



Christian
Community
bible

CATHOLIC PASTORAL EDITION

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY BIBLE

Dear Reader,

The Bible is the Word of God... but even if you had bought this book and read it with much attention, you cannot force God to hand over his message to you. God himself will introduce you to the Truth if you can meet certain requirements. The first one is to search with perseverance: the door will be opened to those who knock. Do not give up if you cannot understand at the beginning, but ask in prayer and you will receive light. Another condition to grasp the teaching of God is that you search for it together with your brothers and sisters as you participate in a Christian community.

If you have something to share, suggestions to give or doubts and questions to be clarified, please write to:

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Nihil Obstat

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who seek God.

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**Christian
Community**

Leviticus

EPISCOPAL INTRODUCTION

The Church is born from the Word of God proclaimed and believed in. Personal and communitarian faith should be rooted in the reading and interiorization of the Word of God. On this premise does the Christian community become missionary, the sacraments become efficient and personal devotions and charitable works become really meaningful.

Something essential is lacking to Christian maturity when a person or a community ceases to read the Bible.

The Bible and God's people were born at the same time and have grown together. God's people needs the Bible, but the Bible has to be interpreted by the people of God. Our vision of God, of man and of the world stems from the Bible, but it is this vision that helps us understand the sacred book.

So the Bible is not a book just to be disseminated and left at the personal whims of anyone.

No one can make himself the owner of the Bible and its message. The believing community who listens to the Word of God is part of the Catholic, that is, Universal Church which has been instructed by the Spirit and enlightened by the great witnesses of the faith during the last twenty centuries. This is why introductions and commentaries accompany the biblical text. They help us get a more global vision of the Good News of God and its impact in a world which God continues to re-create and save among and with us.

The Second Vatican Council asks that the Word of God be available for all times, providing the faithful with necessary and adequate explanations so that they safely and profitably grow familiar with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated by the Spirit (DV 25, PO 4). It is in the spirit of the Council that we recommend this pastoral Bible, hoping and praying that this new version will gain acceptance among our faithful.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines



by Cirilo R. Almario, Jr., D.D.
Chairman, Episcopal Commission for the
Biblical Apostolate

JESUS IS RISEN!

You who open the Bible are seeking Jesus. The Bible is not only a book for prayer or for our instruction. The Bible is the Word of God which communicates life to us.

The Cross of Jesus and his Resurrection are at the very center of the Bible. You for whom the road is difficult and who do not see the light at the end of the tunnel, learn from the Bible that you are walking toward the Resurrection, and understand who the risen Jesus is for you.

The Bible . . .

The Bible did not come down from heaven. The books it contains were not proclaimed from the clouds by some heavenly speaker, but rather they were patiently gathered throughout the centuries within the heart of Israel, the PEOPLE OF GOD, thanks to the faith of its most conscious minorities.

For some 18 centuries, from Abraham to Jesus, the people of Israel discovered ever more clearly that the One God had committed himself to them. The experiences of the national community, the warnings of those men – called prophets – who spoke on behalf of God, the concerns which developed among believers: all of them somehow went into these books. The religious leaders of Israel received books, selected and accredited them, then integrated them into the Sacred Book.

That was how the *Old Testament* of the Bible was formed. It is called *testament* because these books were like the most precious inheritance given by God to his chosen people.

After so many experiences there came a time of crisis for the people of Israel when God wanted to bring them at last to mature faith. And Jesus came for that purpose. The most transcendent experience in all of history was fulfilled in him – Jesus, his efforts to save the Jewish people from imminent destruction, his rejection, his death, and then, his resurrection, which became the final word of God.

The person of Jesus gave rise to the preaching of the church and to the books which were written in the community. The ones which were approved by those responsible in the church came to form the *New Testament*.

. . . and Tradition

The books of the Bible do not get their message through except to those who come to share the experience of the community where these books originated. There is a way of understanding the Bible which is peculiar to the people of God: this is what we call the Tradition of the people of God. Jesus received this tradition from his own family and from his people. Later, he taught his apostles a new way to understand this sacred history. This is why we speak of the Tradition of the apostles or the Tradition of the church.

To understand the Bible well, we cannot rely on just any preacher's interpretation. We must accept it in the same way as the Catholic church understands it – founded by the apostles and always faithful to their norms.

WHERE DO WE BEGIN OUR READING OF THE BIBLE?

The simplest way is to start with the Gospels where we meet Christ, who is the Light, the Truth and "the" Word of God.

Obviously, the Old Testament contains many important lessons. Yet, the person who reads them after having heard Christ, understands them better and discovers a different flavor in them.

Some people are accustomed to opening the Bible at random, thinking that the first paragraph they find will precisely give them the word they need at that moment. Certainly, God can answer their concerns in this way but he never committed himself to communicate with us in such a manner.

In any case it is advantageous to have read each book of the New Testament in its sequence at least once. It is good to begin with the Gospels. With regard to this, read the "Introduction to the Four Gospels" at the beginning of the New Testament.

The New Testament Includes —

THE FOUR GOSPELS. The word Gospel means Good News. These are the books in which Jesus' apostles wrote what they had seen and learned from him.

The book of the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES written by Luke who is also the author of the third Gospel follows.

Then, there are more than twenty LETTERS which the apostles addressed to the first Christian communities.

The Old Testament Includes —

HISTORICAL BOOKS. Here we see God's action in human history in order to liberate a people he wants to make his own. We see God teaching this people and giving meaning to their national history. Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and the books of Samuel stand out among these books.

PROPHETIC BOOKS. God intervenes in history through his prophets whom he entrusted the task of communicating his word.

WISDOM BOOKS: They highlight the importance of an individual's formation and efforts in order to become a responsible person and a believer.

How to Use this Book

Each book of the Bible is divided into *chapters*, and each chapter into *verses*. Usually a book is quoted in an abbreviated form as for example, *Mt* means the Gospel according to Matthew. You will find these abbreviations in the index. Chapters are indicated by large numbers at the beginning of a paragraph and verses by small numbers in the margin.

To refer to a passage in the Bible, first you give the chapter, and then the verse. For example *Jn 20:13* refers to John's gospel, chapter 20, verse 13; *Lk 2:6-10* refers to Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, from verse 6 to 10.

The *biblical text* is found at the upper part of the page with the commentaries below in a different print. The signs ♦ ■ ○ + indicate to what paragraph of the text the commentary refers.

We use the italic type:

- In the New Testament for quotations from the Old Testament. For example in Mt 26:31; the evangelist quotes from the prophet Zechariah 13:7.
- In the Old Testament for various reasons which are indicated in the introduction of each book.

How to read and not to misunderstand the Bible

- 1** Do not think that you are the first to understand God's message and that there were no true Christians before you. This would be the way to have one more founder of those strange sects.
- 2** Do not think that whatever word of God you may find in the Bible has been said straight for you to solve your problem this very day. Each word was given by God to people living under concrete circumstances. Think of what their problem was and what God wanted them to understand. Then you may ask: What light does this message shed on the present time and circumstances?
- 3** God taught his people for more than fifteen centuries from Abraham to the apostles, and he did not teach everything from the beginning. Do not wonder, then, that Moses and even the Prophets ignored important things we are told of by the witnesses of Jesus who is *the Word of God*.
- 4** From the very first message which God gave his people, he had in mind the coming of his Son and the mystery of his cross and resurrection. All is to be understood in this light.
- 5** In the Bible, the most important things are taught clearly. However, some pages that actually have little to teach us were written in a sophisticated way according to an old literary style. Do not cling to some strange sentences to the point of forsaking what is clear and fundamental.
- 6** Read your Bible continually, not to learn what you do not know yet, but as a proof of your love and faithfulness to God. If you persevere, he shall give you the understanding of everything.

WHAT WAS IN THE WORLD BEFORE THE BIBLE?

The world had been in existence for a long time before God called Christ's ancestor, Abraham. Information given below shows how modern science – which still has a lot to discover – views the past history of the universe.

The age of creation

The Earth is no more than a grain of dust in the universe: a fragment of the Sun cooled off. Light, moving at a speed of 300,000 kilometers per second, needs a little over one second to go from the Earth to the Moon; it takes eight minutes to travel from the Sun to the Earth.

Other planets, like the Earth, likewise revolve around the Sun. Some, like Mars, are smaller than the Earth; others are larger. A ray of light emerging from the Sun takes seven hours to reach the most distant planet, Pluto. There ends the sun's power, seven billion kilometers away, which means nothing more than a stone's throw in the universe.

The Sun is a star like others, infinitely distant from other stars, so much that it takes three years for the sun's rays to reach the nearest star.

There are stars everywhere. Some are smaller than the Sun; others are much larger. They are numerous atomic furnaces with incredible heat at its core. Some, like the Earth, have cooled off and stopped shining.

In the same way as the Earth and the planets revolve around the Sun, so also some stars revolve around others. Grouped in families or colonies, they sometimes form clusters of ten thousand or more. When we say "grouped" it does not deny the fact that they are separated by enormous distances.

Seen from a great distance, the Sun and some billions of stars along with it would be no more than imperceptible dots; yet, together, they would appear like a luminous, flattened cloud, something like a disk or a wheel. This small universe, which a ray of light traverses from one extreme to the other in 300,000 years, is called The Galaxy.

Have we reached the farthest end of the world? Not yet; we have only covered a small area. Far away from this universe, or better, this Galaxy, others exist. Specialists say that the total number is at least five hundred million galaxies, some larger, others smaller than our own.

This universe is constantly changing. Some galaxies move away from others at a speed of thousands of kilometers per second. Stars, spatial dust, clusters of matter... the entire world appears to be like fragments emerging from a gigantic explosion. Experts dare to determine the approximate date when this atomic superbomb might have exploded: from ten to twenty billion years ago. That would be the age of creation.

An unfinished creation

For centuries most people thought that God had created everything *in the beginning* and that the universe had remained more or less the same afterwards: God had placed the sun, the earth and the stars in their proper place and they kept on turning in the same way. We have just seen that this idea no longer holds.

People also thought that, in the beginning, God had created "a" man, "a" horse, "a" sheep, "a" lion and that each one had had descendants similar to it. We now know that this is not so, but that God's creation is gradual and that new species appear.

We can take the growing child as a point of comparison. He is a creature of God at birth, but he grows, learns and becomes an adult. Being an adult will be very different from being a child. Yet, the adult is still God's creature and it is God who enabled him to grow.

The same thing happens with the big human family. In the beginning God did not create the beings we now know. Billions of years ago, the world of living beings was a "baby" world with primitive plants and animals which do not exist today. There were no four-legged animals, no birds, and naturally, there were no people. But from them, through a series of transformation and evolution, emerged other living beings – those we now know and who make up a world of living beings – better organized and more developed than those in the world in the beginning.

And thus, there was not "a" creation, but what was started followed its path with the energies that God had placed in it. This is the history we are going to summarize in a few lines.

The emergence of living beings

One or two billion years ago, when the earth was still hot and enveloped in thick clouds from which boiling showers were constantly falling, the first living beings appeared in the seas. They were minute beings, like microbes, which multiplied and evolved as soon as they appeared.

God had not created a collection of living beings destined to reproduce themselves in the same way. God was creating Life and Life was developing. It was not only the struggle for survival which made the weakest disappear and the better prepared remain. It was not chance alone which, in each species, gave rise to beings with characteristics different from those of their predecessors. There were spiritual forces at work within the living matter – creating new organs in every species, attempting to solve each problem in a thousand different ways such as developing organs for seeing, hearing, feeling, running, swimming, flying.

Life was the work of a free and intelligent God, and this uncontrollable Force was looking for the tools that would enable creatures to be freer and more intelligent. And the most effective tool was the brain. The most primitive beings had only a few nerve centres, but in one of these cores was formed a real control centre: the brain. Throughout five hundred million years the brain developed. There appeared new species with a larger and better structured brain. After the reptiles, mammals appeared, and among the latter were the "anthropomorphous," that is to say, animals of human form. Some are still in existence today and they form the most important group of apes. And these *anthropomorphous*, led by creative forces at the service of the divine plan, evolved in such a way that their brains and bodies could already be those of a free and intelligent being.

Some three million years ago there appeared a race already resembling today's man: they already knew how to cut stones in a very rudimentary way. Then, approximately a million years ago, the famous *Pithecanthropus* (Java man) had overcome the fear of fire inherent to animals, and was using fire. Was this a genuine man, that is to say, endowed with reason and freedom? We certainly do not know this.

Then, races very similar to ours appeared. From about 70,000 before Christ, signs of ongoing creativity appeared: progress in techniques, concern to bury the dead, the beginnings of art.

How had a real **man emerged**, or, how had he begun to be a **free person**, with a spirit in the image of God and thus immortal as God is? No one can answer that question. Such a man was the work of God in a very direct sense whatever his ancestors may have been, since his immortal soul that gave him intelligence, freedom and power was received from the divine Spirit.

Man's first steps

For many centuries man did not alter the face of the earth very much. His spirit was in God's image, but his body and his way of life scarcely differed from those anthropomorphous from whom he had emerged (let us not say "had been born," since his personhood truly comes from God). Families and human groups lived in a primitive way – lodging in caverns, hunting in the forests – as do some tribes still in existence today.

Slowly, man invented language and made weapons and instruments. He was not only interested in what was useful and visible. He was an artist. Underground, in the caverns and the grottos where these people celebrated their magic rituals far from daylight, they expressed their vision of the world by the animal figures they painted on the walls. Today we still marvel at their artistic genius.

Man was a *religious being*. He buried his dead with rituals destined to assure them of a happy life in another world. Being created in the image of God, his intelligence instinctively suggested that he would continue to live after death. However primitive he may have been, this man had a conscience, he was capable of loving and he was discovering something of God according to his ability. His beginnings, however, had been profoundly marked by violence and selfish instincts common to all living beings: sin was in him.

The first civilizations

About 10,000 years ago a change began to occur in humankind. People gathered together in greater numbers in the fertile plains. Within a few centuries they discovered how to cultivate land, to raise cattle, to mold and bake clay. There appeared villages which united to defend themselves and to make better use of the resources of the soil. The first civilization had been born.

After that, everything happened very quickly. Five centres of civilization appeared on the earth.

Three thousand five hundred years before Christ, in the geographical area called the Middle East where the biblical people would be born, two empires were being formed. One was Egypt and the other was Chaldea, the land from which Abraham would come centuries later. Chaldea perfected an irrigation system, constructed houses with baked clay walls, invented a writing system, had laws and a centralized administration. Egypt had also progressed. They constructed magnificent temples for their gods and built the Pyramids for the tombs of their Pharaohs.

Similarly in China and India, approximately twenty centuries before Christ and in Central America, ten centuries before Christ, other civilizations were born. Those of Central America, China and India developed separately since in those days it was very difficult to travel over the continents.

On the other hand, in the Middle East, Chaldea and Egypt were in contact with each other and the road leading from one country to the other passed through a small country which, later, would be called Palestine. Material progress was not enough to lead men to truth and justice. We need only recall that the most learned groups of those two countries were the priests of the idols, that slavery was considered quite normal and that women were the slaves of men.

Abraham's departure

Eighteen centuries before Christ a number of nomadic tribes left Chaldea with their flocks to go and live in Egypt. Among those tribes on the way to Egypt were some very insignificant families whose leader was named Abraham. For him, however, the march had a deeper meaning. God had called him and promised him an extraordinary reward: "*Abraham, all the nations of the earth will be yours.*"

Summary and Dates of Sacred History

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The history of Israel can be divided into four main periods: the Patriarchs, the Exodus and the Conquest, the period of the Kings, and the Jewish Community after the exile.

The period of the Patriarchs

Before Israel became a nation, nomadic Amorite families were traveling with their flocks throughout Mesopotamia, Syria and Canaan, going even as far as Egypt. Israel remembered these remote ancestors, especially two of them:

1800-1700: Abraham.

Abraham had left Haran for Canaan on a promise from God that he would give him land and descendants in that country.

1600-1500: Jacob.

Jacob had received new blessings from God while he was trying to settle in Canaan.

The history of the Patriarchs is primarily a praise of genuine faith (see Heb 11:8-11): it is related in Genesis chapters 12-50.

Abraham, Jacob and their people were nomads, poor and uneducated. They would travel with their tents and their flocks as far as they could within the two great civilizations of that time: Mesopotamia and Egypt. God called them so that from them would emerge his people, his own instrument to bring the history of all humanity to maturity and to a happy end.

The Exodus and the Conquest

1250: Exodus of Moses.

This whole history is in Exodus chapters 1-20; 24; 32-34. Also in Numbers chapters 11-14 and 20-25.

Nomads were going in and out of Egypt. One of these groups fled from slavery under the leadership of Moses. The miracle with which they were favoured in crossing the Red Sea was for them the sign that God was liberating them in order to put them at his service. Moses was their guide and their prophet and he was teaching them about Yahweh.

The Covenant between Yahweh and Israel is agreed upon in Sinai: Among all the people of the earth, you will be my own people (Ex 19:6).

According to the Bible the Israelites spent 40 years in Kadesh: Nm 14.

In the oasis of Kadesh Moses' group joins others of the same race who adopt the Mosaic Law: the Only God, Jealous and Just does not tolerate any divine image. God's people will have to fight rather than make pacts with the civilization and the religion of the Canaanites.

1200: Joshua

See map p. 283

After Moses' death, Joshua, with part of Israel, conquers a portion of the land of Canaan. The members of the 12 tribes, still very independent, become aware of their identity in the following century, when the "Judges" lead them in their fights against the oppressors.

The period of the Kings

1000: David takes Jerusalem

Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam 7:14.

The arrival of the Philistines by sea, their occupation of the coast and their invasion of the Palestine valleys, force the Israelites to unite in order to preserve their independence. Following Saul, who dies at war, David conquers Palestine and the surrounding areas. When he captures Jerusalem, he makes it the centre of national unity. David lives as servant of

970-932: Solomon's Kingdom.
The oldest parts of the Bible in Gen, Ex and Samuel are written then.

931: the Schism

Yahweh and a prophet and he receives a promise from God for his descendants who will reign after him.

Solomon, David's son, builds the Jerusalem Temple. It will replace all the old sanctuaries. He transforms Israel into an organized and urbanized nation of settled people.

When Solomon dies, a **schism** or division of the kingdom takes place.

The **Kingdom of Judah** (to the South) with kings who are descendants of David, with its capital in Jerusalem and with the Temple.

Kings, priests and prophets lead the community in various ways, enabling the old faith to adapt to the new society.

Great prophets: **Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel** promote a personal faith in the Living God, a faith which demands Justice and Sincerity. They recall God's promises to Israel: in the midst of their infidelities and trials, God leads them to a Kingdom of Justice with the King-Messiah who will be like a new David.

Finally, the Kingdom of Judah is destroyed by the Babylonians. Jerusalem and the temple are burned and the elite exiled to Babylon.

The **Kingdom of Israel** (to the North), larger and more prosperous, will suffer political instability and tensions between traditional faith and the temptations of modern life and the Canaanite religion.

Three great prophets: **Elijah, Elisha and Hosea** try to bring the people to Yahweh, with renewed fidelity.

Finally, the Kingdom of Israel is destroyed by the Assyrians; its capital Samaria is captured and the elite deported.

850-800: Elijah and Elisha prophesy during the wars with Aram.

740: Beginning of the prophesying of Isaiah who sees the fall of Samaria (722) and the siege and liberation of Jerusalem (690).

Time when a history of the prophetic spirit is written: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

622: Discovery of Deuteronomy and reform of Josiah. Jeremiah prophesies from 626 to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587.

538: Decree of Cyrus.
520-515: Construction of the second Temple.

450-400: Ezra imposes the Law and gathers the sacred books.

330: Alexander the Great takes over the Persian empire and introduces Greek culture.

200: Movement of the Hasmoneans, or pious ones.

167: Mattathias' rebellion.

160: Judas Maccabeus' death

The Jewish Community after the Exile

Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, conquers Babylon and liberates the Jews who had been exiled there. The exiles reorganize in Jerusalem. There are no more kings and prophets are going to be scarce. Priests are in charge of the community. The Mosaic Law, in its final version written by Ezra, rules both civil and religious life. The Temple and worship justify the life of this "holy" people, who are different from other people, because they are God's people.

With the penetration of Greek culture, a cultural and religious crisis occurs. A minority, the "pious ones" (Hasidim) promote a reaffirmation of the Judaic religion and introduce belief in the resurrection of the dead.

The great persecution by the Syrians which the Jews endured aroused the energies of the entire nation. Armed resistance, under the leadership of the Maccabees, obtains religious peace. The Jews even succeed in becoming an independent nation again.

135-75: Independence and conquests.
63: Pompey captures Jerusalem.

40-4: Herod's rule.

250: Translation of the Bible into Greek – called Septuagint – for the Jews of the Diaspora in Alexandria (Egypt)

In the following century the struggle for power brings about the intervention of foreigners: the Roman Empire imposes its domination, in a disguised form during the reign of Herod the Great and more openly when he dies. This is the time of the birth of Jesus.

Meanwhile, a lot of Jews have emigrated to all the great cities of the Mediterranean world and of the Middle East. There they form communities bound by the observance of the Law, and they begin to spread faith in the One God.

Some Important Dates for THE NEW TESTAMENT

- 35 B.C. • Herod, proclaimed king by the Romans, eliminates the Hasmonean princes and murders the high priest Aristobulus, his brother-in-law. From that time on, the high priests hold power in their hands.
- 19 • Herod begins rebuilding the Temple.
- 8 • Roman census (Lk 2:1) which prompts the rebellion of Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37) and of the Zealots.
- 6 • Probably the year of the birth of Jesus. In figuring out the beginning of the Christian era, there was an error of six years.
- 4 • Death of Herod (Mt 2:19). His son Archelaus leaves for Rome to be appointed king, but he only receives Judea. The other provinces are entrusted to tetrarchs (Lk 3:2 and 23:7).
- 6 A.D. • The emperor Augustus replaces Archelaus with a Roman procurator. Zealot terrorism in Galilee and repression.
- 14 • Tiberius, emperor, in Rome.
- 26 • Pontius Pilate comes to Judea as procurator.
- 27 • Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, marries Herodias, his brother's wife.
- 27 • In the fall, preaching of John the Baptist and beginning of Jesus' ministry (Lk 3:2).
- 28 • Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover (Jn 2:13 and 2:25).
- 29 • John is executed in the Maqueronte fortress.
- 30 • On the evening before Passover, Friday, April 7th, Jesus is crucified and he rises the day after the Sabbath (John 20:1).
- 36 • Stephen's death and Paul's conversion (Acts 7 and 9).
- 37 • Herod Agrippa, king of all of Palestine, except Judea.
- 44 • Herod has James killed; Peter, freed (Acts 12).
- 49 • The Council of Jerusalem frees Christians from the observance of the Law (Acts 15).
- 50 • Second mission of Paul. With Gallio in 52 (Acts 18:12).
- 52 • Felix, procurator of Judea.
- 53-58 • Third mission of Paul.
- 58 • Nero, emperor in Rome.
- 58 • James, brother of the Lord, leading the Jerusalem church; Paul is arrested in the Temple (Acts 22:18 and 27).
- 60 • Festus, procurator of Judea.
- 61-63 • Paul in Rome (Acts 28:17-31).
- 62 • James, stoned by order of the high priest.
- 64 • Burning of Rome and persecution against the Christians.
- 64 • Martyrdom of Peter in Rome (or 67?).

- 66 • The first Jewish revolts, the Jerusalem community takes refuge in Peleá (Lk 21:20-21).
- 67 • Martyrdom of Paul in Rome (or 64?).
- 67 • Beginning of the Jewish war which will last four years (Lk 21:22-24).
- 70 • Titus captures Jerusalem: burning of the Temple (Lk 21:6).

FROM THE APOSTLES TO US

Seventy generations of Christians separate us from the time of the apostles. To speak about the church is to speak about these brothers of ours: it is easy to criticize them or to think that they should have been better, but it is more difficult to know the world in which they lived, a world very different from ours, and to understand what they tried to accomplish under the inspiration of their faith.

Free people, virgins and martyrs

Christians of the first centuries rejoiced in feeling liberated: freed from pagan superstitions and also freed from their own fears and selfishness. But, they paid a high price for this freedom. In their days there was no law superior to the Emperor's will or to the customs of his people; yet, Christians placed Christ above human authorities and, being conscientious objectors, they were treated as evil-doers. Christian love and virginity were insults to the vices of the pagan world.

Therefore, Christians were persecuted. During three centuries there were repressions and martyrs, at times in one province of the empire, at times in another. In some periods all the forces of power were unleashed against Christians with the intention of wiping out the name of Christ. But the crowds who, for entertainment, would go to watch the tortures inflicted upon Christians came back ashamed of their own wickedness and convinced that authentic humanity was in the persecuted.

Constantine's conversion

Meanwhile the Roman world was becoming decadent. Before they were vanquished by their enemies, the Romans' spiritual forces which had so exalted their empire, were weakening; the old beliefs were lifeless. In the year 315, Constantine, the emperor himself, asked to be baptized. And after him, the rulers were Christians. This was a decisive event for the church which became protected instead of being persecuted.

This triumph, however, brought along disadvantages which would be gauged with time. From then on the church had to be the spiritual force needed by the people of the Roman Empire. It replaced the false religions and opened up its doors for the crowds seeking baptism. The church was no longer restricted to believers baptized after being converted and tested. Rather the church had to be the educator of a "Christian people" who did not differ much from the previous "pagan people." What was gained in terms of numbers was lost in terms of quality. The "Christian" emperors were no different from their predecessors either. Just as they had been the supreme authority in the pagan religion, so now the emperors wanted to rule the church, to appoint and control its bishops: they protected the faith and controlled consciences.

On the other hand, when Christians were no longer considered underground or oppressed, they became more involved in worldly problems. How could they reconcile the culture of their time with faith? This was the period when the bishops, called the "holy fathers," gave an extensive presentation of the faith as they responded to the questions of their contemporaries. St. Augustine stood out among the best.

Some people prefer not to see the difficult aspects of faith. But those who dare to probe them, as should be done, do not always bother about errors. The heresy which spread the most and which almost dragged the church down was "Arianism." Due to their fear of dividing the one God, Arians denied that Christ was the Son, equal to the Father; they considered him to be only

the first among beings in the whole of creation. Arian emperors would appoint Arian bishops. However, as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit preserved the faith of Christian people and the heresy faded away.

Seeing that the church was no longer the fervent community of the time of the martyrs, Christians looking for perfection in those days began to organize themselves in austere and demanding communities. They felt they had to separate themselves from a comfortable life to seek God with their whole soul. And so, first in the deserts of Egypt, then throughout the whole Christian world, there were monks and hermits. In the church, monks preserved the ideal of a perfect life, a life totally surrendered to Christ. Their life of mortification allowed them to know the deepest recesses of the human heart. And God, for his part, gave them the experience of transformation or divinization reserved for those who left everything for him.

The yeast in the dough

When the Roman Empire collapsed at the invasion of the barbarians, and was ruined, devastated and torn to pieces, it seemed as though it was the end of the world. (We always mention the Roman Empire not because it was the only inhabited place in the world but because, Christian preachers had not actually, or barely, gone beyond its boundaries.)

But, in reality, this destruction announced by John in Revelation marked the beginning of other times. The church did not collapse in the turmoil. Instead, it discovered a new task: to evangelize and educate people who, after the Barbarian invasions, had come back to a poorer society, very uncivilized and totally disorganized.

The only moral force or stable institution these people knew was the church. Many times the bishop had become the only "defender of the people" against the invaders. There was no one except the priests to educate the people; books about ancient culture were kept in monasteries along with Sacred Scriptures. The church was the soul of these primitive people, who were cruel, liberal and excessive in everything. While the church was always struggling to limit wars and revenge, to protect women and children and to develop a sense of constructive work, it also allowed superstitions and corruption within its ranks. It seemed at times that even the highest authorities, the Popes, were falling into the vices of the world... but what was sown in tears, flourished with time.

Just as in Sacred History where God had taught the primitive people of Israel, allowing many errors to be corrected only with time, so it was with what was called 'Christendom,' namely, those European people who were learning to be human, free and responsible. A new civilization was born: its culture, art and, above all, its ideals were products of their faith.

Catholics and Orthodox: The Schism

The Eastern part of the Roman Empire had resisted the Barbarian invasions. Little by little this part of the church, called Greek or Orthodox, which later would evangelize Russia, distanced itself from the Western part occupied by the Barbarians and led by the church of Rome. There were two churches, different in culture, language and religious practices in spite of keeping the same faith. And that was not bad. Both churches, however, sinned in paying more attention to their own customs than to the common faith. Thus, the Eastern church moved away from the Pope, Peter's successor in Rome.

Later the Turks, followers of Islam, conquered the rest of the Roman Empire in the East and there remained only a few Christian communities where the ancient churches of Syria, Palestine, Egypt... had flourished. Today, Greece, Rumania and Russia, above all, form the most important part of the Orthodox world.

The Church and the Bible

In 1460 Gutenberg's discoveries made the printing of books possible. Before that there were only expensive and rare books, written by hand. The average person could not have a Bible, not even a Gospel. The Bible was read in church and was the source of preaching. To make it more visible to the faithful, no church was built without adorning it everywhere with paintings, sculptures or stained-glass windows depicting biblical scenes.

From then on, anyone able to read **could have the Sacred Scriptures**. This technical discovery was going to precipitate a latent crisis in the church. For centuries the institutions of the church, its clergy and religious had built the culture and unity of the Christian world: being guides in politics as in spirituality, their material preoccupations had often been more important than their dedication to the Gospel. Many outstanding, religious and holy men had protested and asked for reforms. But there were no reforms. With the printing of the Bible many thought that the only way to reform the church was to give the Sacred Book to everyone so that by reading it, people would appreciate the original message and correct the errors and bad customs which had become entrenched in them.

When Martin Luther took the initiative of reforming the church by moving away from the official church, he undertook the translation of the Bible into German, the language of his people. Up until then the Bible had almost always been published in Latin.

This is because most priests in the church, unaware of the benefit from an individual reading of the Word of God, paid more attention to the possible danger for everyone feeling capable of understanding the Bible correctly if the Sacred Book were given to all. They were not totally wrong. As soon as Luther had translated the Bible, his followers began to fight among themselves and to establish opposed churches, each one certain of having the truth.

When, years later, the church did reform, it still did not promote enough interest in the Bible. Preachers and missionaries were teaching the Gospel, but everything was given to the people from above without arousing their interest to look for the truth on their own.

The missions of the Western Church

From the time of the apostles, believers have been preoccupied with passing the faith on to others. There were also missionaries who ventured among the hostile people, or people who spoke a different language, in order to preach the Gospel. But when all of Europe was more or less united under Christianity, and the cultural and social fields animated by the church, people felt that the missionary task had been achieved. What was there outside of the Christian nations? They would have answered: "Only the Moors." The Moors, that is, the Muslims were fierce enemies of the Christian nations. They did not think there were any other people beyond.

Some prophets like Francis of Assisi or Raymond Lull saw that it would be better to preach Christ among the Muslims than to fight them with arms. There were also some missionaries, like Juan de Montecorvino, who travelled all of Asia on foot all the way to China. But they were the exceptions. In those days which seem remote to us, the churches of Europe already had centuries of tradition; they had their culture, their own way of thinking about the faith and of living the Gospel. It was very difficult for men of that time to understand people from another culture and to pass the Gospel on to them in such a way that they could organize themselves into a church suited to their own temperament and according to their own idiosyncrasies. This is why the missions which the church established in these distant places did not prosper and the church became identified with European Christianity.

But when Marco Polo, Vasco de Gama and Christopher Columbus pierced the wall of ignorance surrounding Christianity, the church realized the true dimension of the world which had not received the Gospel yet: Africa, Asia and America. The first who sailed to far countries were merchants and adventurers – unobtrusive people who do not usually venture into such things. But as soon as they had discovered the new world, they would be accompanied by adventurers of the faith, people eager to win for Christ those who did not know him yet. Among those who left without weapons, with no preparation other than their faith, saints and martyrs were not lacking.

In Africa, mission and colonization progressed together. Christian faith could extend to those of animist religions. In their preaching, however, missionaries did not pay enough attention to cultural background so that the numerous baptisms did not mean that the depth of the African soul had been converted.

In great parts of Asia, especially in China and India, many missionaries were not prepared to undertake an evangelization starting from the knowledge of local culture and religion. The ignorance of such a long religious experience did not allow but the conversion of minorities, except in some places of India and Vietnam.

It seemed that the mission in America would be **easy and fruitful**. The Spaniards had destroyed the indigenous nations and, at times, ruined their culture. The natives did not resist the faith and, in various places, privileges were granted to those who became Christians. But under a thin layer of Catholic practices, the native people preserved their pagan beliefs. Most of them did not encounter Christ, nor did they convert to his message in a responsible way.

The rebellion of the laity

When we discussed Christianity, we said that the church had taken over many public services out of necessity for there were no civil or military authorities to take care of them. The clergy founded and managed schools and universities; the religious were in charge of public health – hospitals, hospices and orphanages. Monks colonized and developed uncultivated lands.

However, the time came when the most responsible among the leaders and intellectuals realized that all these tasks should be given back to civil authorities. Considering this they agreed with the Gospel which distinguishes between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God. But they had to confront traditional ideas. We are hardly convinced that we should relinquish our responsibility to someone else. This happened with church authorities to the point that the changes needed for decadent Christianity to give way to modern nations, lay institutions, and independent sciences were achieved through struggles. Everybody knows about the ridiculous suit against the physicist Galileo and the political conflicts which took place between popes and kings.

The Church and the modern world

In the last four centuries the world has experienced more crises, progress and changes than in all previous times. Christian faith had given the Europeans the energy, security and awareness of their mission in the universe which enabled them to create science, develop techniques and dominate other continents. Obviously, conquests and colonization sprang from motives very foreign to faith; but even so, they were completing the plan of God who, from the beginning, contemplated the reunion of all nations.

The church participated in this expansion. In the 19th century there were as many as 100,000 missionaries, priests and religious committed to evangelization and education in Asia, Africa and America.

What was most important, however, was occurring in Europe. The church was facing the modern culture which had emerged from the church itself but which, having become independent, was turning out to be its enemy. Learned minds commonly believed that their wisdom was capable of bringing about progress, happiness and peace to humanity and they saw nothing in the church but ignorance and prejudices. In short, they saw the church as the main obstacle to human liberation. Many dared to predict the death of Christianity before the 20th century.

This complex situation forced the church to let go of its security and to answer questions that were becoming more crucial. Christ had indeed entrusted the church with the truth and he continued to reign in his risen state. But the church had to discover and to prove again and again what this truth meant for modern people... and this was not the time for the church to rule but to serve in the midst of humiliations.

The great century of evangelization

The 20th century seems to have simplified the situation. On one hand, after three centuries of futile struggles, the church has realized that in losing its resources, its political power and its cultural monopoly, it has recovered its true mission, that is to be a source of love and unity in the world, the yeast in the dough.

The church represents only a minority in the world: some 700 million Catholics among four billion people on earth. Yet, they are – more than ever before – a minority concerned for all that is human, knowing that God's work consists in saving all that is human.

On the other hand, the secular culture that pretended to solve all human concerns without resorting to faith has seen its limitations, and later, its failure. The best thinkers admit that humanity is heading for chaos if people do not come back to faith, hope and a common vision of their destiny. Otherwise, the tensions between rich and poor, the conflict of ideologies, and the confusion of human wisdom will lead us straight to a universal confrontation.

In many parts of the world, the church, which had previously sided with the rulers, is persecuted. This is taking place in communist countries determined to eliminate all religions; this is happening in countries dominated by people of another religion, like Muslims or Hindus; and it is happening in the very societies which claim to be Christian, but which turn their backs on justice and respect for persons, as is the case in America.

Now, the church has a better understanding of what it means to give witness to Christ and to proclaim the Good News to the poor. It ceases to be an institution ruled by a higher class, the clergy, and it is again a community of communities. The church understands that disaster is approaching if people do not learn how to be reconciled; and reconciliation based on truth, justice and forgiveness is the fruit of evangelization. For those who do not dwell on thoughts of the inevitable mediocrity of most believers, on past errors or on the slowness of certain changes, this century is undoubtedly the great century for the evangelization of all the world.

Will there be other times after this one?

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Alleluia. Praise God! Among the Psalms are the Hallel, that is the Alleluia Psalms: Ps 111-118; Ps 135 and 136.

Amen. I believe! I agree! So be it!: 2 Cor 1:17-20; Rv 3:14.

Anathema. Consecration to God for total destruction (com. on Jos 6:1; 1 Sam 15; Dt 13: 13-18). Consecration to God in a definitive way (Lv 27:28).

Angels. Com. on Gen 16; Ex 33:12; Is 6:1; Ez 1; Rv 8:1. See 15.

Antichrist. see 254.

Apostles. The Twelve apostles of Jesus: Mk 3:13; Mt 10:1. Their call: Lk 5:1; Jn 1:35. Jesus forms them: Mk 1:14, 6:7, 9:33, 14:26; Mt 16:13, 16:21; Lk 9:1, 10:1, 22:24. See also 122 and 175. The apostles of the church: 240. The apostle in the world: 1 Cor 1:17, 4:1; 2 Cor 3:6; Rv 11.

Ark of the Covenant: Ex 25:10; 1 Sam 4; 2 Sam 6; 1 Kgs 8:6; Jer 3:16; 2 Mc 2; Rv 11:19.

Authority: Ex 18:13; 1 Sam 8, 12; Ez 34; Is 9, 10, 32; Mi 5, 7:10; Mt 23; Mk 9:33; Rom 13:1.

Brothers of Jesus: Mk 3:31, 6:3, 15:40; Jn 7:3; Acts 1:14, 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 1:19.

Baptism: see 144, 180 to 182.

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Christ (or Messiah, or Anointed of God). Used to refer to Kings, David's sons (1 Sam 9:11), to priests (Ps 106:16) to Jesus (Is 61:1, Ps 2; Heb 1:9).

Circumcision: (Gen 17).

Comfort: Is 40, 49, 51; 2 Cor 1:3; Rv 1-3, 22.

Confirmation: 183.

Conversion: see 244.

Covenant: with Noah (Gen 8:20), with Abraham (Gen 15), with Israel (Ex 19 and 24). Renewal of the Covenant (Jos 24; 2 Kgs 23; Neh 9:38). Limits of the Old Covenant (Heb 8 and com. on Dt 30:15). Promise of the New Covenant (Is 42:6; Jer 31; Ez 34, 37; Hos 2; Mal 3:1). The New Covenant (Mk 14:24; Gal 3; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 12:18). See **Testament**.

Creation: 10-12, 141. The new creation: 150 to 154, and Rev 21.

Decalogue: Ex 20:1; Dt 5:6.

Devil: In the Old Testament mental problems, temptations (1 Sam 16:14), errors and perversions of men (Dt 32:17) are attributed to demons. But gradually the person of the Devil (Tempter), or Satan (Accuser: Job 1) stands out, the one who brought death to men. Jesus speaks of the Evil one (Mt 5:37; 6:13; 12:43; 13:39; 25:41), he expels the unclean spirits (Lk 6:18; Mk 5), he confronts the Evil one (Mt 4). He rescues us from the power of the devil (Acts 10:38; Heb 2:14; Jn 12:31, 17:15; 1 Jn 2:13).

Essenes: see com. on Lk 1:57.

Fast: Is 58; Zec 7; Jl 1-2; 1 Mac 3:47; Acts 13:2; Mk 2:18; Mt 6:16. Jesus' fast: Mt 4; Ex 25-28, 1 Kgs 19:8.

Intercession: 230, 231, 234, 237, 238.

Judgment: 56, 145, 116, 255.

Justice: of God, that is, the intervention of God to establish a just order (Is 41:2, 45:8; Ps 85:11-14; 36, 54, 56, 88). Man's justice in God's eyes: see **justification**. Justice with one's neighbour: Ex 23:1-3, 225.

Justification or Righteousness: God makes just (or righteous), that is, he makes man holy by reconciling him (182, 202, 203).

Kerygma: early proclamation of the apostles.

Mercy of God: 39, 40, 43, 136, 161, 162, 223; of man: 54, 77, 87, 225, 228, 118.

Ministries. Clergy in the Old Testament (Nm 4; Heb 5-8; Nm 16). In the early church (186 and 195).

Mission: see 240 to 242.

Mystery. The saving plan of God for all nations (242). See Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9, 3:3; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 3:16; Rv 10:7.

Oath: Ex 20:7; Nm 5:14; Mt 5:33.

Pagans: see com. on Mk 7:24; Mt 23:31.

Paraclete: see com. on Jn 14:16 and 14:26, 15:26, 16:7.

Passover: see com. on Mk 14:1 and Ex 12:1; 134.

Penance: see **repentance**. Sacrament of forgiveness: 184.

Pharisees: Mk 8:11; Mt 23; Lk 18:9; Acts 9; Phil 3:4.

Poor: see 54, 55, 113, 224.

Prophets: Dt 18:9; 1 Sam 9:10. Prophets in the church; 195 and Acts 2:17, 11:27, 21:9; Rom 12:6; 1 Tim 1:18.

Providence: 14, 88 and 216.

Publicans: com. on Mk 2:13; Mt 11:19, 21, 31; Lk 3:12, 7:29, 15:1; 18:10, 19:2.

Remnant of Israel. The survivors after God has punished his people (Am 3:11; Ez 5:3, 6:8), assembled by God (Is 11:11; Mt 4:6) and purified by the trial (Ez 12:16); those who will live in God's presence (see 56). Also Lk 12:32.

Repentance: see 244.

Rest: Gen 2:1; Ex 20:8; Mk 3:1; Jn 5; Ps 95; Heb 3.

Righteous, Righteousness: see **Justification**.

Son, Jesus Son of God: 100, 101, 105, 141 to 143; also Israel (Ex 4:22; Hos 11:1; Jer 3:19; Wis 18:13) and David's descendants (2 Sam 7:14).

Sons of God. The angels (Dt 32:8; Job 1:6).

Soul: see 83 and 93. Sacrificing one's "soul": 138. After death: 255.

Virginity: The Virgin of Israel (see com. on Is 7:14). The Virgin Mary (Mt 1:18; Lk 1:26; Mk 6:1). Jesus valued virginity (Mt 19:10) and so did Paul (1 Cor 7).

Widows: Judith (8:2); see Lk 2:36, 21:1. In the church (1 Tim 5:3).

NAMES OF PERSONS

THOSE IN JESUS' COMPANY

Apostles – Naming of the twelve: Mt 10:2; Acts 1:13. Their call: Jn 1:35-51; Lk 5:1-11.

Elizabeth: Lk 1:39-56.

Elzirus: Mk 5:22.

James, the brother of John: Mk 1:19, 3:17; Acts 1:13, 12:2.

James, the son of Alphaeus: Mt 10:3; Acts 1:13; Mt 27:56; Lk 24:10. He may be the same as the "brother of the Lord": Mt 13:55, 6:3; Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18.

John the Baptist: Lk 1:57-80; 3:1-18; Jn 1:19-28. John the Baptist and Jesus: Lk 7:18-35; Jn 3:22-36, 10:41. John the Baptist and Elijah: Mt 17:10.

Joseph: Mt 1-2; Lk 1-2, 3:23, 4:22; Jn 6:42

Lazarus: Jn 11, 12:1.

Mary: 106 to 108.

Mary Magdalen: Mt 27:56, 27:61, 28:1; Lk 8:2, 24:10; Jn 12:1, 19:25, 20:1, 20:11. Mary and Martha: Lk 10:38; Jn 11.

Mary of Clopas: Mt 27:56, 28:1; Jn 19:25.

Nicodemus: Jn 3:1-21, 7:50, 19:39

Peter – Vocation: Jn 1:42; Mt 4:17; Lk 5:1. Peter, James and John: Mk 5:37, 9:2, 13:3, 14:33. Promises to Peter: Mt 16:13; Jn 21:15. Peter's faith: Jn 6:68; Lk 9:18, 22:31. Peter's denial: Mk 14:53; Lk 22:61.

Salome: Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40; Mt 20:20.

Samaritan woman: Jn 4:7.

Simeon: Lk 2:25.

Zechariah: Lk 1:5, 1:59.

Zacchaeus: Lk 19:1.

THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES

Barnabas: Acts 4:36, 9:27, 11:22, 13:1, 15:36.

Cornelius: Acts 10.

Luke: Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24.

Mark: Acts 12:12, 15:37; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; 1 Pt 5:13.

Matthias: Acts 1:15-26.

Paul – his life: Acts 22:1-5; Phil 3:4-11; Acts 7:58, 8:3,

26:9. Conversion: Acts 9:1-22, 22:3, 26:1; Gal 1:15-24; 1 Tim 1:12. His missions: Acts 9:23-30, 11:25, 13:21; 2 Cor 11. Journey to Rome: Acts 13:21.

Peter: In the Jerusalem church: Acts 1-2, 4:1-23, 5:26; Gal 2:7, 2:11. His missions: Acts 9:31, 10:1; 1 Cor 1:12.

Peter's liberation: Acts 12:3. Jerusalem Council: Acts 15:7.

Philip (deacon): Acts 6:5, 8:5, 21:8.

Priscilla: Acts 18:2; Rom 16:2.

Simon Magus: Acts 8:9.

Stephen: Acts 5:5, 6:60.

Timothy: Acts 16:1.

BIBLICAL TEACHING

The Old Testament: GOD TEACHES HIS PEOPLE

	O	All God's relations with the created world manifest three aspects of the divine purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God loves humankind. Here we recognize his justice and generosity, and we speak preferentially of creation and providence. God chooses those who will be granted a closer relationship with through Christ. Here we recognize his mysterious and loving predestination. And we speak preferentially of grace and sanctification. God wants those who have received more from him to take part in the work of bringing salvation to the rest of humankind. In this this work of redemption Christ, the Chosen One and the Saviour of all stands out.
1^a God the creator. God of all people	10	The universe is the work of God: Gen 1; Is 44:24; Ps 8:4, 18:2, 32:6. God, creator of the heavens and the earth : Gen 1:1, 14:9, 22. God created from nothing: 2 Mc 7:28.
	11	God creates with wisdom: Ps 104:24. God creates through his wisdom: Prv 8:22; Wis 8:6; Sir 24:9; or through his Spirit: Ps 33:6, 104:30; Jdt 16:14. God creates with measure, number and weight: Wis 11:20. The apostles discover that this Wisdom is the Word or the Son of God: Jn 1:3; Col 1:16. Through him God plans the development of history: Heb 1:2. God brings creation to maturity by infusing his Spirit into it: Wis 1:1-7, 10, 11:20-12:2.
	12	God has created us through his Son: he makes us children "in him": Gal 3:26-29, 4:4-7; Eph 1:3-4. And gives the human person life through his word and his Wisdom: Dt 8:3; Prv 8:1-21; Lk 1:50-55. Examples in Ex 3; Jgs 6; 1 Kgs 19:6-8; Is 6:8; Jer 15:19-21. See also 153-156.
	13	The universe praises its creator: Ps 18:2, 148; Bar 3:34; Dn 3:56-80.
	14	God rules the universe: Ps 33, 96; Rv 4:1-10. He directs events for our good: Mt 6:31; Lk 12:5-7; Jn 16:23; Rom 8:28. God looks after all his creatures: Ps 104; Jon 4:11; Wis 11:23-26.
	15	Spiritual creatures called angels take part in the development of the universe and in the execution of the divine plans: Zec 1; Ex 23:23; Tb; Dn 3:49-11.
	16	God blessed humanity and its development: Gen 1:28. He renewed his blessing after the fall: Gen 8:21, 9. He is the God of all nations: Dt 33:3; Mal 1:11; and the saviour of all: Jon 4:11.
	17	God punishes man's sins (Ex 7:10), but he never ceases to love the human race: Gen 8:21.
	18	God gives signs to all men (Heb 14:17; Mt 2:1) and he also gives them prophets to interpret those signs: Nm 22-24; 1 Sam 6; Jonah. There are saints not belonging to the people of God: Enoch (Gen 5:23), Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), Job and Daniel (Ez 14:4).
	19	However, to achieve his work of salvation, not from outside but within the frame of history, and respecting the necessary stages, God chooses a people of his own through whom his promises will come to all the nations: Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8 and 14. See 37. All of Sacred History refers to this chosen minority. It manifests their mission and the inheritance God willed to grant to them. God who sends them is the same who loves them for all eternity. See com. on Lk 1, 38; Eph 1, 18 and 2, 7-10.
2. God gives his Covenant to Abraham	20	First step in Sacred History: God calls Abraham: Gen 12:1. God's call to Abraham includes a double promise: he will give him descendants (Gen 15:4; 18:10) and a land: Gen 12:7.
	21	God makes a Covenant with him. From then on he will be the God of Abraham and of his descendants for ever: Gen 15:18; 17:7; Is 51:2.
	22	This covenant makes Abraham (and his descendants), the servant of God and of his works in the world, so that God's blessing will come to all nations: Gen 12:3; 28:14.
	23	On various occasions Abraham demonstrates his faith in the promises of God for whom nothing is impossible: Gen 15:1-6; 22.
	24	God shows that he is pleased with Abraham's faith (Gen 15:6) and

		<p>obedience (Gen 22:26; Jas 2:21) more than with the fulfilment of some religious practice (Rom 4:3-4 and 4:19-22).</p> <p>25 Abraham's faith makes him a friend of God: Is 41:8; Dn 3:35; Jas 2:23, and he lives with God after death: Lk 20:38.</p> <p>26 Because of his faith, Abraham becomes a person who counts in the eyes of God who takes him into account when he makes decisions: Gen 19:17-33; Is; 41:9, 43:1, 49:4.</p> <p>27 Abraham's faith shows the way that all must follow from then on in order to receive God's promises: faith in the promises of God (Rom 4:20) who can even raise the dead: Heb 11:17-19.</p> <p>28 The Covenant with Abraham is confirmed in his descendants (Gen 28:10; 32:23; 49:28). However, this covenant continues to be a gift of God which is given not to all of Abraham's children by family right, but to those whom God designates: Gen 21:12, 25:23; Rom 9:6-13.</p>
3. Moses and the Exodus. God as Liberator and Just	30	<p>God sees the sufferings of his people in Egypt (Ex 2:24 and 3:7) and he remembers his covenant with Abraham (Ex 2:24 and 3:16). God calls Moses (Ex 3:1 and 6:28) to liberate Israel.</p> <p>31 In the Hebrew culture the liberator of a thing or a person is the one who buys it or takes it away from its/ his owner in order to make it/ his own. Israel is liberated from the power of the Egyptians in order to belong to God: Ex 3:10 and 3:12, 19:4 and 19:6, 20:2 and 20:3.</p> <p>32 The God who liberates Israel teaches them his very Name, or a part of his mystery. The name with which Israel will invoke him: Yahweh: 1 am. Ex 3:14-15. See commentary on Ex 3:1 and Jn 8. Yahweh: the one who is, the one who brings into existence; the God who reckons with what is nothing and worthless in order to humble those who believe in them: 1 Sam 2:4-8; Ps 113:7; Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 4:17. See commentary on Ex 3 and 4.</p> <p>33 Yahweh is the Only God (Dt 6:4) who cannot be portrayed without diminishing him (Ex 20:4): totally different from all that men can imagine or invent, namely, from all that can be seen (Dt 4:12). We know him only through his word (Dt 4:12; Jn 5:38). Against images: Dt 4:15 and com. on Is 46:5 and Bar 6.</p> <p>34 God is holy (Am 4:2; Hos 11:9). Holiness means an irresistible and deep-seated vitality, an energy which devours and gives life at the same time. God is holy and holy is his name (Am 2:7; Lv 20:3; Is 57:15). No one can endure his presence when he comes near (Ex 19:16; Is 6:1). Man cannot see him: Ex 3:2, 33:20; Jn 1:18; Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; com. on Gen 16:1. Man cannot judge his actions: Is 40:21; Ez 18:29; Job 38, 42; Rom 11:33; 1 Cor 2:9.</p> <p>35 God is jealous (Ex 20:5): he cannot tolerate a stranger who comes and profanes what he has chosen or cared for, what he has chosen is already sanctified (Nm 17:1). He cannot stand to see his plans fail: Ez 36:22; Ex 32:12. He cannot cede his glory to another: Is 48:11. Devouring fire and jealous God: Dt 4:23; 1 Heb 12:29.</p> <p>36 God is just. He forgives sin, but he does not leave it without punishment Ex 20:5; Jgs 2:13-22; 2 Sam 12; Jer 3; Hos 2,3. He brings sins into the open: Jos; 1 Kgs 21:20; Is 22:14; 2 Mc 12:38. God is just and his commands demand that we be just: Ex 20:1-17. See 50.</p> <p>37 The only God, Holy, Jealous and Just, is a God who works in history and asks his people to do the same, differently from the other gods of nature (see com. on 1 Kgs 17). The God Liberator (Ex 14:15; 16; 17) also demand the conquest of the land of Canaan: Ex 34:11-13; Nm 14 and com. on Ex 32.</p> <p>From then on instead of only remembering the past, the religion of Israel will also look forward to new liberations (Jgs 4-6; 1 Sam 17; 2 Kgs 18-19; 1 Mc 4; Lk 1:73; Acts 1:6) and it will have new goals: Is 40-42; 65-66; Zec 8:20-23; Dn 7:26-27; Acts 1:8.</p> <p>38 On Sinai God celebrates a Covenant with the people who will be his servant as he works in history: Is 49: 1-9; Ps 2; Ps 149:6-9. God makes them a people of priests and a consecrated nation: Ex 19:6, 24:3-11; 1 Pt 2:9. Renewal of the Covenant: Jos 8:30; Jos 24; 2 Kgs 23:21; Neh 8. He establishes a New Covenant: Jos 8:30; Jos 24; 2 Kgs 23:21; Neh 8. He establishes a New Covenant: Jer 31:31; Ezr 36:22; Mal 3:1.</p> <p>39 Hebrew tradition will consider Moses as the first of the prophets (Dt 18:18-20, 34:10-12). It states that Moses was the first one to recognize</p>

		the true face of God: Merciful and Clement , rich in Love and Fidelity: Ex 34:1-9.
4. Time of the Kings a) The first prophets teach that God is Love and Fidelity	40	Prophecy will develop in Israel from the time of David onwards. Prophets affirm that God is Love and Fidelity, especially in Deuteronomy. Love and Fidelity refrain of Psalm 89: verses 2, 3, 15, 25, 29, 34, 50. Dt 7:9; 2 Sam 2:6.
	41	Love (or Gift, or grace) of God for Israel . He chooses Israel who does not deserve it (Dt 7:7, 9:5, 10:15). He gives her the land (the land of Canaan) inheritance: Dt 4:1, 4:38, 6:10. He makes the Israelites his children: Dt 32:5-6; Hos 11:1; Is 1:2.
		He gives prosperity in the Land : Dt 7:12-15, 8:18-19. Israel will keep God's gifts if she obeys and loves God: Dt 4:40, 6:10-19, 11:12-21.
	42	If Israel fails God, he will take away their prosperity and their land: Dt 4:24-31, 28:15-68. But the ever-faithful God will convert Israel after punishing her: Dt 30:1-10. A remnant of Israel will be saved: see 1 Kgs 19:18 and 60:69. Israel's destiny: chosen, punished and renewed: Dt 32. Then I will love them : Hos 14:5.
	43	Love (or Gift) of God to David . He gives him the Kingdom and makes him his own: 2 Sam 7:12-16. In Israel, only kings were considered as God's children: 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:27-28; Ps 2:7. Because of his love for David, as ruler God looks after his descendants: 1 Kgs 8:25, 11:34.
		Because of their sins, they deserve to be rejected by God: Jer 22:24. But God, being merciful and faithful, will again establish a descendant of David as ruler (see 60-69).
	44	Fidelity or Truth : it is the same word in Hebrew and it is similar to amen which means: it is so! (2 Cor 2: 18-20). Every word of God is faithful and it will be fulfilled: 1 Kgs 8:26; Neh 9:33. God's faithfulness to Israel cannot be belied: Rom 11:28; 15:8.
	45	In politics, kings must respect the demands of the Covenant (Dt 17:16-20; 1 Kgs 13; 2 Kgs 9:6-10). While priests condemn disobeying the Law of God (2 Chr 26:16), prophets focus on all that betrays the spirit of the Covenant: 2 Chr 20:36; 2 Chr 25:15.
5. Time of the Kings b) The great prophets speak of Love, Justice	50	You will love God with your whole heart, your whole soul....: Dt 6:4. Love for God, an interior attitude, is worth more than worship : Hos 6:6 and costly sacrifices: Mi 6:7-8; Jer 2:2.
	51	True love comes from the knowledge of God : Is 1:3; Jer 31:34; Hos 2:22, 3:5. To know God is to recognize his actions in events: Is 1:1-6, 22:8-14, 28:23-29, 30, 31:1-9, 42:18-25; Jer 6:10-16; Am 4:4-13; and to listen to his prophets: Is 6:9-12, 8:11-18, 41:21-29; Jer 13:15-17; Am 5:6-8; Zec 7:9-12.
	52	Love and the knowledge of God will be the fruits of the New Covenant , profound gifts of God: Jer 31:31; and work of the Spirit : Ez 36:27-30; Jl 3:1-2; the covenant of God with the humble and the poor in Spirit: Zep 3:11.
	53	The Covenant must turn into a real marriage . Israel, the bride of Yahweh: Is 54:6, 10, 62:1-5. Israel compared to the unfaithful bride : Hos 2; Jer 2-3; Ez 16 and 23. The future wedding in Love and Fidelity: Hos 2:20-25; Jn 1:17; Rv 21:2-4, 21:9.
	54	God, Just and Holy demands social justice . Return to a society of equality and fraternity: Jer 34:8-19. The rich is an oppressor : Is 5:8-9; Mi 3:9-11; Mi 2:9. In equality: a source of violence: Is 5:7; Ez 22:23-25, 24:6-8; Am 5:7-13; Mi 2:1-5. Unjust laws : Is 10:1-2; Am 5:7.
	55	God detests the pride coming from the money: Is 2:6-22, 3:16-24. He detests the pride coming from power: Is 14:5-21, 36:22-29, 47; Hb 2:6-13.
	56	God prepares a destructive Judgment , called the Day of Yahweh : Is 1:24-28; Am 5:14-21; Zep 1:14-18, 3:1-8. A judgment which will reestablish justice: Is 2:1-5, 4:2-6; Ez 34; and will bring about final peace: Is 9:1-7, 11:1-9, 32:15-20. He prepares a City of Justice : Is 1:26, 60; Zec 8:1-17 and Triumph for the humble : Is 26:1-6; Zep 3:12-18, and Consolation for the oppressed : Is 61:1-3.
6. God the Redeemer and his Messiah	60	In the Bible the word Redemption means the same as Liberation . One liberates a thing or person that was under the power of another in order to make it/him one's own: It is somewhat like buying. See in Lv 25 the redemption of slaves and lands. More still in Ru 2:20, 3:13, 4.

	<p>61 God the Redeemer frees his people from the power of foreigners: Jgs 2:13-17; Dt 4:34; Ex 20:1,3:8. After the first liberation from Egypt and many other liberations (Jgs 3:4; 1 Sam 7; 2 Kgs 19), it was becoming eminent during the time of the Exiles that a definitive liberation is nearing: Is 40,41:8,43:1-7.</p> <p>62 God also led them to hope that by saying his people he would give peace to all the earth: Gen 12:3; Is 49:6. This hope took shape with King David: Israel believed they had found the perfect king in this anointed one (or Messiah). Gen 49:10; Nm 24:7 and 17 refer to him.</p> <p>63 Later, they considered David and his descendants as being sacred and they hoped for the coming of a Messiah like David: Ps 132; Ps 72; Jer 30:9. But they also understood that the Messiah would surpass all the rulers of the earth and that he would establish a kingdom of justice and peace: Is 4:2, 9:1-7, 11:1-9; Ps 2; Ps 110.</p> <p>64 During the Exile, the author of second part of Isaiah sees in the believing remnant of Israel the Servant of Yahweh, an instrument of his salvation: Is 49:1-6, 50:1-9, 52:13-53:12.</p> <p>65 The figure of a Suffering Messiah also appears in Zec 12:10-12. In Dn 7:13 the Son of Man, who comes from God himself, was perhaps an image of the Holy People (7:27). Jesus, however, will consider it as announcing him: Mt 24:30 and 26:64.</p> <p>66 Various biblical texts leave us in doubt. Will it not be God himself who will visit people to meet those who are waiting for him? Is 25:6-10; 7:12, 63:19; Zep 3:14-18; Zec 2:14-17.</p> <p>67 When the Bible speaks of the Shepherd who will rule over Israel, it sometimes calls him the Messiah King (Jer 23:4; Mi 5:4; Zec 13:7), sometimes God (Is 40:1; Mi 7:14; Song of Songs 2:16; Ps 23:1; Ps 28:9, 80:2) and easily associates the one with the other (Ez 34:11-25).</p>
7. Time of Judaism: the religion of the Law	<p>70 The Law sometimes means all the laws of the Bible (Mt 22:36), or the Bible itself (Jn 12:34) or at times the Jewish religion (Gal 2:19). The Law and the Prophets, or The Law, the Prophets and the Psalms are two ways of referring to the Bible (Mt 7:12; Lk 24:44).</p> <p>71 The Law reveals two basic demands: Justice and Holiness. Holiness, that is, respect toward God and the rules of purity. The first is found in the Ten Commandments of Moses (Ex 20:1-17) and the second in the commandments of Moses (Ex 20:1-17) and the second in the commandments of God expressed in Ex 34:10-26. Laws of Justice: Ex 21:22; Lv 19:10-18, 19:35-36; Dt 19 and 24. Laws of Holiness: Lv 17-18; Dt 23.</p> <p>72 The Law was both the expression of God's will and of Jewish culture. In the Law, we find God's attempt to transform the customs of Israel and to educate believers: Ex 15:15; com. on Lv 8:11, 11:1, 24:17.</p> <p>73 The law differentiates between ordinary days and days dedicated to God, the Sabbath: Gen 2:3; Ex 20:8, 23:12, 34:21; Nm 15:32; 28:9-10. New Moons: Nm 28:11-15. The three feasts of Passover, Weeks (Pentecost) and Tabernacles (or booths): Dt 16; Ex 23:14-17; Lv 23; Nm 28:11-31; Nm 29:1-6 and 12-39. Especially about Passover: Ex 12:1-17 and 43-51. The Day of Atonement: Lv 16; Nm 29:7.</p> <p>74 The Law determines what is pure and impure, namely the requirements for participation in divine worship: Lv 15:31. Circumcision: Gen 17:9-14; Ex 12:48. Cleanliness in sexual life: Lv 21:1-8; Lv 15. Diseases: Lv 13:14. Contact with the dead and with unclean animals: Lv 11:24-40; Lv 21:1-12; Lv 17:15-16. On not mixing materials or harnessing animals of different species: Lv 19:19.</p> <p>75 The Law forbids certain foods: Blood: Gen 9:4; Dt 12:16; Lv 17:10-14. Fat: Dt 14:21; Lv 7:22-25. Certain animals: Dt 14:3; Lv 11:1-23.</p> <p>76 The Law includes sexual morality: Ex 21:7-11; Lv 18, 20:11-21, 21:13-15; Dt 22:13-30.</p> <p>77 The Law teaches solidarity within God's people: You will love your neighbour (from the same race or people): Lv 19:18, but it advocates separation from and aggressiveness towards</p>

		<p>foreigners: Ex 23:32; Dt 22:9-11, 23:4 and it especially condemns marriages with foreign women: Dt 7:3-5.</p> <p>Forms of solidarity with the poor: Ex 22:25-27; Dt 22:1-4, 24:10-22, 23:20; Lv 19:9-11, 23:22. Respect for the helpless, widows, orphans and strangers: Ex 22:22-24.</p> <p>The Jubilee Year: Lv 25:13.</p>
	78	<p>The Law teaches about gifts to God and to his priests:</p> <p>Tithing: Ex 23:19, 34:26; Nm 18:21-32; Dt 14:22-29.</p> <p>Sacrifices: Lv 1:7.</p> <p>Voluntary sacrifices: Ex 25:1, Nm 6; Dt 16:16-17.</p> <p>Rights of the priests: Lv 7:9, 7:34-36; Nm 18:18-25; Dt 18:8-19.</p>
8. Wisdom teaching	80	<p>In the Bible, Solomon is the first and the model of wisdom teachers: 1 Kgs 4:29-34; Sir 47:14. The dream and the judgment of Solomon: 1 Kgs 3. Various wisdom books written after him are attributed to him: Prv 1:1; Eccl 1:1; Wis 9:12.</p>
	81	<p>Wisdom means: practical intelligence to govern one's house and to achieve success: 1 Kgs 10:6; Ez 28:1-7.</p> <p>Then, the ability to put one's life in order according to the Law of God: Prv 16:1-11; Sir 15:1-3; 24:23-30.</p>
	82	<p>How to obtain wisdom? Wisdom is a gift of God: Sir 1:1; Wis 6:14-16, 9:1-6. It can be found in the sayings of wise men and in meditating on their proverbs: Prv 1:6, 13:20; Sir 6:34-36; in overcoming one's whims: Sir 11:1-10, 23:1-7; Prv 16:32; in perseverance in trials: Sir 2:1-14 and in studying: Sir 6:23-33; in meditating on the Law: Sir 32:7-24, 39:1-11, 51:17-21; Ps 119; and in reflecting on one's experience: Eccl 1:12-18, 2:1-11, Sir 34:9-11.</p>
	83	<p>Wise men ask: What is man? Almost all of the Old Testament was written by Jews of Hebraic culture and it expresses the concepts of that culture which, unlike ours, does not distinguish in man a spiritual part, or soul, and a material part, or body. Instead, they saw man as a whole and in speaking of flesh, body, and heart, they were referring to man's various aspects. Man is called flesh and blood since he is a mortal creature. He is called soul because he is a living being. Soul means breath (Gen 2:7 and 7:22) and the Jews readily identified breath with life (Ps 104:29). Moreover, they believed that life was in the blood (Lv 17:10-14). The spirit means openness to God. The heart refers to the inner man, not only his feelings, but also his mind and conscience. Very often we should translate my soul as: myself, my life, or I.</p> <p>Different from animals, man's soul receives something of the Spirit, or the breath of God (Gen 2:7). The spirit is both the spirit of man and the Spirit of God in man (Eccl 12:7).</p> <p>Man is free and responsible for his actions: Sir 15:11-21 and 17:3-14.</p> <p>Man is a sinner since his birth (Ps 51:7; Job 10 and 13). The weight of sin upon him is the result of the sin of his ancestors: he bears the consequences of their errors: Gen 3; Jer 31:29; Lam 5:7; Ps 106:6; Tb 3:3.</p> <p>The great evil for man is death: Job 14; Eccl 3:18-22, 6:1-10, 8:7; Sir 42:9-14.</p>
	84	<p>How must man and woman be? The equality of men and women is affirmed at the beginning of the Bible: see commentaries on Gen 1:26 and 2:20. However, this is contrary to the whole approach of Hebrew culture which is male-centered. The inferiority of women admitted by the Law (Dt 24:1; Nm 5:11; Lv 27:3-7), is accepted by wise men: Eccl 7:27-28. Women are seen as being responsible for men's sins (Prv 7:5-27); they must be watched (Sir 42:9-12, 25:15-26) and they are praised when they serve their husbands well: Prv 31:30-31; Sir 36:23-26. It is only in the Song of Songs that a woman's equality in love is recognized.</p>
	85	<p>Work and man's own effort are the conditions for his excellence: Prv 6:6-11, 27:23-27; Sir 7:15. Work keeps men occupied (especially slaves) and disciplined: Sir 33:25-28; yet it is not everything in life: Sir 2:4-11, 4:7-12.</p>
	86	<p>Regarding social relations, the social order with its distinctions between rich and poor, between kings and subjects, is accepted: Eccl 5:7-8, 4:1-3; Sir 8:1-3. The king is respected as God's representative: Prv 16:10 and 24:21. However, his company is dangerous (Eccl 8:2-4; Sir 13:9-10) and his whims are feared: Sir 16:12-15.</p> <p>Inferiors (slaves) as well as the young must be watched (Sir 33:25-30); their freedom cannot be trusted and they must be trained firmly: Sir 30:1-13.</p>

	87 In order to please God man must be humble (Sir 10:6-26), merciful (Sir 28:1-7) and he must be generous with the poor (Job 30 and 31; Sir 4:1-10, 29:1-13).
	88 How does God reward the just? The wise people of the Old Testament did not know yet of the hereafter (Eccl 3:17-22, 8:7-8; Sir 17:27-30). Therefore, knowing that God is just, they made an effort to examine divine retribution in this life. God is just and he does not leave evil people unpunished (Job 18 and 20). God rewards his people, maybe not with money and a long life (Prv 10:22-30, 11:20-21; 13:21-23), but at least by giving them peace and security. He may test them (Job 36, Wis 3:1-6), but in the end God will reward them: Wis 3:5; Sir 1:23, 11:21-26. And yet, some point out many exceptions to this retribution: Job 21 and 24; Eccl 7:15-16, 8:11-14. See also 90-92.
	89 Wisdom of God and wisdom of man. Gradually wisdom writers realize in the Wisdom of God something distinct from God, though it is part of him: Prv 8:22 and 30. Through Wisdom, God created the world (Prv 8:22-30; Sir 24:3-4) and Wisdom shines forth in him: Sir 43. Wisdom guarantees the unfolding of the plan of salvation: Wis 10 and Sir 24:9-29. Wisdom completely surpasses the human mind (Job 9 and 28; Eccl 3:10) and it is only communicated through God's revelation (Bar 3:9-29 and 4:1-2; Sir 24:8-12 and 23-25). Wisdom is nourishment coming forth from the mouth of God : Dt 8:3; Prv 9:5; Sir 24:3 and 19; Ps 19:11 and 81:17.
9. The Resurrection and the hereafter	90 According to the teaching of Jesus (Lk 24:27) the whole Bible announced the Resurrection, for wherever the Bible speaks of the covenant of the living God with mortal man, it is understood that God means to share life with man forever: Ex 3:6 and Mk 12:26; Ps 16:11, 23:6, 73:25-26.
	91 But Old Testament believers, who only spoke of a sad and strange survival in Sheol, or the Place of the Dead, did not see that: Is 38:18-19; Ps 88:12-13, 115:17-18.
	92 The persecution at the time of the Maccabees forced them to reflect on the fate of the martyrs and it became obvious to them that there would be no justice of God if he did not raise (resuscitate) them to share a happy life with him. Since Hebrew culture did not make the distinction between body and soul (see 83), they said that man would emerge from dust, or that he would have life again on Judgment day: Dn 12:2; 2 Mac 7.
	93 At that same time Greek culture influenced Israel: Greeks saw in man something material, the body , and the soul (which gives life), often-times different from the spirit , in search of truth and good: 1 Thes 5:23. For this reason, Wisdom, the last of the Old Testament books, says that the soul (or the spirit) of man is immortal and it meets God at death: Wis 2 and 3. This conviction will later be found in all the books of the New Testament: Mt 10:28; 2 Cor 5:1-8.

The New Testament: THE FAITH OF THE APOSTLES

10. The person of Jesus. Jesus and Mary.	100 After speaking so many times through the prophets, God spoke one last time through his Son (Heb 1:1) when the fullness of time had come (Gal 4:4). Jesus is the only and eternal Son (Col 1:13-15), the Word who is in God and is God present to the Father (Jn 1:1; Rv 19:13).
	101 The Son of God became man (Jn 1:14). Jesus, true man and not an apparition, nor God disguised as man, took the form of a slave and died on the cross (Phil 2:6-11; Gal 4:4). Other than at the Transfiguration (Lk 9:32), the glory which was his as Son did not manifest itself in his humanity (Jn 1:15 and 17:5); rather Jesus wished to grow by means of suffering like any other man (Heb 5:7-8). From the start Jesus was conscious of who he was (Lk 2:49; Heb 10:5). It did not however mean that he knew everything (com. on Mk 6:2), for he discovered the demands of his mission gradually (com. on Lk 3:21; and 9:31).
	102 Jesus enters into our history. The Gospel situates his birth (Lk 2:1; Mt 2:12-1; Jn 7:42); the beginning of his public ministry (Lk 3:1-2; 3:22); his death at the time of Pilate, the governor, and Caiaaphas, the High Priest

		(Jn 11:49). He was born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth (Mt 2:23; Lk 4:16) where he worked; he never left to become the disciple of any master (Jn 7:15).
103		Jesus begins by preaching in the synagogues (Lk 4:15; Mk 1:21) and by initiating the Reign of God (Mk 1:15 and 110-118). He gathers crowds (Mt 5:1; 14:14). After a while a crisis takes place (Jn 6:66) and Jesus devotes himself to forming his disciples (Mk 9:30) who will become the nucleus of his Church (Mt 16:16; Lk 22:24-32). Then, he prepares for his death (130-138) crowned by his Resurrection (see 140-148).
104		Jesus performed miracles as the prophets had done but in a different way, as someone with divine authority (Mk 2:27, Mt 5:21, 5:28, 5:32. He easily puts himself in the place which belongs to God (Mk 2:1-12; Lk 7:36-50; Mk 8:34-38). He declares he is one with the Father (Mt 11:26-27; Jn 5:18, 8:58, 10:30, 10:37-38).
105		Jesus usually refused being called son of God (Mk 3:11, 5:7) because this title was traditionally given to the kings of Israel (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:27), and Jesus was son in a very different way. He preferred to be called Son of Man (Mt 26:64) referring to Daniel 7:13 (see 65). But, first, Peter (Mt 16:16) and, later, the Church recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Heb 9:20). See 140-145.
106		The eternal Son of the Father did not come down from heaven to human-kind, but he was born from a people, Israel, and from a woman (Gal 4:4) Mary, uniquely associated to the Father's divine plan (com. on Lk 1:26). The one who was to be welcomed by the "virgin of Israel" (Is 7:14; Zec 2:14, 9:9) was born of a virgin mother (Mt 1:18; Lk 1:26 and com. on Mk 6:1). Mary's faith and consent allowed the work of the Spirit to be accomplished in her (Lk 1:45).
107		Mary intervenes in the Gospel: for the sanctification of John the Baptist (Lk 1:39); at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Jn 2; Cana) and in order to welcome us as adopted children (Jn 19:25). She is mentioned in the birth and infancy of Jesus (Lk 2; Mt 2). Two texts compels us to realize that her greatness does not come from having given physical birth to Jesus, but rather from her being the model of the believers. (Mk 3:31; Lk 11:27). Mary is also mentioned in the first nucleus of the church (Acts 1:14).
108		Here are some biblical texts which helps us express what Mary means to God and to the church: Gen 3:15; Is 7:14, Sg 4:12-16; Prv 8:22-31; Jdt 13:18-20, 16:9-10; Rev 12.
11. Jesus proclaims the Reign of God	110	Jesus begins by proclaiming a new age, announced by the prophets, the age of God's favour (Mk 1:14; Lk 4:21, 4:19).
	111	Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of heaven : Mt 5:1 and com. of Mt 6:9). His miracle are signs that this Kingdom of God is already in the midst of men (Mt 11:26; Lk 17:21) with the power to cure all their ills: Mt 9:35.
	112	The Kingdom of God means that now God reveals himself as Father (Mt 6:1, 6:9, 6:18 ...) and he must be acknowledged as such by his children (Mt 11:26-27). The whole newness of the Kingdom lies in a new awareness of God (Jn 4:23), an awareness of the Father (Jn 7:28-29) and of the Son (Jn 17:3), erasing the old image of a punishing God (Lk 9:54 and 14:2; Jn 9:3) with mighty power (Mt 11:29; Jn 12:34-35) and very distant from men (Jn 14:8).
	113	The Kingdom of Heaven is proclaimed to the poor first (Lk 4:18, 6:20, 7:22). They are the first to enter it (Lk 16:9) and they will have a decisive role in the spreading of the Kingdom: Lk 12:32-34; 1 Cor 1:26; Jas 2:5-7. This is not because the poor are better but because the power of God is better manifested in human weakness (1 Sam 17; 1 Cor 1:29; 1 Mc 3:18; 2 Cor 12:9) and because God loves to save what was lost (Is 49:2; Lk 1:25, 19:10). He humbles the proud and raises the humble: Lk 16:15; 1 Sam 2:3-8.
	114	It is rather significant that the first promises of the Kingdom are addressed to a great king (2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kgs 8:24) and the last to the poor of Yahweh (Zep 3:12; Zec 9:9; Ps 132:15), the oppressed believers (Dn 3:30; 1 Mc 2:7) exploited by the rich and the opportunists (Ps 55, 58, 123:3). These poor welcome the Gospel better (Lk 2:8, 10:21, 4:18).
		The fact that God reigns does not mean that from then on men will leave him to act alone, but rather that they will act with more freedom because they are freed from prejudices (Mk 7:15; Acts 10:15 and 34) and laws (Lk 14:3; Col 2:16) and are concerned about making their talents grow (Mt 25:14-30).

	115	The salvation of men is not achieved from above by eradicating evil (Mt 13:24, 26:53): it is a seed sown among men (Mt 13:1, 13:31) that grows slowly (Mk 4:26), first within the person (Mk 4:14; Mt 13:44; Jn 3:3); and then becomes a visible reality (Mt 5:14; Lk 12:32) which is concretized in the church (Mt 16:18).
	116	The contemporaries of Jesus thought that the Kingdom would begin after the Judgment of God which would separate the good from the bad (Is 1:25-28, 4:2-5; Zep 1:14; Mal 3:1-2; Mt 3:9-12). Jesus states that the judgment is not for now (Mt 13:32; Acts 1:7): nonetheless, even now men are being judged by their attitude toward the Gospel (Jn 3:18-20, 12:46) and so are the nations. (Lk 10:13, 14:19; Mt 23:37)
	117	Jesus presents himself as the One sent by the Father (Jn 6:29, 10:36) and the apostles discover the unique relationship which unites him to the Father (Lk 11:1; Mk 1:35; Lk 6:12; Mk 14:37; Jn 4:31-34, 16:32). Jesus says: My Father (Mt 7:21, 10:32, 16:17; Mk 25:34) and your Father (Mt 5:16, 10:20). He never says Our Father .
	118	Jesus asks the Jews to recognize that they were living in an exceptional moment (Lk 12:54; Mt 11:21, 12:41) and that they had to overcome the crisis that divided them (Lk 12:57, 13:5) by accepting this new vision of God the Father and the primacy of mercy (Lk 15) and reconciliation (Mt 19:23).
	119	The great majority of the Jewish people did not respond to this call (Mt 12:45; Lk 13:34) and their fanatical religion brought them to the catastrophe foretold by Jesus (Mt 21:43, 22:7, 23:35-37; Lk 21:23 and 23:28-31).
12. Jesus prepares his church	120	The church (Acts 9:31) and the churches (Gal 1:22). The church of God (Acts 20:28) and the churches of God (1 Cor 11:6; 1 Thes 2:14). The church is the spiritual people of God. Church means the Assembly convened by God, or the Assembly of God's elect. They are also called the saints : the church of the saints: (1 Cor 14:33).
	121	To renew Israel and then to extend the Kingdom to all the nations (Mt 10:5, 15:24), Jesus plans his church founded on Peter (Mt 16:18) and the apostles (Mt 10:1). His people's lack of faith makes him think of the church as a new people of God, open to all nations (Mt 8:10; Jn 10; Mt 21:43, 22:1, 23:37) in which the Kingdom will be concretized (See com. on Mt 13:31).
	122	Jesus is followed by disciples who believe in him (Lk 6:17, 19:37). Among them he chooses those he wishes (Mk 3:13; Jn 15:16) to be his apostles (Mk 3:16). They will form the core of his church (Lk 22:28-30). Jesus asks self-sacrifice from them (Mk 8:34; Lk 9:57) and total fidelity to him (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:25).
	123	Jesus teaches them the foundations of co-existence in the church. The greatest will be the servant the others (Mk 10:43; Mt 18:6 and 10). No one will be called Father, Master or Teacher, but the authority will respect the fundamental equality of all and their direct relationship to God (Mt 23:8). The greatest Law will be love (Jn 13:34-35 and 15:12-14). Love will be expressed primarily in forgiveness (Mt 18:21 and 23) and in concern for unity (Jn 17:21). Church decisions will be ratified by God (Mt 16:19 and 18:18).
	124	The growth of the Kingdom in a world which rejects light will be a source of conflicts and will bring about persecutions to the church (Lk 12:49-53; Jn 15:18-25; Mk 13:13; Mt Rv 12:13-18). The first crisis will be the destruction of the Jewish nation (Mk 13:5-23, 13:28-31). See com. on Mt 24. Other crises will follow until the last one which will witness the return of Christ and the Judgment: Mt 16:27; Acts 3:21; 1 Thes 4:16; Mk 13:24-27; 2 Thes 2; Rv 19:11-21, 20:7.
13. The Sacrifice	130	The death of Jesus is not accidental. (Heb 10:5). From the start he prepared to face it (Mt 20:28; Jn 11:9, 12:27). He predicted it many times (Mk 8:31, 9:9, 10:32; Lk 13:31). He assumed full responsibility for it (Jn 10:28-30, 19:30), knowing that this Hour was the hour of his triumph (Jn 7:6-8, 12:31, 17:1-2).
	131	Jesus' sacrifice is like a second revelation of the justice of God (Rom 3:25-26) completing that of the Old Testament. The punishing God banished sinners (Gen 3:22-23); God-made-man heals evil people and ac-

		cepts to be rejected by them (Jn 1:11; Mt 21:37). The liberating God demonstrated his sovereignty (Ex 15; Dn 4 and 5); Jesus chooses the last place in order to save (Mt 20:28).
132		Those who became victims of society have greater power to disturb us after their death. Jesus chooses the last place (Phil 2:8) in order to bring to repentance the very society which condemned him (Zec 12:10; Jn 19:37; Rv 1:7), and in so doing, he draws all people to himself (Jn 12:32).
133		Since the very beginning, men have offered sacrifices . The holocaust (that is when the victim is completely burned) expressed a person's total submission to God: Lv 1:1; 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:18; Heb 10:6-7. The blood poured out atoned for sins (Lv 5, 17:11; Heb 9:22). Victims which were eaten in a communion banquet made the participants share in divine holiness (1 Cor 10:18). The sacrifice of the lamb served to renew God's covenant with his people (Ex 12; Ps 50:5).
134		Jesus' death and resurrection constitute the new and final sacrifice that replaces all the previous ones (Heb 7:27, 9:25). This is why Jesus is called Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). His sacrifice is identified with the New Passover (Passover means: Passage) leading to holy and eternal life (Lk 12:50, 22:16; Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 5:7; com. on Mc 15:16).
135		The sacrifice of Jesus enabled him to reach his perfection and to receive the gifts that make him the Leader and the Head of all humanity (Is 53:11-12; Acts 2:33; Heb 2:10, 5:7). See 203.
136		With the pouring of his blood, his painful death obtains the forgiveness of sins for all people (Is 53:10; Mt 26:28; Rom 3:21, 5:9; 5:19, 8:3); it reconciles us with God (Rom 5:10, 5:20; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 1:21); it redeems us (1 Pt 1:18); it gives us freedom (Rom 7:4; Eph 1:17) and it begins a process that brings a solution to all the contradictions in the universe (Rom 8:19; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20).
137		The sacrifice of Christ reveals the love of God for us in the Father's great generosity (Rom 8:3; Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:10) as well as in the Son's obedience (Mk 14:36; Rom 5:6; 1 Jn 3:16). In Jesus' pierced heart (Jn 19:34) we contemplate the mystery of the love of God who wished to dazzle us with his capacity for total surrender in order to restore trust to his lost creation (Rom 5:8).
138		Jesus' death and resurrection teach us the meaning of our own life: the one who gives his life comes to a new birth (Lk 17:33; Jn 12:24-26, 16:21, 17:9). His death and resurrection point out to us the demands of genuine love (Jn 15:13) and of ministry (2 Cor 6:3-10, 12:14) as well as the value of our own trials (Jn 15:2; 2 Cor 12:9-10).
14. The Resurrection. Jesus Lord of History		
140		Jesus is risen as he had said he would (Mk 9:9-10); according to the Scriptures (Lk 24:25-27; 1 Cor 15:4; Acts 2:30). The appearances of the risen Jesus in Jerusalem and in Galilee: (Mt 28; Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20 and 21; 1 Cor 15:5-8).
		The Resurrection has a double meaning: Jesus has returned to life (Lk 24:5; Acts 2:24) and Jesus has been glorified, or exalted (Jn 17:1; Acts 2:33, 3:13). Jesus' last appearance (or the Ascension) expresses this second aspect of the Resurrection (Mt 28:17-20; Lk 24:50, Acts 1:9).
141		In being raised, the humanity of Jesus is totally transformed by divine energy, receiving the fulness of life which the Father communicates to his Son (Jn 1:14, 17:1; Acts 2:32; Rom 1:3). Now Jesus is recognized as Son of God. Being the Son, splendour of the Father (Heb 1:1), Jesus, Son of God made man, is the manifestation of the invisible God in this created universe (Jn 14:9; Col 1:15) In him the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled (Mt 12:41-42, 23:35-36; Jn 8:56; Rv 5). Now as man, he is the head of all creation (Col 1:18), above all creatures, whether material or spiritual (Heb 1:4-14).
142		Jesus has come from God (Jn 13:3, 16:27, 17:8) and returns to the Father through his death and resurrection (Jn 16:28) so that the filial relationship which unites him to the Father can come to perfection (Acts 2:33; Rom 1:4). To express her faith in Jesus, the Son of God made man, one God with the Father whom the church calls Lord . Of the two names denoting God – God and Lord – the church kept the first for the Father and the second for Christ (see Rom 10:9; Phil 1:11; com. on Jn 11:2, 13:2, 20:2).
143		Jesus replaces the figure of God-Alone with that of God-Communion . Communion between the Father and the Son (Jn 1:1, 1:18; com. on Jn

- 5:19; Mt 11:26; Jn 13:32, 17). A communion in the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16, 15:26).
- 144 The church of the Apostles **baptizes** in the unique name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19) and acknowledges only one God in three Divine Persons which we call the **Holy Trinity**: 1 Cor 6:11, 12:4; 2 Cor 13:14; Rv 1.
- 145 The risen Jesus is now **Lord of History**: that is to say that he rules over and directs the material and spiritual forces, visible or invisible, which shape our history: Jn 12:31; Rv 1:18, 6; Col 1:18, 2:10 and com. on Mk 16:9. Paul shows Christ to be superior to the Heavenly powers which, in those days, were believed to be in charge of the fate and history of men (Eph 1:10-29; Col 1:16). This reign of Christ means that humanity has come of age (Gal 4:3-5).
- 146 From then on salvation takes place through the **Name of Jesus**, that is, through the divine power (Phil 2:9-10) which radiates from him (Acts 4:30; 1 Jn 2:12; com. on Mk 16:17). Every saving act proceeds at the same time from Christ and from the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 3:16-17) and is attributed to Christ the Lord or to his Spirit (Jn 6:35-36, 7:38-39; Mk 9:38; Lk 11:20; Eph 4:7 and 1 Cor 12:7).
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15. The New Creation - the gift of the Spirit - the Mystery of Reconciliation
- 150 Jesus did not come only to correct man's sins, but to **renew creation** (Jn 5:20). This new creation is achieved through the **gift of the Holy Spirit** (1 Cor 15:45). Above all, this work means a resurrection of people and **universal reconciliation** (Jn 5:21).
- 151 Jesus' violation of the **Sabbath** (Mk 2:28; Jn 5:29) and the Sabbath replacement by **Sunday** (see com. on Acts 20:7) reveals his intention to rearrange the first creation which took place in 6 days (Jn 5:17 and com. on Gen 2:3; Rev 3:14). The fulfillment of what the prophets had announced (Is 25:6-10, 32:15-20, 65:17-19; Ez 37, 47:1-12). The death of Jesus expresses the **death of all that preceded him** (2 Cor 5:14; Gal 2:19). Sins are forgiven (Rom 6:10; Heb 9:28). The laws and forms of religion taught in the Bible itself are no longer valid (Rom 7:4; Gal 4:5, 5:4-6; Col 2:16).
- All distinctions of sex, class and nation are abolished** (Gal 3:28, 6:15; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). **We are new creatures** (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:15; Eph 2:10, 15) moving towards a perfection similar to that of God the Father's (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). This new creation must embrace the whole universe: Rom 8:18-25.
- 152 The new creation especially implies **revoking the laws of the Old Testament**: they were no more than the shadow of the definitive realities (Col 2:17; Heb 8:5, 10:1; Mt 11:13) which begin with Christ. To rely on **circumcision** (Gal 5:2, 6:12) or on the other practices of the Law (Col 2:16; Rom 14:14-20) is to go backwards and to deny God's grace (Col 2:20; Gal 2:18). **The person who wishes to be righteous** in terms of practices and merits (Lk 18:9; Phil 3:7-9) loses genuine justice and holiness, the gift of God in Christ: Col 2:11; Phil 3:9.
- 153 The new creation is achieved through the **gift of the Holy Spirit** who gives life (Ps 104:30; Jn 6:63; Rom 8:2). Jesus' glorification had to precede the gift of the Spirit (Jn 7:37-39; Acts 2:32-33; Jn 16:7). The Spirit makes us **free** (Gal 4:7, 5:13-18), **forgives our sins** (Jn 20:22, 1 Cor 6:11). He makes us **sons** (Rom 8:14-17); he makes known to us God's mysterious designs (1 Cor 2:10-12; 1 Jn 2:20). The revelations of the Spirit in the church are the **first fruits** (Rom 8:23) and the **assurance** (Eph 1:14; 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5) of our complete transformation in the world to come (1 Jn 3:2-3; Rom 8:18).
- 154 **The new creation does not know death**, which is a consequence of sin (Rom 5:12; Rv 20:15, 21). It is true that the part of us which is called **exterior man** (2 Cor 4:16) or **old man** (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9) or **flesh** (2 Cor 4:11; Gal 6:8; Rom 8:3) moves toward death (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 5:16, 13:4; 1 Pt 3:18). But the **inner man** (Rom 7:22; Eph 1:16) is alive through sharing in the Spirit (Rom 8:10-11).
- 155 The risen Jesus gives us the power of the resurrection (Jn 5:25; Col 2:12, 3:1; Rom 5:21, 6:6, 8:4) and he will raise us (Jn 5:28, 6:39-58, 11:25; Rom 8:10; Phil 3:20).
- 156 Jesus reveals the **Mystery** (Eph 3:3; Rv 10:7), that is the amazing plan which was kept secret (Eph 3:9; Rom 16:25; Col 1:26). The entire work of creation, salvation and sanctification had for its goal the **praise of God's grace and generosity** (Eph 1:6, 12). Everything was entrusted to

		the Beloved Son (Eph 1:1-6) and through him all men receive it. All peoples are called to form a single body in him (Eph 1:22, 3:5-6) and through him they come to share the very Glory of God (Col 1:27; Eph 2:6).
	157	This mysterious plan was initiated with the salvation of Israel (Rom 11:25) and it extends to the whole universe (Col 1:27). This Mystery d demands universal reconciliation in a world divided by nature, prejudices and sins (Eph 2:14-16; see 151: differences).
	158	The Apostles' ministry is to proclaim and extend this reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20-21; Rom 15:16) already announced by Jesus (Lk 4:19); the very religion of the New Testament consists in achieving this reconciliation (Rom 15:16).
	159	In this mission Jesus appears as the unique Mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15, 12:24) since he is the one who intercedes for them (Heb 2:17-18; 4:15-16) and obtains for them the blessings of the New covenant (Acts 13:34; Heb 9:11, 10:20).
16. Salvation through faith	160	We become part of the new creation as God's gift (Mt 11:27; Jn 6:43; Eph 2:8). This decisive step (Col 1: 12-13), our salvation is not the reward for our merit and good deeds (Rom 4; Phil 3:4-6), but it comes through faith (Rom 3:21; Phil 3:9).
	161	According to John, believing consists in recognizing the One sent by God (Jn 5:38; 6:29). It means recognizing the fact that God loves us first and forgives us (1 Jn 4:10; Jn 2:16). It means accepting God that we may be transformed and made holy (Jn 12:42-45); and recognizing that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn 2:22-29, 5:1); namely, the Only Son who came from God and would return to God (Jn 6:62).
	162	According to Peter and Paul, to believe is to accept the love of God who delivered his Son for the sake of sinners (Rom 5:24-25; Gal 3:1). It means to acknowledge that God has raised the Son from the dead (Rom 4:23, 10:9) and made him Lord (Acts 2:36, 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11). It means to accept that all the promises of God were fulfilled in him (2 Cor 1:20).
	163	Faith that saves is supported by the witness of the Scriptures (Acts 17:3, 18:28; Rom 16:26; 2 Pt 1:19) but it also means discovering a word which God speaks to us today (Heb 1:1 and com. on Mk 11:29). The contemporaries of Jesus had to recognize him as the One sent through the signs that he worked (Jn 6:26, 10:32, 15:24). Later, faith was supported by the testimony and the signs given by the Apostles (Mk 16:17; Acts 8:7; 1 Thes 1:5). Faith is never limited to accepting beliefs, but it sees God's plan (Mt 11:16-24; Lk 7:30) through present events (Lk 12:56, 19:44) and the prophetic voices of the church (Eph 3:5; 1 Thes 5:19).
	164	Faith integrates us to the people of God (Eph 2:19-22) through baptism (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Col 2:11-13).
	165	Faith brings us to a state of holiness which the Bible calls justice, or righteousness, or justification (see com. on Rom 1:16; Rom 4-8; 1 Jn 2:1-6). It makes us pleasing to God, reconciled with him (Rom 5:1-2) and a reflection of God's image (Rom 8:28; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). Faith introduces us to the Kingdom of his Son (Col 1:13) where we receive the first gift of the Spirit (Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 1:22). See 153-154.
17. The church of God	170	Jesus lays the groundwork for his church: see 120-124.
	171	The church did not originate from human will, but from God's eternal plan. The Mystery is concretized in the church, (Eph 3:5) that is, the saving plan of God who brings all people together under Christ, the only head (Eph 1:5-12.22). That is why the church is called holy because its destiny depends more upon God's plans than upon the initiatives of men.
	172	Christ, in taking the steps leading to its foundations, does not act upon his own initiative alone. He lets himself be guided by the Father (Jn 1:35-51; Mt 16:18; Lk 6:12; Acts 1:7; Jn 17:6, 17:9-12). The churches of Christ (Phlm 16). The church is subject to Christ who loves her and gives himself for her (Eph 5:24-25; Jn 17:19). The church of God which Jesus bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28). The church is his bride (Jn 3:29; Eph 5:27; Mt 22:2; Cor 11:1; Rv 21:2) and his body (Col 1:24; 1 Cor 12:12) and he is the head.
	173	The church is born on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) as an effect of the pouring out of the promised Holy Spirit (150).

	<p>174 The apostles' proclamation of the faith in the risen Jesus accompanies the pouring out of the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27; Acts 1:7-8) to establish the church (Acts 2:14-39; 1 Thes 1:5). The church is made up of all those who hear the call to conversion and who believe that they will receive forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38) and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:39) through faith in the saving power of Jesus and in baptism (See 181).</p> <p>175 The church is founded on Peter and the apostles (Mt 16:18, 10:1). The faith of the church is the same as that of the apostles (1 Cor 15:11; 2 Pt 1:16-21). Those who accept the witness of the apostles and of their successors belong to the church (Jn 17:20, 20:21) and are accepted by them (1 Cor 14:38; 2 Cor 10:6, 13:10). We are in communion with God by being in communion with them (1 Jn 1:3). Christ is with them (Mt 28:20) so that their decisions may not be opposed to the divine plan (Mt 16:19, 18:18; Lk 10:16) despite the fact that they will fail in many ways (Gal 2:11; Acts 15:37, 21:20). The church will always be what the apostles made it (Lk 22:30; Rv 21:14).</p> <p>176 The church is communion (Acts 2:4; Heb 13:16). The communion existing between the baptized and the Divine Persons (2 Cor 13:13; 1 Cor 1:9, 10:16) brings about communion among themselves (1 Jn 1:7) both in the spiritual (Acts 2:42; Phil 1:5, 2:1) and the material sense (Rom 15:27; Gal 6:6).</p> <p>177 The church is the presence of divine Truth in our world (1 Tim 3:15). It is the manifestation of God's love (1 Cor 1:26; 2 Cor 4:7) and, despite the weakness of its members, it is a sign of God's saving presence (2 Cor 4) and God gives it strength (Rv 2:8, 3:8).</p>
<p>18. The sacraments of the church</p>	<p>180 The church is a communion of believers where God manifests himself (see com. on Mt 16:18). This is why we say that the church is a sacrament of God (see com. on Mt 18:1). Various rites of the church, called sacraments, come from Christ and his apostles; they express and make the saving action of God present.</p> <p>181 Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5), with the Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11); with water along with the word (Eph 5:26) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19) in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38, 8:16). Baptism for the dead (1 Cor 15:29). Baptism and baptisms (Heb 6:2 and com. on Lk 3:7).</p> <p>182 He who believes is baptized (Mk 16:16) to receive the forgiveness of his sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16). Baptism means death to a sinful past (Rom 6:3-9) and entrance into a risen life (Rom 6:4; Col 2:11-12). It is an interior purification (1 Pt 1:22) through Christ's blood (1 Pt 1:2). It is a new birth from above (Jn 3:8), a birth in the Spirit (Jn 3:6; Col 2:12). The only baptism in the one faith reunites us in a single body (1 Cor 12:13). Baptism introduces us into life "in Christ," into Christian life (Phil 4:1 ff.). See 200.</p> <p>183 The imposition of the hands to confirm baptism and to confer the gifts of the Spirit (Acts 8:14, 19:6) a rite which cannot be performed by just any minister (Acts 8:14-17). See also Heb 6:2.</p> <p>184 The power to forgive sins: see com. on Jas 5:16. The baptized person must fear weakening of faith and loss of hope with them: there is neither desire nor possibility to have sins forgiven again (Lk 13:7-9; Heb 6:4-8, 12:15). This is the kind of sin which leads to death (1 Jn 5:16). The church may exclude the sinner if he does not mend his ways (Mt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:11-13), and may ask God to give him a warning through physical punishment (1 Cor 4:4-5; Rv 2:22).</p> <p>185 The anointing of the sick: practised by the missionaries of Jesus (Lk 10:1) and entrusted to the elders of the church (Jas 5:14).</p> <p>186 The imposition of the hands to consecrate the ministers of the church (1 Tim 4:14, 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6).</p> <p>187 Matrimony of Christians has its own demands (1 Cor 7:10-12 and com. on 1 Cor 11:2 and 1 Pt 3:1): it is a sacrament because it is an image and an active realization of Christ's union with the church (Eph 5:22-23).</p> <p>188 The Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20) or the breaking of the bread (Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Cor 10:16). See the commentaries on the promise of the Eucharist (Jn 6:22-58), and its institution (Mk 14:12; 1 Cor 11:23).</p> <p>189 Some passages of the Old Testament prefigure and clarify the meaning of the sacraments, especially: Baptism (Gen 6-7; Ex 14:15; Jos 3; 2 Kgs</p>

		5; Is 12:1, 55:1; Zec 13:1; Ez 47:1); the Eucharist (Ex 12:16; 1 Kgs 19:5; Gen 14:14; Mal 1:11); Matrimony (Gen 1:26, 2:18; Tb 8:4-7, Song).
19. The Spirit in the church. Charisms and Ministries	190	The Holy Spirit (see 143 and 144) who proceeds from the Father (Jn 14:16, 15:26, 16:15) and is sent by the Son (Jn 14:16, 15:26, 16:7). The Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:11, 7:40; 1 Jn 4:2) and Spirit of Jesus (Acts 8:39, 13:16; 2 Cor 3:7; Gal 4:6; Rv 3:1).
	191	Already before Christ there was mention of the Spirit of Yahweh , a supernatural power given to liberators (Jgs 6:34, 11:29, 14:6), to prophets (Nm 11:25; Ez 37), to artists (Ex 31:3) and to wise men (Wis 1). An active power in creation (Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30 and com. on Jn 7:37).
	192	As a result of Jesus' glorification, the Spirit is given to believers (Jn 7:39. See 153 and Heb 9:17, 19:2; Rom 5:5; Gal 3:2; Eph 1:3; 1 Jn 3:24). Upon entrance into the church, the Spirit is received in the rite of the imposition of the hands (Acts 8:15; 19:6) which normally accompanies baptism (Acts 2:38; Ti 3:5; Jn 3:5). God can, however, make exceptions; he is not bound to the sacraments (Acts 10:45).
	193	The spirit is given to everyone according to the degree of Christ's gift (Rom 12:3; Eph 4:7; Heb 2:4) and he manifests his presence in different gifts (1 Cor 12:3, 12:7-11; Gal 3:5; Phil 1:19). These gifts of the Spirit make us members of one same body diversified (Rom 12:5-8) and organized (Eph 4:16).
	194	The spiritual gifts (often called charisms which means gifts: 1 Cor 1:7, 7:7, 12:31; 1 Pt 4:10) are for the good of the community (1 Cor 14:1-6, 14:19, 14:32). For this reason, they can also be called services (or ministries) and works (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:5). Even though we know that the gifts and ministries are valid inasmuch as they encourage real love and communion (1 Cor 12:31; Eph 4:3), the most important of them are the apostolic ministries of the founders and those responsible for the churches (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11).
	195	Regarding ruling ministries, see com. on Acts 14:21. Some more are called apostles , not only the Twelve (1 Cor 1:1; 9:1-6). The prophets (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 2:20, 3:5, 4:20; Rv 11:10, 16:6, 18:20). Apollos was most probably a prophet and so were Timothy and Titus (see com. on Acts 11:19, 13:1, 15:32; 1 Thes 5:19; Heb 7:1; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). The bishops (or inspectors) had an active part in the councils of presbyters (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1; Ti 1:7). The presbyters (or elders): Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2-23, 21:18; 1 Tim 5:19; Ti 1:5; Jas 5:14; 1 Pt 5:1. The deacons : Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1 and com. on Acts 6.
	196	The spiritual gifts, however varied they may be, come from Christ, the only head, and they must be aimed at the unity of the growing body: Jn 17:21; Eph 2:18-22, 4:3, 4:12-13.
20. The Spirit and Christian Spirituality	200	Christian life was formerly called the way (Acts 9:2, 19:9, 16:17, 18:25; 2 Pt 2:2) and it was not based on special commands (Acts 15:18) to such an extent that Paul relates the demands of sexual morality to faith in Christ and not to any particular law (1 Cor 6:1; 1 Thes 4:2). 2 Christians of Jewish background spoke at times as if Jesus had confirmed the Law of the Old Testament (Jas 1:25, 2:12, 4:11), but usually they understood that the new Law proclaimed by Jesus (com. on Mt 5:17) replaced the Law of the Old Testament (Mt 5:22, 5:28 ...). The only command of love (Mt 22:39) replaces the many precepts of the Law of Moses (Mt 22:40; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14).
	201	But we are also told that Christ freed us from all human law (and not only from the Judaic Law): Rom 7:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 2:15. We should understand, then, that in speaking of the Law of Christ, another meaning is given to the word law (Rom 2:27, 8:2). We do not place too much value on man's effort to fulfill the law (Mk 10:21, 10:27; Gal 2:16, 3:5) but we must invite him to allow himself to be guided by the Spirit (Lk 10:33; Rom 8:14; Gal 5:16) who, alone, can transform the heart (Ez 36:25; Rom 2:29) and make the fulfilment of the Law possible (Rom 8:4).
	202	Entrance into the church (see 192) makes us new creatures (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 4:24). Recreated in the Son (Eph 2:10); sons of the Father (Rom 8:15; Jn 1:13), the Spirit is already given to us in this life (Rom 12:11; Gal 4:6) as a foretaste of what definitive and holy life will be in heaven (Rom 8:11, 23; Eph 1:14). From now on we are in communion with the Three divine Persons (Jn 14:17; 1 Jn 1:3, 3:21-24, 4:15).

	203	Christian life presupposes the constant cooperation of man with God who acts in him through the Spirit. We have died to sin (Rom 6:11) and we must die to the works of the "flesh" (Rom 8:13). We have been renewed and we must walk along new paths (Rom 7:6). We have been made just and holy (Rom 6:2; 1 Cor 6:11) and we must walk as saints (Rom 6:13-19; Gal 5:25). We were liberated (Rom 6:14, 8:2) but we still have to liberate ourselves (1 Cor 7:15-23). God's love has been given to us (Rom 5:5; Jn 17:26) and we must persevere and grow in this love (Jn 15:9; 1 Cor 16:14; Phil 1:9; 1 Thes 3:12).
	204	The Christian's new life is energized through participation in the Eucharist (Jn 6:48-58), through good works (Jas 2:14-28; 1 Jn 3:18; 2 Thes 1:11; Ti 2:14, 3:8; Heb 10:24; 2 Pt 1:10) and through prayer (see 230). It is a source of happiness (Jn 16:24; Acts 13:52; Rom 14:17; 2 Cor 7:4; Gal 5:22; 1 Thes 1:6; 1 Pt 1:8), of freedom (Jn 8:32,36; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 5:1; 2 Tim 1:7; 1 Pt 2:16) of peace (2 Cor 13:4; Gal 5:22; Eph 6:23), and of thanksgiving (Rom 14:6; Eph 5:20; Col 3:17, 1 Thes 5:18). With perseverance (Lk 8:15, 21:19; Rom 2:7, 5:3; Col 1:11; Heb 10:36; Jas 1:4) it produces a transformation of the whole being (Rom 12:2; 1 Thes 5:23) enabling one to deal with God as a son (Rom 8:15-17; 1 Jn 4:17-18) and to be a living stone of the spiritual building (Eph 2:22; 1 Pt 2:5).
	205	Christian life manifests itself, above all, in three powers which we usually call theological virtues , which is to say, that they come from God and are oriented to him: they are faith, hope and love: 1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5-6; Eph 1:15-16; Col 1:4-5; 1 Thes 1:3, 5:8.
21. Faith and Hope	210	Faith means: 1) the act of faith which, in conversion, obtains for us the holiness or justice proper to a Christian (see 165). 2) the gift of faith which achieves miracles: 1 Cor 13:2; Jas 1:5; Mk 11:20-24 and com.. 3) the first of the theological virtues (see 205 and 211) born of the first act of faith.
	211	Christian faith is submission to the word of God (Jn 12:44-46; Rom 10:14; 2 Tim 3:15, 4:3) as received from the prophets and Christ through the witness of the apostles (see 163). It accepts without adding or deleting (Dt 4:2; Rv 22:18) the entire faith (Ti 1:13, 3:10-11) preserved by the church as the Tradition of the Apostles : 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 2:8, 3:14.
	212	A Christian has the same faith attitude as Old Testament believers (Rom 4:23-25; Heb 11). Now, however, the final words have come to us (Heb 1:1-2; Jn 3:31, 4:26) through the very person who is the Word of God (Jn 1:1,18; Heb 2:2-3). See 152. In the person of Jesus, God talks to us without parables or examples (Jn 16:25-29).
	213	Faith works through love (Gal 5:6) and it manifests itself in works of love (Jas 2:14; 1 Cor 13:13). Faith must grow (2 Cor 10:15; 2 Pt 3:18) along with the knowledge of God. With love, faith is the very attitude of someone who lives in the light (Rom 13:12; Eph 5:8; Col 1:12; 1 Jn 1:7, 2:9) and is light for the world (1 Thes 5:5).
	214	Hope is born of the faith in God's promises (Eph 3:5-10; Heb 3:14, 6:11-20; 1 Pt 5:9). We hope for what we do not see (Rom 8:4; Heb 11:1) and would not have dared imagine (1 Cor 2:9; 2 Pt 1:4). We believe that God is faithful (see 40-44). We have confidence in God who can sustain us in faith and love (Phil 2:12; 1 Thes 5:23; 2 Thes 3:3; 1 Cor 1:8). Hope means perseverance and constancy in our trials (see 204, 217).
	215	Israel hoped that God would give prosperity in their Land (see 42) and a Kingdom of Justice (see 56, 62). In proclaiming the Kingdom, Jesus reminds us that our hope is somewhat collective (Mt 22; Lk 22:28-30; Mt 25:31-40), but he also emphasizes the personal dimension of salvation (Mt 10:28,32), as faith in the resurrection develops (see 92-93). We hope to share God's glory . We will be like God because we will see him (1 Jn 3:2). We will rise together (1 Cor 15:23) to see God (1 Cor 13:12) and form a single body in Christ (Eph 2:16-22). Only in God will we find happiness (Mt 25:21; Rv 21:6), and humanity, its end (1 Cor 15:28; Rv 22:1-5). Such is our inheritance (Lk 18:18; 1 Pt 1:4).
	216	The Kingdom of God is already present in the person who lives in God's grace. Thus all the events in his life, even his material needs , are related to this Kingdom of God and to his own progress in Christian life. Being a child of God, he expects daily bread from the Father (Mt 6:11) and he asks for his own needs (Phil 4:6) and for the needs of the world (Lk

		18:11), knowing that God will provide him with what is necessary so that, in his turn, he may give to others (2 Cor 9:9).
	217	Waiting for the coming of Christ is at the very center of Christian hope (Acts 1:11). Coming, called "parousia" which means, visit (Mt 24:27; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thes 3:13; 1 Jn 2:28; Rv 3:10) or manifestation (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; Ti 2:13). This coming seemed very familiar to the early Christians (1 Thes 4:13; Heb 10:25-27; 1 Pt 4:7; Jas 5:8). This waiting means a vigilant attitude (Lk 12:32-48; Mt 25:1): being awake in order not to be submerged in worldly projects and greed (Lk 21:34; see com. on Mk 13:33). It makes us constant and persevering in trials (Phil 3:10; Rom 8:17; see 184) and persecutions (Heb 12:2; 2 Thes 3:5; Lk 21:19; Mt 10:22; Rv 2:10, 3:21; 1 Pt 3:14). It brings us happiness even in suffering (1 Pt 4: 18; Mt 5:11). It makes us sober (1 Thes 5:8) and detached (1 Cor 7:29; Ti 2:12; 1 Pt 1:13).
22. Love	220	Love is power coming from God. In God, love is identified with the inner communion of the Three divine Persons (see 143). God had revealed himself to Moses as He Who Is and as Merciful (see 32, 39). However, after knowing Christ, John says: God is love (1 Jn 4:8).
	221	In the Old Testament God's love was manifested as God communicated with men. Israel , seeing how God chose, guided it (Ps 89, 105, 106, 107; Is 63:7), forgave (Ex 32:11-14) and redeemed it (Is 40, 41) understood God's jealous love for his people (Is 5, 54:6-8). The prophets , as they became aware of the ever closer relationship between themselves and God, realized God's strong love (Ez 3:8; Mi 2:8), a tender (1 Kgs 19) and demanding (Jer 15:10, 20:7) love for his friends.
	222	Love for God is the first command for Israel (Dt 6:1, 30) and it will continue to be first for Christians (Mk 12:28).
	223	When Jesus came, he tried to reveal something of the unique love that the Father has for his Son (Jn 3:35, 5:20, 17:24; see 117). Jesus, in turn, responds to the Father's love with total surrender (Mk 1:35; Mt 11:25) in perfect accord to the Father's will (Heb 10:5; Jn 4:34, 6:38). He shows this divine love springing from his heart to his friends (Jn 11, 13:1, 15: 9-17, 18:8), to the marginalized (Mk 1:40), to sinners (Lk 7:36, 19:1), to his very enemies (Lk 23:22) and to all people (Mt 11:28; Acts 10:38); that they may also understand the love the Father has for them (see 137). We love Jesus by keeping his Word (Jn 14:15-23) and by renouncing everything in order to follow him (Mk 10:17-21; Lk 14:25).
	224	In his Passion and death Jesus reaches the culmination of love. Love for the Father, obeying him up to his death on the cross (Mt 26:39, 27:46; Heb 4:15), while the Father is silent he cares for and forgives men (Lk 23:28; Jn 19:26; Lk 23:34-43). Jesus gives everything to everyone (Mk 10:45, 14:24; 2 Cor 5:14).
	225	Love for others is mentioned in many Old Testament texts (Lv 19:18; Dt 10:8). However, in many places of the Law (Ex 20:12-17) and of the prophets (Am 1-2; Is 1:14-17, 10:2, 65:13; Jer 9:2-5; Ez 18:5-9; Mi 3:5) it is said that we cannot please God without respecting others; doing them justice , freeing them from oppression (Is 58) and attending to the most humble (Ex 22:20-26, 23:4-12; Jer 9:4, 22:15; Prv 14:21; Sir 4, 25:1; Wis 2:10).
	226	Jesus closely relates the two main commands (Mk 12:28-33). The love for one's neighbour is the basis of Christian morality (see 201 and 203) to the degree that it tries to imitate the love of the Father, perfect and merciful (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36; Eph 5:1; 1 Jn 4:11) and it is a response to the love with which God first loved us (1 Jn 3:16, 4:10-19). Love is the power which the Holy Spirit communicated to us (Rom 5:5) and it is nourished by contemplating Christ's limitless love (Eph 3:18; 2 Cor 5:14).
	227	On the eve of his Passion, Jesus emphasizes brotherly love as his new command : Jn 13:12-15, 34-35, 15:9-13; 1 Jn 2:6-8.
	228	Christian love is a gift without bounds, leading us to serve one another (Gal 5:13). It goes to all without consideration of social barriers (Mk 2:13; Lk 10:29, 14:13; Gal 3:28). It is manifested in forgiveness (Mt 5:43, commentary and references; Mt 18:21) and it is not denied to enemies. It inspires us to make an effort to understand the other , to respect his ideas (Rom 12:15-18, 14:1-10), to bear his limitations (1 Cor 13). The love, which is able to give and to receive, builds up the church (1 Cor 8:1; Eph 4:16; see 196) and leads us to perfection (Phil 1:9).

23. Prayer

- 230 Throughout the Bible **prayer** is inseparable from **action**. The models of prayer are those who lead God's people. **Moses'** intercession for Israel (Ex 17:8, 32:11, 33:12; Nm 11:11, 14:13). Moses gives us a pattern for intercession: he reminds God of his **faithfulness**; his own honor forces him not to abandon Israel, but rather to forgive Israel. The prayer of David (2 Sam 7:18), Solomon (1 Kgs 8:22-60), Hezekiah (2 Kgs 19:15), Judas Maccabeus (1 Mc 5:33, 11:71; 2 Mc 8:29, 15:20), Esther (4:17), Judith (9:2). **Penitential** prayer of Ezra (9:6), Nehemiah (1:4), and Daniel (3:26, 9:4).
- 231 The **prayer of intercession** is peculiar to the prophets: their word and prayer bring about and prevent events. Thus, Abraham, called prophet because of his power of intercession: (Gen 20:7) praying for Sodom (Gen 18:22). Likewise, Elijah (1 Kgs 18:36), Amos (7:1), Jeremiah (10:23, 14:7, 37:3). The prophet feels divided between compassion for his chastised people (Jer 14:19, 8:18; Ex 9:8) and **zeal** for God betrayed (Jer 2:3; Ez 16). His prayer is a **confrontation** with God (Nm 17:6; Ez 13:5, 22:30).
- 232 Prayer is also the prophets' **ongoing dialogue** with God at the very root of their call (Ex 4:5-22, 17:4; Jer 12:1, 15:10, 20:7), coming face to face with God (Ex 33:18; 1 Kgs 19:9).
- 233 The **Psalms** are God's people's prayer book. Prayer flows from the very needs of the one who implores, not asking for heavenly things, but for the concrete help needed in this precise moment. Yet, prayer is always forgetting self in order to praise God: Ps 47, 81, 89, 95, 98, 113, 117, 135, never forgetting that his **well being** is in **God**, asking to see God and to dwell in his house (Ps 16:23, 27:7, 63:2, 65:5, 73:24).
- 234 **Jesus** prays (Mk 1:35; Mt 11:25; Lk 22:32, 23:33; Jn 11:42) especially before making important decisions (Lk 3:21, 6:12, 9:18-29, 23:46; Mk 14:36; Jn 8:29). See also Heb 5:7, 7:25. Jesus works his miracles for those who **ask him with faith** (Lk 7:1; Mk 10:46) and who **persevere** until he attends to them (Mt 7:24). He tells us that this is the way to ask from the Father (Lk 11:5-13; Mk 9:23, 11:22). But he also teaches us to ask first that the **Father's will be done** (Mt 6:10, 7:21, 12:50; Jn 4:34, 7:17). He tells us what we should ask of the Father and how to ask for it: the **Our Father** (Mt 6:9; Lk 11:1 and also Mt 6:5).
- 235 The prayer of the **early church**. In the Temple of the Jews (Lk 24:5; Acts 3:1; 5:12) with hands lifted up (1 Tim 2:8) or kneeling (Acts 9:40). Community prayer (Acts 1:14; see Mt 18:19) in difficult situations (Acts 4:24, 6:6, 12:5).
- 236 **Paul's letters** include **invitations to pray** (Eph 6:18; Col 1:3; 1 Thes 5:17; Rom 15:30; 1 Cor 7:15; 1 Tim 2:1, 5:5) and spontaneous **thanksgiving** (Rom 8:31, 11:33, 16:25; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1). For him the prayer of intercession is a **struggle** (see 231; Rom 16:30; Phil 1:30; Col 4:12 and com. on Col 2:1; see also com. on Gen 32:23). There is always a balance between supplication and thanksgiving (Phil 4:6).
- 237 Prayer in the **name of Jesus** is fitting for one who shares Jesus' mission and allows his Spirit to guide him (Jn 14:12-13, 16:23). It is the perfect prayer of one who has achieved self-renunciation; it is not guided by human greed (Jas 4:3) but **inspired by the Spirit** of adopted sons (Rom 8:15, 26). This prayer is addressed to the Father (Gal 4:6), making us desire with our whole being what the Father wants and what hastens his Kingdom. We ask for specific things (Mt 7:11), but in another sense it is the Holy Spirit whom we wait for (Lk 11:13). This prayer which is always heard brings joy (Jn 16:24).
- 238 Other texts: 1 Pt 3:7, 4:7; Jas 1:6, 5:16; Rv 5:8.

24. Mission and evangelization

- 240 The word **mission** means **being sent** (com. on Mt 10:1). Jesus is the One sent by the Father to bring the Good News to Israel (Jn 3:17, 4:34, 6:38, 9:4, 10:36, 17:18; Mt 15:24), to the **poor** and the afflicted (Is 61:1; com. on Mt 5:1; Lk 7:22). On leaving this earth Jesus sends forth the apostles (Jn 20:21; Mt 28:19; Acts 1:8) and authorizes them with **signs** of the Holy Spirit (Mk 16:17; com. on Lk 10:1). **Apostle** means **one sent** (Lk 6:13). After the Twelve, the church will keep on sending apostles and missionaries (com. on Lk 5:1). One must be sent by the church, just as the Twelve were sent by Christ (Mk 3:13; Acts 26:16, 13:2, 19:14).
- 241 The missionary task is the common work of the apostles and of the **Holy Spirit** (Jn 14:26; Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4) who will give witness together with

		<p>them (Jn 15:26). The Spirit encourages the apostle (1 Pt 1:12), the apostle's words later bring the Spirit upon his hearers. Whoever receives the apostles receives the Father and the Son (Lk 10:16).</p> <p>242 The missionaries announce the Gospel (that is the Good News). In the words of Jesus, the Good News means the coming of the Kingdom of God (see 110-116) and it is accompanied by the many cures that Jesus works (com. on Mt 9:35; Lk 7:22). In the words of the apostles, the Good News means the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel (Acts 13:32). It is the gift of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38, 3:26, 10:43, 13:38). The Good News is all about the coming of Jesus (Mk 1:1) which brings us peace (Acts 10:36; Eph 2:14). For Paul the Gospel is God's plan of salvation for all men (Rom 15:9; Eph 3:6) which centers on the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:1). It is a power that is conquering the world (Rom 1:16; Col 1:6).</p> <p>243 Preaching the Gospel, when it is welcomed, brings repentance (Acts 2:37-38, 3:19, 17:30, 26:20) and conversion (Mt 4:17; Mk 12 and 182). Man sees the sinful situation in which he was in a lost world (Acts 2:40; 3:26) and believes in the forgiveness God offers him through Christ (Acts 5:31 and 160-164). This conversion of the heart and of the innermost being is different from only giving up one's vices (see com. on Lk 3:7 and 7:24). It is the work of God (Ez 36; 1 Kgs 18:37; Rom 2:4). On the other hand, when preaching is rejected, people and societies are ruined (Mt 11:20, 12:41; Mk 16:16).</p> <p>244 To evangelize is not only to announce the Gospel, but to make it Good News, which frees a person in concrete circumstances of his life (com. on Mt 28:16). The Gospel means a healing of the whole human person. Liberation from religious prejudices (Col 2:16-22; Gal 4:8-11) and from social barriers (Gal 2:11). It brings about a renewal of the whole culture and a radical criticism of the social order (1 Cor 7:17-24). It leads to maturity in judgment and in relationships with others (Eph 4:14, 22-32).</p> <p>245 Those who announce the Gospel become witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8; Jn 15:27); the faithful witness after Jesus (Rv 1:5, 3:14) who comes to the world to give testimony of what he has heard from the Father (Jn 1:18, 3:11) and of who he is (Jn 8:13; 1 Tim 6:13), the apostles, in their turn, give witness to him (Jn 15:17, 20:21). Through their testimony it is God who gives testimony (1 Jn 5:9).</p> <p>246 Martyr, in Greek, means witness. Someone who has suffered and given his life to remain faithful to his testimony is called a martyr (Rv 2:13, 6:9, 11:3, 17:6; Mk 13:9 and com. on Mt 10:16). Due to the devil's hatred for the church, there will be many martyrs (Rv 17:6). They are the true victors of the world (Rv 12:11).</p>
25. The future of the world, judgment and the Resurrection	250	<p>The Kingdom of God develops in the world – the work of God – as yeast (Mt 13:33) capable of transforming and saving it (Jn 3:16). Yet, this world is in the power of the Evil one (see com on Jn 3:11; and Jn 5:19) due to the fall of man which alienated his freedom (Jn 8:34; Rom 8:18). In his death, Jesus somehow deprived the Evil one of his power (Mt 12:29; Jn 12:31). Yet, if we judge according to appearances, he (the Evil one) continues to have a lot of influence (Mt 16:18) and moves a powerful current opposed to truth and justice (Jn 3:19) and he hates, above all, the witnesses of Christ (Jn 15:18; Mt 10:16; Rv 12:17) and to his church (Rv 12:13). This hostile current is at times called "the world" (Jn 16:33). At times "world" refers to those who do not know their vocation as sons of God (Jn 14:19, 16:20, 17:23; 1 Cor 5:10). See also 1 Jn 2:15.</p> <p>251 Believers are in the world without being of the world (Jn 17:15). The church is at the service of the world to bring it to its true goal (Mk 16:15; Col 1:20). It is not at the service of the world's designs (Jas 4:4) nor of human ideals of happiness, justice and peace, which are always limited (Lk 12:13, 51), and which forget the real situation of sinful man (Mt 4:1) and do not understand salvation through the cross (Mt 16:23; Lk 24:26; 1 Cor 1:20).</p> <p>252 Yet, if we pay attention to the Old Testament, we discover a divine pedagogy. In order for man to understand his divine vocation, he needs to taste the goods of the earth and to struggle for human ideals (see com. on Gen 13:7; Ex 3:16; Introduction to 1 Kgs; com. on Mt 5:1), limited ideals which God will gradually help him to purify, bringing man to understand the mystery of the cross (see com. on Lk 24:13).</p>

- 253 For his own growth as well as for the good of the world, the believer **involves himself in the tasks of the world** (Mt 25:14; 2 Thes 3:10; 1 Tim 4:3; Ti 3:8; com. on Mk 3:33) and in so doing he **cooperates with God the Creator** who continues to act and to create (com. on Gen 1:28; Jn 5:7).
The church can hope for a time of peace and the spread of the Gospel (Rv 20:1). Its influence will be manifest (com. on Mt 13:31) and all kinds of human institutions will be under its protection (Mt 13:32). Yet, there will be **persecutions** (see 251) besides **scandals** within the church (Mt 13:47). Against the church, the devil will favour false religions (Rv 13:11) and totalitarian regimes (Rv 13:2) and at times, will give the impression that he has won (Rv 11:7, 13:14-17).
- 254 After many a crisis, the time of the final confrontation will come (see 12 124) and the time of the **Antichrist** (2 Thes 2:3-9; 1 Jn 1:18) as the prelude of the coming of Christ (Mk 13:26) and of the Resurrection (1 Thes 5:15; 1 Cor 15).
- 255 **What is our destiny** after death? Man lives only once (1 Heb 9:27, 6:4-8; Lk 16:27) and his eternity is determined in this one life. Some books of the Old Testament already spoke about life beyond death: **83** and **90-93**.
- 256 Our destiny is to be resurrected when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead. How shall we be after the resurrection? What kind of body and existence shall we have? See Lk 20: 27; 1 Cor 15 especially.
This existence above all will be sharing in the Glory of God, seeing him, loving him, being transformed into his likeness and made one spirit with him: 1 Cor 6:17, 13:13; 1 Jn 3:2.
However this existence is always pictured as a communitarian and happy life: Mt 22, 25:1-30; Lk 22:30.
- 257 Will those who die not live at all until the last day of Resurrection? This was a difficult question before Jesus came when the Jews had just come to believe in the resurrection of the dead: Dn 12:1-5 and 12:13. But the teaching of the New Testament is clear: Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; 1 Pet 4:6; Rev 14:3.
- 258 Scripture speaks in a figurative way of those who have definitely rejected God's love. We are used to speak of: hell, something as final as heaven will be for the elect: Mt 13:42; Mk 8:42; Lk 16:23; Rev 21:5.
- 259 No one can approach God without having been purified of all sin and impurity. What happens to all the believers who die in the grace of God but are also filled with imperfections and human desires? It has been a constant teaching of the church that purification takes place during death or after death: 2 Mac 13:43; 1 Cor 3:15.
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INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS

Genesis means: *The beginnings*. In this book we are told about the ancestors of the people of Israel: chapters 12-50. We are also given a first vision of God's saving plan for the world: chapters 1-11.

Chapters 12-50

With chapter 12 begin the memories of the *Patriarchs*, that is to say, Israel's ancestors. At the beginning of this Sacred History, which would transform the world, there was a family of believers: Abraham and his sons. They were nomads, that is, people who did not own land, but who lived in tents. They were accompanied by their sheep and donkeys and were always looking for wells and pastures for their flocks. It was these nomads, despised by city and rural people, who received the promise of a Land and the Blessing for all the nations of the world.

Chapters 1-11

The first chapters of Genesis were written to teach us the meaning of history, and of the world in which we live. Why creation? What is man? Why death? These chapters do not deal with history in the modern sense of the word since they do not give a description of historical facts. Rather there are comparisons and stories which contain an always valid religious truth. People like Adam, Eve, Noah... stand for past and present people.

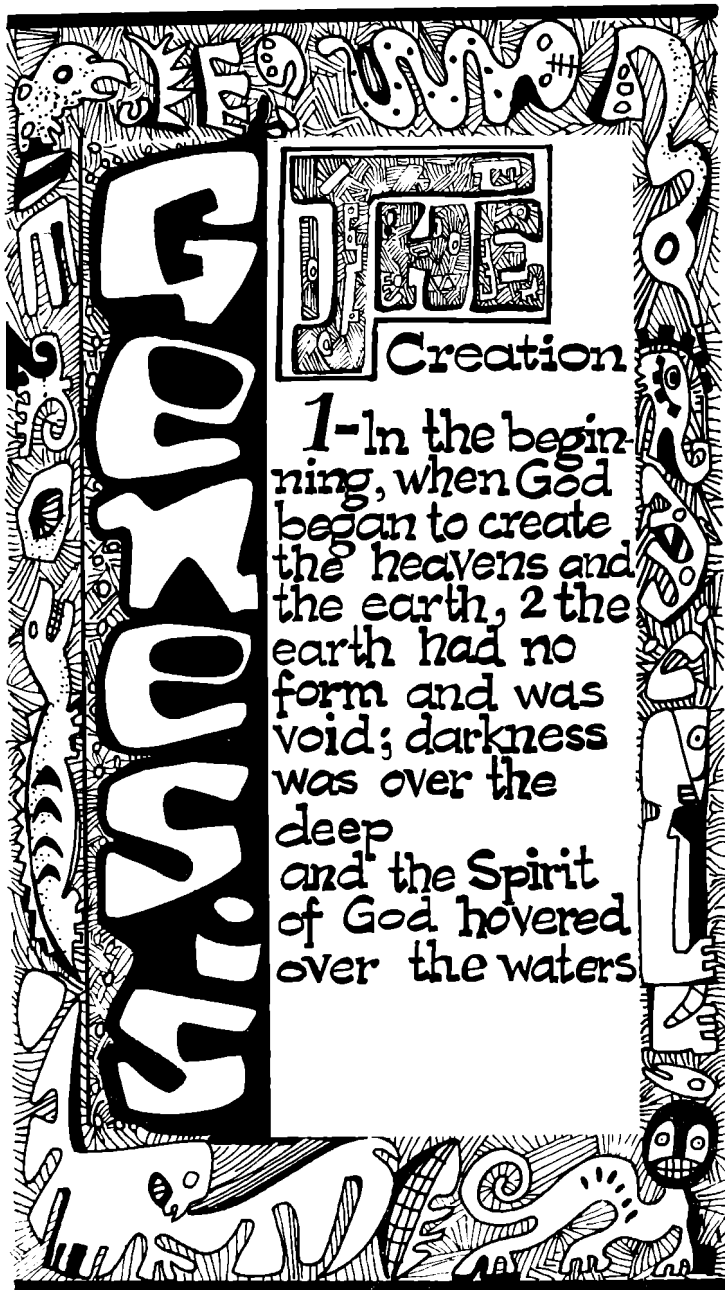
Who wrote Genesis?

There was not just a single author but several. At the time of King Solomon (10th century before Christ), an unknown writer, usually called Yahwist, wrote a first history of God's people which began with the story of Paradise. He may be the same man who wrote most of the history of David in the books of Samuel.

To write about Abraham, he had at his disposal many memories and legends which Israelites had passed on orally from generation to generation. For the first part of Genesis, not dealing strictly with history, he made use of the literature of the Babylonians who, for centuries, had poems referring to the first couple, paradise lost, the flood... The author used part of those but he also deeply transformed them, so that these stories, as comparisons, would express God's plans for his creation.

In the 9th century before Christ, another author, usually called Elohist, wrote from various memories of the patriarchs and of Moses, at times repeating what the Yahwist had related in a somewhat different way. Then, these two stories were combined mixing at times phrases from both authors when treating the same topic.

Much later, when the Jews returned from the Exile in Babylon (5th century before Christ), their priests added many paragraphs which we indicate here by italics. The priests were the authors of the poem about creation in seven days, which begins Genesis and the entire Bible.



1-In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth had no form and was void; darkness was over the deep and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters



+ 1 *¹In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth, ²the earth had no form and was void; darkness was over the deep and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.*

³God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light 'Day' and the darkness 'Night'. There was evening and there was morning: the first day.

⁶God said, "Let there be a firm ceiling between the waters and let it separate waters from waters." ⁷So God made the ceiling and separated the waters below it from the waters above it. And so it was. ⁸God called the firm ceiling 'Sky'. There was eve-

ning and there was morning: the second day.

⁹God said, "Let the waters below the sky be gathered together in one place and let dry land appear." And so it was. ¹⁰God called the dry land 'Earth', and the waters gathered together he called 'Seas'. God saw that it was good.

¹¹God said, "Let the earth produce vegetation seed-bearing plants, fruit-trees bearing fruit with seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And so it was. ¹²The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kind and trees producing fruit which has seed, according to their kind. God saw that it was good. ¹³There was evening and there was morning: the third day.

4. Is 45, 7; 60, 19; 2 Cor. 4, 6

6. Ps 8; Ps 104; Jer 10, 11; Pro 8, 22; Job 38; Rev 22, 5

9. Job 26, 8; Is 51, 10

+ This very famous poem contains fundamental teachings, but it is neither God's first word about his creation, nor his last.

It is not the first word, since it was written relatively late, after the time of the kings and the prophets.

It is not the last word, since in order to understand the profound meaning of creation, people had to know Christ, the perfect image of God, through whom the world was made. The mystery of God as Creator is fully revealed to us in Jn 1 and Eph 1.

SOME CLEAR ANSWERS ABOUT FUNDAMENTAL FAITH QUESTIONS

In the beginning. In the beginning there is God, not the world, or matter or nature, but Someone who decides to create everything (Is 43:10).

God said: let there be light: thus we must understand that all of God's creation is light. Nothing is created evil. Everything has its origin in God's Word, that is to say, in his decision. Everything is created as God wants it. And God saw that it was good. If something in the world seems evil to us, this might be because we are unable to understand it. If it is really evil it is because someone other than God intervened, man or the devil (Wis 1:14; 11:20; Sir 13:1; Jas 1:17).

First day, second day, third day. The poem lists all the categories of creatures existing in the world, and everything comes in its time: the most perfect creatures, with a fuller degree of life come after the lower creatures. God's work is

ordered and infinite. Man, who will be the king of creation, appears last.

He created him in his image. In the midst of crawling animals whose faces are turned towards the earth, man walks erect and looks at the sky. Man alone studies, knows and loves. Man alone is conscious: see the magnificent commentary of Sir 17:1-13. But when the Bible says that God created man, of whom does it speak? Not of man alone, nor of woman alone, but of the couple. The image of God is not the individual a prisoner of his loneliness and pride, but the meeting of two people united in communion, who are thus, carriers of life. In a similar way God is Three Persons in the same being.

The Bible insists that God made man *in his image and likeness*: that is someone with whom he could strike up a friendship and have a dialogue. And the Bible will tell us how God commits himself to men.

Being the image of God, man is God's servant whom he has put in charge of ruling the world: *Let them rule* (Sir 17:4).

Increase in number and fill the earth. God created man so that his life would be fruitful. The first books of the Bible emphasize that God's great blessing consists in having numerous children. Later biblical writers saw that what was important was not the number of children but that they be good children (Wis 4:11). The Bible never mentions multiplying in an irresponsible way. If God dedicated six days to preparing the earth to welcome humans, no parents should bring children into the world without having thought about how they will be welcomed.



¹⁴God said, "Let there be lights in the ceiling of the sky to separate day from night and to serve as signs for the seasons, days and years;¹⁵ and let these lights in the sky shine above the earth." And so it was.¹⁶ God therefore made two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the smaller light to govern the night; and God made the stars as well.¹⁷ God placed them in the ceiling of the sky to give light on the earth¹⁸ and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good.¹⁹ There was morning and evening: the fourth day.

²⁰God said, "Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth under the ceiling of the sky."²¹ God created the great monsters of the sea

and all living animals, those that teem in the waters, according to their kind, and every winged bird, according to its kind. God saw that it was good.

²²God blessed them saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the waters of the sea, and let the birds increase on the earth."²³ There was evening and morning: the fifth day.

²⁴God said, "Let the earth produce living animals according to their kind: cattle, creatures that move along the ground, wild animals according to their kind." So it was.

²⁵God created the wild animals according to their kind, and everything that creeps along the ground according to its kind. God saw that it was good.

²⁶God said, "Let us make man in

14. Jer 31, 35; Ba 3, 33; Is 40, 26	17. Ps 136, 7; Sir 43, 1	21. Is 27, 1; Ps 74, 13; Job 40; Jon 2
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educated and thus be able to discover within their own family the love of the Father.

The seventh day God rested. This does not mean that God was tired, nor does it mean that since then God looks at his creation from a distance. We must understand that all of God's creation and human work must flow into the eternal day when we will rest with God, sharing his happiness in heaven. See also the commentary on Ex 20:8.

DO NOT TAKE EVERYTHING LITERALLY

Some people believe that God dictated these pages and that the sacred author only took them down without changing a single letter of what God said. But this is not the way the Bible was written. God obviously assisted the author so that the poem would come out as God wished it and would be a lesson for people of all times. But this does not change the fact that the author wrote for his contemporaries and used images and expressions peculiar to their culture. When we read the Bible now we have to enter into that culture and understand those expressions to some extent, if we wish to really grasp the message of the author.

First day, second day. Should we think that God created the world in six days, similar to ours, including the first three days when the sun did not yet exist?

What, in fact, the author intends to present is a drama about creation during which the curtain falls several times and the actors change. God is depicted creating the universe which will be his Temple and he builds it solemnly, step-by-step,

as in an orderly ritual. Everything and every living being is given a function.

The author spread the ritual over six days, so that the seventh day would coincide with the sabbath, which the Jews observed as a day of rest dedicated to God. God rested on the sabbath and was praised by his creation: such is the goal of the universe and humankind. The Israelites called that day sabbath or day of rest and they looked upon its observance as a pillar of their religion.

Let there be a ceiling between the waters (v. 6). In those days people did not know that the earth was a planet revolving around the sun. They thought the earth was flat, like a disk and planted on columns. They envisioned these columns as planted in lower waters which surrounded the earth and formed the oceans (see Job 38:4-10). Above was a great blue dome, heaven, or firmament on which the stars and the sun were fixed. Above this firmament were, as they believed, the higher waters from which the rain came.

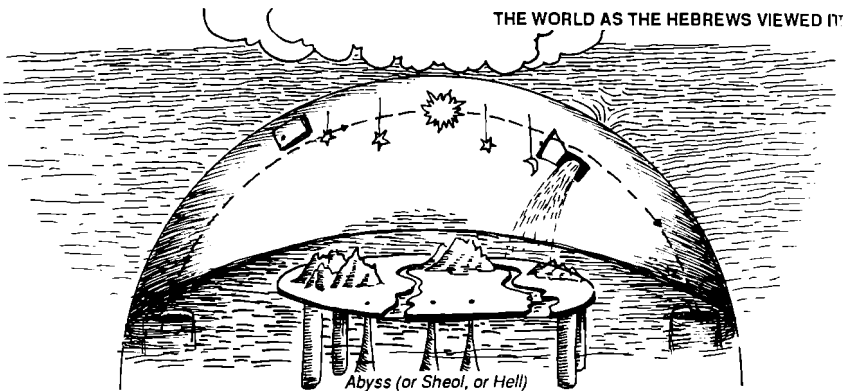
Indeed, for them, this heaven was the abode of another world where God lived with his angels. In the Bible, heaven and earth refer to all that exists: both the world of visible things, and another better world, a spiritual one which cannot be seen.

God saw that it was good. The author does not deny the existence of evil in the world. For the Israelites, the sea and darkness were symbols of evil forces in the world. However, these forces were ordered and contained: the sea had its limits and night was overcome by light every day.

God said: Obviously God, who is spirit, does not have a mouth, nor does he speak in sounds.

The Highest Heavens

THE WORLD AS THE HEBREWS VIEWED IT



The ancient people viewed the earth as a round table whose pillars descended into the ocean. In the uppermost part were the Heavens among the Heavens, or the Highest Heavens, the dwelling place of God. The sun, the moon and the stars hung from a canopy called *ceiling*. The rain flowed from *waters from above*, on the ceiling or firmament. The place of the dead, or *hell*, was under the earth, and was connected to our world through thousands of openings which were the sepulchres of the dead.

This expression *God said* reminds us that the Creator gave us his word and his law.

I give you all kinds of plants and fruit trees. With these words the author expresses the ideal of a non-violent world in which not even animals would be killed. God does not wish the death of his creatures, but later, a concession will be made (Gen 9:3) because God takes into consideration the true condition of sinful men.

CREATION AND MODERN MAN

Many people see a contradiction between what the Bible says and what science discovers. In fact, modern science speaks more and more about the beginning of the universe (see *The Age of Creation*, p. 7) but it does not know how to explain it. And so, we can relax.

We have already explained the meaning of six *days*: it does not contradict the theory that the universe was formed over millions of centuries. And if someone wonders why the story does not follow a scientific description of creation, let us say that the Bible is God's word to inform our faith and is not meant to replace scientific investigation.

More frequently another objection is raised: in presenting God as the creator of the world and man as a creature, religion makes us used to a life of submission and resignation. The truth is different: when the Bible states that God creates everything and is before all things, it exalts man who comes from God and is no longer a product of chance.

The Bible liberates the human spirit. Ancient people believed that man's fate depended upon the gods' whims and they lived with resignation, under the weight of a destiny from which no one

could escape. Their efforts to control their environment were paralyzed by the fear of offending these gods who controlled the forces of nature. The pagan legend of Prometheus is well known: he was punished for having discovered, "stolen" fire which belonged to the gods, and for giving it to men, his brothers.

The Bible, on the other hand, presents a man not afraid of the hidden power of the stars (they are "lamps" at God's service), nor of any curse in his destiny when he looks for the secrets of the universe. Was not the first man who walked on the moon a Christian?

The biblical account declares that man comes from God, not just the first man, but every person born in this world: we are not the chance product of some purely physical laws. God has arranged the events and the encounters through which our personality has been formed; he has acted through all the people who have awakened our spirit.

Man appears the sixth day: from that moment on, God gives in – in a way – to his favorite creature man. God continues his creation through the hands, the brain and the heart of man. Man works and also creates. Schools are built, books printed and social structures planned through which every person is called to develop his initiative and responsibility.

A PROPHETIC MESSAGE

When Genesis says in the *beginning* it refers to creation, or to all that appears outside of God himself. The Gospel (Jn 1:1) uses the words in the *beginning* to express what God is in himself.

This first page of the Old Testament is a prelude to the later and final revelation in the

our image, to our likeness. Let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the wild animals, and over all creeping things that crawl along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over every living creature that moves on the ground.

²⁹ God said, "I have given you every seed-bearing plant which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree that bears fruit with seed. It will be for your food. ³⁰ To every wild animal, to

every bird of the sky, to everything that creeps along the ground, to everything that has the breath of life, I give every green plant for food." So it was.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

2 ¹ That was the way the sky and earth were created and all their vast array. ² By the seventh day the work God had done was completed, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had done. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he rested from all the work he had done in his creation. ⁴ These are the successive steps in the creation of the heavens and the earth.

26. Sir 17, 4	27. Mt 19, 5; 1 Cor 11, 7; James 3, 9; Eph 4, 24; Col 3, 10	28. Gen 8, 17, 9; 1; Ps 8, 5
29. Ps 104, 14	31. Ecl 3, 11; 1 Tim 4, 4	2. Ex 20, 11; Heb 4, 4

Gospel. John says in the beginning and he tells us about the inner life of God, not subject to time, for God lives in that permanent fullness which we call eternity. There, there is neither before, nor after, neither duration, nor tiredness nor boredom.

In the beginning the Son of God is born of God, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. But we know that this beginning still continues and does not pass away; when the Son and the Spirit return to the unity of the Father-God to enjoy the highest beatitude together, time will not have passed.

In the beginning God projected himself in his Son who is his Image and Reflection (Col 1:15 and Heb 1:3); also in the beginning the riches that the Father saw in his Son were distributed in the world.

Genesis says in the beginning and that means when creatures, space and time began, since before that there was nothing outside of God; there was not even a "before" since time does not exist.

In the beginning God said it all, or rather, he totally revealed himself in his Only Son, and this only Word radiated from eternal Love. Similarly, the creative word mentioned in Genesis proceeded from God's love. Then the Spirit became present in the world, pervading all creatures (Wis 7:23) to get them started and to encourage them also to come back to divine union.

When we relate this first chapter of Genesis to the first page of John's Gospel and to the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians, two ways of considering them open up for us. The first is to study human history which deserves to be

called a sacred history in which God reveals his eternal plan to love us, to bring the human race to maturity and to reunite it to Christ, his Son made man. The other way is to interiorize the inner mystery of God, from whom the universe emerged, the mystery of his dazzling wealth, incomprehensible wisdom and irresistible love.

The spirit of God hovered over the waters ... to give creatures the creativity which allows them to cooperate with God. Mothers, especially, are aware that God co-creates with them in the secret of the body and soul. And it is through the Spirit that the creative works of artists, poets and of God's people spring forth.

He made man in his image and likeness. This refers to the person who lives in God's grace (Eph 2:15; 4:24). Yet our sins erase God's image in the individual as well as in society we are building, a society dominated by greed and violence. That is why the Son comes to his own (Jn 1:11) in order to restore this likeness.

In his image and likeness. This is one of the major declarations in the Bible. We would never seek a personal relationship with God if we were to see only his immensity or all that makes him different from us. How could the Infinite Being be concerned with the ants that we are in this vast universe? But the Bible speaks of likeness.

This means that we are not incapable of receiving the full Truth. God can give us his Word and we can understand something of it. Man is not hopelessly locked in the world of his own fantasies and illusions, he is also made for the Truth: he cannot always doubt.

It is also good to remember that we are like God in so far as we love him (1 Jn 3:1-6; 7-8) and



The second account of creation

o On the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens,⁴ there was not yet on the earth any shrub of the fields, nor had any plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not made it rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the earth,⁶ but a mist went up from the earth and watered the surface of the earth.

⁷ Then Yahweh God formed Man, dust drawn from the clay, and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and Man became alive with

breath.⁸ God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he placed Man whom he had created.⁹ Yahweh God made grow out of the ground every kind of tree that is pleasing to see and good to eat, also the tree of Life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

¹⁰ A river flowed from Eden to water the garden and from there it divided to form four mainstreams.¹¹ The name of the first river is Pishon. It is the one that flows around all the country of Havilah where there is gold,

4. Jer 10, 11 7. Ec 3, 20; 12, 7; Ps 104, 29; Job 34, 14; 1 Cor 15, 45 8. Esk 47, 12; Pro 3, 18; Rev 2, 7; 22, 2

our growth in love brings us closer to the moment when we will be able to see God and live in union with him by sharing his own life.

Let him rule. Despite his frailty, the human being has been chosen by God to be the link between him and the universe. From the first moment of creation God planned that his Son would become man (Eph 1:14); God refers to Christ in the words of Psalm 8: *What is man that you should remember him? You crowned him with glory.* (See 1 Cor 15:24.)

God rested on the seventh day and made it holy. Creation does not end with the appearance of the "working man" but with the Rest that God has prepared for him (Heb 3:13). Jesus inaugurated this rest by rising the day after the sabbath; that is why the apostles chose Sunday for the weekly gathering of Christians, leaving the sabbath for the Jews who had not believed in Christ.

o Following the solemn song about the creation of the universe which fills the first chapter of Genesis, the Bible offers us a much older story: Man and Woman in the garden of Eden.

This story can be compared with Jesus' parables, especially the parables about the father waiting for the prodigal son's return, and about the king inviting people to share his banquet. Yahweh, the Holy God, is pictured as the owner of a marvellous garden (*Eden* means *delights*) where he likes to take a walk after the heat of the day (3:8). We do not have to imagine a huge stage: all we have here are two trees, Man and his companion. *Animals* only pass by to be subject to Man (that is the meaning of his naming them in 2:20), and the *serpent-demon* does not need much space since it takes shelter in the heart of Man. But, no matter how small the Eden of the human couple is, what takes place there will, in the end, determine the lot of the entire earth. Thus, at the beginning, the small fountain of Eden is seen as feeding the great rivers of the world, especially the *Euphrates* and the *Gihon*

which are thousands of kilometers apart.

Should we speak of *Adam* or of *Man*? In Hebrew *Adam* means any human being. When the word is used as a proper name without the article (as for example in 5:1; 5:3), we say *Adam*. Here, however, the Bible says "the" *Adam*, that is *Man*. In this regard, let us recall the words of Origen, the great biblicist who, living in the 3rd century, wrote: "As to Adam and his sin, only those who know that in Hebrew *Adam* means *man*, will really understand the profound meaning of this story. In those passages presented as the story of Adam, Moses gives his teaching about human nature." Thus, *Adam* stands for the whole human race: you are *Adam* too.

This ingenuous and simple story is full of profound words and divine teachings. Notice how Yahweh, the good craftsman and artist that he is, works the clay with his own hands, looking at the one who is still unable to know him and preparing him to receive from his own "blowing" both breath and life. About *breath of life*, or the *soul* of man, see paragraph 83 in the index: *Biblical Teaching*.

Man lives, but through the grace of God whose breath constantly awakens him so that he will not fall asleep or fall back to where he came from – and then, of all the animals, he becomes the most intelligent, the most cruel and the most unsettled. *Breath* and *spirit* are words very close in meaning: the Spirit of God sustains man. Should the Spirit abandon man, within a few minutes, or generations, man would return to dust: Man, that is, you and me: as well as families, and societies. Therefore, philosophers note that after the 19th century with its great proclamations about the death of God, the 20th century is the century of the death of man, with its confusion and despair, with its wars and worldwide hunger.

Man will have to give back to God all that he received from him, in particular, his spirit. This



¹² and the gold of that country is good; bidellium and onyx stone are there.

¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon. It is the one that flows around all the land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris. It is the one that flows to the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ Yahweh God took Man and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and take care of it. ¹⁶ Then Yahweh God gave an order to Man saying, "You may eat of every tree in the

garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you will not eat, for on the day you will eat of it, you will die."

¹⁸ Yahweh God said, "It is not good for Man to be alone; I will give him a helper who will be like him." ¹⁹ Then Yahweh God formed from the earth all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air and brought them to Man to see what he would call them; and whatever Man called every living creature, that was its name.

17. Wis 1, 12; Rom 6, 23

means the death as well as the divinization of Man: see Jesus' example in Mt 27:50. In creating us, God did not think of death; rather he made us like him so that one day when we see God face to face, he can recognize himself in us and love himself through us, when we achieve *being one spirit in him* (1 Cor 6:17).

Man is placed in the garden to develop it: humankind will build itself up while working in the world, and it will toil for many centuries to become mature and to know what it is and what it can do. Yahweh takes a break and Man remains between two trees. On one hand is the *tree of Life* which Man may taste while in the garden. As long as he experiences life he knows he is in the truth. But, there is also the *tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, namely, self-knowledge and knowledge of the world includes the taking over of all the products of science, technology, economy and sex in order to enjoy what seems good for him so he can be free and happy.

It is not good for man to be alone (2:18). God who does not know solitude, creates separate sexes in order to bring couples together in love, mutual surrender and shared enjoyment, and not because it is the only means he can choose to transmit life.

There was not a helper like him... (2:20). The parade of animals prepares us to discover the unique value of Woman. She will be man's companion, not his servant, and God takes her from the *rib*. Had he taken her from the upper part of the body or the lower part, one of the two would feel inferior to the other. Despite this teaching from God, the people of Israel were always male-centered. On this topic see Mal 2:15; Lk 8:1; 1 Cor 7:4; 7:10; Eph 5:31.

Adam fell asleep (2:21) so that God could achieve in him the second part of his work. To exist as an individual is one thing; but to live as a couple demands a kind of rebirth for both.

And the two are one flesh: a Hebrew expression to mean they form a single being.

They were naked without shame: that is, they were at peace with nature and with their own body. They did not experience rebellion from their instincts nor did they feel awkward before God.

THE BIBLE AND EVOLUTION

How do we reconcile this creation of man from the mud of the earth with what science says about the evolution of living beings and about the animal origin of the human race?

We have already given an answer in the commentary on the previous chapter in the section *Creation and Modern Man*. But now let us ask: Who wrote that page of the Bible about the first couple? One of the wise men around King Solomon. That was the time when the Israelites had just become a nation. The writers of Israel's first sacred books in composing were influenced by their own times and environment.

Let us be specific: they wrote the first books of the people of Israel. Fifteen or twenty centuries before, the great neighbouring nations of Egypt and Babylon already had their literature: legends, religious poems and proverbs. The wise men of Israel did not begin from zero, but took advantage of ancient literature which related how the gods had created the world, how they had become jealous of the happiness of humans, and brought a deluge over them, and how a clever snake had stolen the plant of immortality from men. Solomon's wise men used these stories as models, but they transformed the legends in order to speak of God and men correctly. If we ask now, as science does: how was the human race formed? How does it relate to other forms of animal life? The Word of God says nothing about that. God lets us investigate with our intelligence and this is what scientists do.

One final observation. What is amazing for us is that everyone receives from God the spirit which makes a person in the image of God. It is not so important that we owe our body to human parents while the first humans inherited theirs



²⁰ So Man gave names to all the cattle, the birds of the air and to every beast of the field. But he did not find among them a helper like himself.

²¹ Then Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to come over Man and he fell asleep. He took one of his ribs and filled its place with flesh. ²² The rib which Yahweh God had taken from Man he formed into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ The man then said, "Now this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken from man." ²⁴ That is why man leaves his father and mother and is

attached to his wife, and with her becomes one flesh. ²⁵ Both the man and his wife were naked and were not ashamed.

The fall

3 ¹ Now the serpent was the most crafty of all the wild creatures that Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You must not eat from any tree in the garden?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the

21. 15, 12 22. 1 Cor 11, 9; 1 Tim 2, 13
1. Wis 2, 24; Jn 8, 44; Rev 12, 9; 20, 2; Rom 5, 12

24. Mal 2, 15; Mt 19, 5; 1 Cor 6, 16; Eph 5, 31

from animal ancestors. God is the one who gave the impulse and orientation to the whole evolution of living beings so that Man would appear in the end, Man who in fact, is first in God's plan.

A PROPHETIC MESSAGE

We will never fully understand these paragraphs. At any rate, we cannot understand them well without having grasped that, "prophetically" they prepare for the revelation of Christ.

If Adam represents the whole human race, one in its origin and also in its destiny, then Christ is the authentic Adam. At creation God has his heart set on Christ since he planned that his own Son would come into the world and become a creature of flesh and blood in order to bring back to the Father not only the human race but the whole of creation.

"In Christ" God blessed this race in which each one appears with unique features, yet inseparable from the whole. He is concerned about saving our entire history; he teaches us from the beginning of our animal origins, brings our cultures to maturity and gathers us together in Christ. No doubt our first ancestor according to the flesh deserves at least a fond memory; but the one who communicates the Spirit to us and raises us before God is quite other (1 Cor 15:45-49).

This page also deals with the human couple, the authentic image of God in this world. God who in the Three Persons, Father, Son and Spirit forms one same Being in a single communion. This was "the law at the beginning" (Mt 19:8).

For most people, marriage is the providential way, the sacrament enabling them to prepare for the final encounter with God. Years of shared life, their efforts to listen to and understand each other and to make decisions together, their capacity to forgive and persevere in

total faithfulness: these are the means which transform weak, irresponsible human creatures and make them grow.

God's creation of the couple also hints at the mystery of Christ and his coming to people as the groom (Mk 2:19). From the side of Adam asleep, Eve was born; from the side of Christ, dead on the cross, blood and water flowed (Jn 19:34) which means the birth of a church cleansed through the water of baptism and the blood of Christ (Eph 5:26, 31).

■ The simple friendship of man with God was lost through disobedience. Man freely became the enemy of God to whom he owed everything. From that moment on, man's life on earth would be one of struggle and suffering but he was promised victory over evil.

The story distinguishes three moments: temptation, sin and judgement. First we meet the Tempter, personified in the *serpent*: he is the enemy of God ready to poison his work.

Adam's sin is one of rebellion against God: man eats despite God's telling him: *you shall not eat*. Let us keep in mind that the Hebrews used the word *eat* to express the effort of a person who memorizes and repeats the sayings of wise men. *One eats the fruits of wisdom* (Prv 9:5; Sir 24:26). Man's sin consists in wanting to have a wisdom which does not come from God. And by wisdom we must understand also: money, success, happiness, long life as in 1 Kgs 3:11.

Some claim that the first sin was a sexual sin. The Bible says nothing to support that idea: on the contrary, it understands the sin of Adam, or of the human race, as a perversion of the mind: man wants to decide his own destiny. But in separating himself from God, he cuts off his own roots and destroys himself.

The sinner is always deceived. Two details express the irony of the devil's lie:



garden God said: You must not eat, and you must not touch it or you will die.⁴ The serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, ⁵but God knows that the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil."

⁶The woman saw that the fruit was good to eat, and pleasant to the eyes, and ideal for gaining knowledge. She took its fruit and ate it and gave some to her husband who was with her. He ate it. ⁷Then their eyes were opened and both of them knew they were naked. So they sewed leaves of a fig tree together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, and they, the man and his

wife, hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.

⁹God called the man saying to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰He said, "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid." ¹¹God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree I ordered you not to eat?" ¹²The man answered, "The woman you put with me gave me fruit from the tree and I ate it." ¹³God said to the woman, "What have you done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

The judgement of God

+ ¹⁴God said to the serpent, "Since you have done that, be cursed among

10. Rev 3, 18; 16, 15

13. 2 Cor 11, 3

14. Mi 7, 17

– *Your eyes will be opened:* man expects to conquer Truth: he awakens not to find himself transformed into God but aware of his nakedness.

– *You will know good and evil,* that is, they alone will decide what suits them. In fact, they only achieve the bitter experience of sin.

They knew they were naked. Sinful man is not at ease with himself. The loincloth or whatever other adornment he may use to gain dignity is not enough to reconcile him with himself. He is unable to bear God's looking at him.

They hid from God. Fear of God is the consequence of sin. Sinful man invents a false image of God and sees him as jealous of man's freedom.

The forces of evil will preserve this erroneous image of God as a vengeful God, envious of man's happiness. There are even many "religious" people who really do not have much faith in Jesus' Father, and who fear this false God. When Scripture teaches us the *fear of God*, it refers to respect and obedience).

We have already mentioned that Adam represents the whole human race. Adam's sin of wanting to decide his own destiny, is also the sin of our present civilization. In the last centuries, Western civilization has been moved by faith in man's ability to solve all his problems: there has been an incredible development in science and technology and an industrial take-off. All of this, of bad in itself, has been perverted at the root by the illusion that man is self-sufficient.

Our present century has seen the failure of its *humanism without God*. Man no longer

knows who he is, nor what is the meaning of his life. He has only succeeded in building an oppressive world. This failure reminds us that God created us to be his children and from the moment we renounce our vocation, we become Adam going to his death.

Other biblical texts dealing with these themes:

The ancient serpent: Wis 2:24; Jn 8:44; 2 Cor 11:3; Rv 12:19.

The false concept of an envious God: Mi 6:7; Job 10:13; Mt 25:24.

Rebellion against God: Is 14:14; Ez 28:2; Dan 11:36; Lk 15:11; 2 Thes 2:4.

Temptation: Mt 4:6-25; Sir 15:11; Rom 7:8; 1 Cor 10:13; Jas 1:13.

ADAM AND THE PRODIGAL SON

There are lots of places in the Bible which deal with how God looks on sinners. Perhaps the most important one is the parable of the *Prodigal Son*: Lk 15:11. This parable not only shows the misfortunes and forgiveness of a *sinner*, but portrays Man as the prodigal son. But, while in Genesis Adam is a rebellious servant whom God expels, in this parable man is the son and in the end he recovers his inheritance.

Adam does not know how he stands with God: is he creature, servant or friend? He does not know what abyss separates him from God and so, he thinks about becoming God's rival. But Jesus teaches us how to be sons who imitate the Father (Jn 5:19). Jesus is the Son and he makes us sons: that is how he frees us.

+ God's judgement indicates the new situation resulting from sin.

all the cattle and wild beasts! You will crawl on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will make you enemies, you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman, God said, "I will increase your suffering in childbearing, and you will give birth to your children in pain. You will be dependent on your husband and he will lord it over you."

¹⁷ To the man, God said, "Because you have listened to your wife, and

have eaten from the tree of which I forbade you to eat, cursed be the soil because of you! In suffering you will provide food for yourself from it, all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorn and thistle for you and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ With sweat on your face you will eat your bread, until you return to clay, since it was from clay that you were taken, for you are dust and to dust you shall return."

²⁰ The man called his wife by the name of Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. ²¹ Yahweh

15. Rev 12, 7

16. 35, 16; Jn 16, 21; Rev 12, 1; Eph 5, 22

17. Jer 12, 4; Hos 4, 3; Rom 8, 20

18. Is 11, 6

19. Ecl 2, 22; Job 7; Ps 90, 3; 104, 29; Job 3

20. Rom 5, 12

Man is expelled from Eden. Thus, the present life of man, who suffers and dies away from God, does not correspond to the divine plan. But God cursed the serpent, not man. The primitive plan has not failed: man will reach his end and share God's happiness, but that will only be achieved through Christ's redemption.

The punishment comes from nature which rebels against man. Man is the creature who, having everything to make him happy, ruins his most valuable undertakings. Contradictions and suffering accompany what is most precious in people's lives:

- giving birth and educating children:
- the relationship between husband and wife, with the stronger one dominating the other. From this comes the exploitation of women who have been "the largest exploited working class in the world" from the beginning.
- work becomes a cause of unhappiness. For some, work brings wealth but not an authentic self-realization. For others, work makes them part of the laboring class.

Let him not stretch out his hand ... God deprives man of the possibility of living forever and man falls back into the category of living beings who must be born, grow and die. This physical death is a blessing for sinners. How horrible it would be for men to live many years and become gradually more enslaved by their sins and limitations, more attached to materialism and more devoid of generosity and hope.

What would human existence be without sin? We would certainly have to leave this world, but death would be a happy and free surrender of our lives to God as happened with Mary and the saints. As it is, a sinner's death is a mystery of fear and insecurity and it appears to be punishment.

We must not forget, however, that Adam's weakness and death are part of God's saving plan. Our lives would be meaningless if it were

not that within us there is an ongoing springing forth from our nature, which is that of Adam: animal and mortal - toward the holiness and incorruptibility of the other Adam, Christ.

Yet, Yahweh clothing Adam and Eve reminds us that in his mercy God stays with men and looks after them in the misfortunes which they bring upon themselves.

DO NOT TAKE EVERYTHING LITERALLY

We have already mentioned that the author of these pages took some characters from ancient tales, as for example, the serpent. He also preserved some strange expressions, like the following: *the man has become like one of us ...* in which it would seem that God is afraid of man's competition. The author did not feel it was necessary to clarify these ambiguous expressions which came directly from the pagan legend. The same goes for the *cherubim* and the *flaming sword* which referred to certain figures posted at the entrance to cities to keep the evil spirits away. Here, these figures show that humankind is under the wrath of God (Ept 2:3): that is to say that human beings cannot find happiness, nor can they encounter God until they humbly accept Jesus Christ, the one who freed us and who is the way to life.

ORIGINAL SIN

If we have been taught that because of Adam's fault we are all condemned to live far from God and to die, we might have doubts. So God who tells us not to punish anyone for the sins of his parents (Dt 24, 16) contradicts himself! If this passage has been presented to us as historical, that is to say as the history of the first man's sin, we might be confused by what science now affirms about man's origins. How could we attribute a sin of such serious consequences to primitive man barely beyond the animal stage?

But we have said that Adam stands for



God made garments of skin for the man and his wife, and with these he clothed them.

²² Then Yahweh God said, "The man has now become like one of us, making himself judge of good and evil. Let him not stretch out his hand to take and eat from the tree of Life as well, and live forever."²³ So God cast him from the garden of Eden to till the soil from which he had been made.²⁴ And after having driven the man

out, God posted cherubim and a flaming sword that kept turning at the east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of Life.

Cain and Abel

4 ¹Adam had intercourse with Eve his wife; she became pregnant and gave birth to a child. She named him Cain, for she said, "*I have got a man with help from Yahweh.*"² She later gave birth to Abel, his

23. Rev 22. 1

4. Ex 34. 19

Humankind. When we speak of original sin we mean:

- 1) that our sins are not the sins of isolated individuals: the sins of our ancestors and of our culture have conditioned and limited our freedom from the beginning.
- 2) that, profoundly marked by the demands of our body and feelings, which are aroused before the awakening of our reason, we usually affirm ourselves by being negative and rebellious towards the Law of God.
- 3) that human freedom involves a mystery which reason finds disturbing.

In the beginning we experience God as one who has power and authority over us; so our worship conceals rebellious feelings. This God (the God Adam deals with) is not the true loving and merciful Father.

Thus, between the time of the awakening of our reason and the time God manifests himself to us as a person, we necessarily go wrong, either in wanting to be independent, in rebelling against a God who sets laws for human behaviour or in remaining timid and resigned because we are afraid of using our freedom.

CHRIST AND THE SIN OF THE WORLD

To achieve true faith and surrender to the Father, we need to be prepared by God who comes to us personally, through His only Son, Christ. It is never we who love God first (1 Jn 4:10).

This is the mystery that Paul tries to explain in chapters 1 through 8 of his letter to the Romans. There he speaks powerfully of the sin of Adam, not to explain the universality of sin through the first man's fault, but to emphasize salvation through Christ: Jesus is the only authentic head of the human race and the only one who can bring it together. In speaking about Adam, Paul somehow wants to personify all of sinful humanity before its Saviour came.

Jesus "makes up for Adam's sin." This means that he does not come only to erase a collection of individual sins, but that his cross and Resurrection initiate a current of grace in the world and

solidarity in goodness which bring humankind to the maturity it had to reach.

We say that baptism "erases original sin": this means that the filial relationship with God, begun at baptism, is the renunciation of and the solution to the false independence which imprisoned man in sin and death.

THE WOMAN - THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

In speaking of the woman's offspring, the author was thinking of people who struggle against evil and are constantly wounded, but victorious in the end.

But, later biblical writers referred it more and more to a conqueror, the Son of Man, the protagonist of the decisive battle.

The Woman is humankind, giving birth to the Saviour, to its Saviour and made fruitful through the grace of God (Is 45:8). Revelation 12 will also speak of the Woman. This figure refers to Mary as well as to the Church since both Mary and the Church have entered into the divine marriage: Jesus was born of Mary. In its turn, the Church is the mother of all those who are born of water and of the Spirit, and who become members of the Body of Christ, which gradually extends to all people.

In art Mary is represented as crushing the head of the serpent to express that God preserved her from the evil affecting our race. Even more: In her case, God did not want the lapse of time when human freedom is blind to take place between the first instant of her conception and the first manifestation of God the Father. So, from the beginning he prepared her with the fullness of his grace so that her entire life would be established and develop in a perfect filial spirit. This privilege of Mary is what we call her *Immaculate Conception*.

Mary is the perfect creature, inseparable from the Son of the Woman, Jesus Christ. God placed her amidst a multitude of sinners whom she was to help. *A Woman* (Jn 2:4; 19:26) is the model of all those who would be saved. Mary is the new Eve and the Mother of the disciples of Jesus (Jn 19:26).



brother. Abel was a shepherd and kept flocks, and Cain tilled the soil.

³It happened after a time that Cain brought fruits of the soil as an offering to Yahweh. ⁴Abel for his part brought the firstborn of his flock, and some fat as well. Now Yahweh was well pleased with Abel and his offering, ⁵but towards Cain and his offering he showed no pleasure. This made Cain very angry and downcast.

⁶Then Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry and downcast? ⁷If you do right, why do you not look up? But if you are not doing what is right, sin is lurking at the door. It is striving to get you, but you must control it."

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go to the fields." Once there, Cain turned on his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹Yahweh said to Cain, "Where is your brother, Abel?" He answered, "I don't know; am I my brother's keeper?"

¹⁰Yahweh asked, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹Now be cursed and driven from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood that your hand has shed. ¹²When you till the soil, it

will no longer yield you its produce. You will be a fugitive wandering on the earth."

¹³Cain said to Yahweh, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴See today you drive me from this land. I must hide from you and be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, and it will so happen that whoever meets me will kill me." ¹⁵Yahweh said to him, "Well then, whoever kills Cain, will suffer vengeance seven times." And Yahweh put a mark on Cain to prevent anyone who met him from killing him.

¹⁶Cain then went from Yahweh's presence and settled in the land off Nod, to the east of Eden.

The descendants of Cain and Seth

+ ¹⁷ Cain had intercourse with his wife: she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. As he was building a town, he called it by the name of his son, Enoch. ¹⁸A son, Irad, was born to Enoch. Irad became father of Mehujael, and Mehujael of Methuael, and Methuael of Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech had two wives, Adah and Zillah. ²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabel: he was father to those who live in tents and keep flocks. ²¹His brother was Jubal: he was father to all those who play the lyre and flute. ²²As for Zillah, she gave birth to Tubal-Cain, forger of

5. Heb 11, 4

8. Wis 10, 3; 1 Jn 3, 12

10. Mt 25, 35; Heb 12, 24

15. Ekk 9, 4; Rev 7, 3; 9, 4

◆ The story of Cain, like the story of earthly Paradise, is not historical; it is a religious story which teaches us the depth of the human condition, by way of comparison. It shows violence as a decisive factor in our history, with its roots deep in the human heart (4:7) and its first victims those who, like Abel, are pleasing to God (4:5). Abel's spilled blood cries out to God (4:10) who does justice in his way, not as we would with vengeance and violence (4:15).

Originally Cain's story had nothing to do with the story of Adam and Eve and their descendants. The biblical author who took the story and placed it here, related it to the previous one by, fictitiously, making Cain become Adam's son. (There is, therefore, no room for stupid questions about whom Cain and Abel married: the Bible does not intend to relate the beginnings of the human race.)

This was like the national history of the tribe

of the *Cainites* (or *Kenites*: Jgs 1:16; 4:17) who became part of Israel. As often related in ancient legends, Cain, the founder of the tribe, had killed his brother, who could become his rival, since that was the only way to establish political authority. Later, a society with different functions saw the light (4:19-22); then Lamech became the spokesman of national pride (4:23); the people would learn how to get even with aggressors.

In borrowing this legend the biblical author gave it another meaning and inserted a dialogue between God and Cain as judgement on violence: "You pretended to act justly: wrong! You have committed a crime." It is like us saying: "You who pretend to serve the sacred interests of the nation, how long will you eliminate and expel those who do not agree with you?"

In the Bible, Abel is the first and the model of innocent victims who are murdered. This and



all tools in bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.

²³ Lamech said to his wives:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, listen to what I say, for I killed a man for wounding me and a boy for striking me.

²⁴ If Cain will be avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."

²⁵ Adam again had intercourse with his wife and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth; for she said, "Yahweh has given me another child in place of Abel since Cain killed him." ²⁶ To Seth also a son was born and he called him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of Yahweh.

The descendants of Adam

5 ¹ This is the account of Adam's descendants. When God created Adam he made him in the likeness of God; ² male and female he created them; he blessed them and called them Man on the day they were created.

³ Adam was a hundred and thirty years old when he became father of a son born in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. ⁴ After the birth of Seth, Adam lived for eight hundred years and had other sons and daughters. ⁵ Altogether Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years; then he died.

⁶ When Seth was a hundred and five, he became father of Enosh. ⁷ After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years. He had other sons and daughters. ⁸ Altogether Seth lived nine hundred and twelve years; then he died.

⁹ When Enosh was ninety years old, he became the father of Kenan. ¹⁰ After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹¹ Altogether Enosh lived nine hundred and five years; then he died.

¹² When Kenan was seventy years old, he

became father of Mahalalel. ¹³ After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived eight hundred and forty years, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴ Altogether Kenan lived nine hundred and ten years; then he died.

¹⁵ When Mahalalel was sixty-five, he became the father of Jared. ¹⁶ After that, Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷ All the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; then he died. ¹⁸ When Jared was a hundred and sixty-two, he became father of Enoch. ¹⁹ After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁰ Altogether Jared lived nine hundred and sixty-two years; then he died.

²¹ When Enoch was sixty-five, he became father of Methuselah. ²² After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²³ In all Enoch lived three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ After Enoch had walked with God, he disappeared because God took him up.

²⁵ When Methuselah was a hundred and eighty-seven, he became father of Lamech. ²⁶ After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁷ In all Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years; then he died.

²⁸ Lamech was a hundred and eighty-two when he became father of a son ²⁹ and named him Noah, for he said, "He will console us in the hard toil and suffering of our hands, because of the soil that was cursed by Yahweh." ³⁰ After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years and he had other sons and daughters. ³¹ In all Lamech lived seven hundred and seventy-seven years; then he died.

³² When Noah was five hundred years old, he became the father of Sem, Ham and Japheth.

23. Ex 21, 23

24. Mt 18, 22

26. Ex 3, 14

24. Heb 11, 5; 2 K 2, 11; Sir 44, 16

29. 3, 17; Ps 29, 1; Job 1, 6

other passages suggest that they are eliminated because they are just people (Mt 23:35; Heb 11:4; Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:12).

+ The sacred authors inserted between the origins of the world and the start of their own history (the call to Abraham) what they knew about the past of men. They knew it in their own way through traditions and legends.

♦ Methuselah lived nine hundred sixty-nine years! The believing Israelites who wrote this text thought that their earliest ancestors were better than themselves. They also thought that

since they had been better, they must have been rewarded with very long lives. Some numbers are symbolic: for example 777 and 365. These lists of ancestors gave the people of the period some idea of time and history, but they are still legends. We must not take all of this literally.

In this legendary list of the ancestors of humankind appears the name of Enoch the just one, whom God took up to heaven just as he did with Elijah (2 Kgs 2).

♦ In 6:1 we find a popular belief of the Israelites. The sons of God refer to the angels. Here we find an affirmation in the Bible that, at the be-

Sons of God and daughters of men

◆ **6** ¹ When men began to increase on the earth and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that men's daughters were very beautiful, so they married those they chose. ³ Yahweh then said, "My spirit will not remain in man forever, for he is flesh. His span of life will be one hundred and twenty years." ⁴ At that time there were giants on the earth, and afterwards as well, when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. These were the heroes of old, men of renown.

The flood

■ ⁵ Yahweh saw how great was the wickedness of man on the earth and that evil was always the only thought of his heart. ⁶ Yahweh regretted having created man on the earth and his heart grieved. ⁷ He said, "I will destroy man whom I created and blot him out from the face of the earth, as well as the beasts, creeping creatures and birds, for I am sorry I made them." ⁸ But Noah was pleasing to God.

⁹ This is the story of Noah. Noah was a just man, blameless among the people of his time, a man who walked with God. ¹⁰ Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ¹¹ The earth became corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw the earth and saw it corrupt, for corrupt, indeed, was the way of all mortals.

¹³ Yahweh said to Noah, "I have in mind to destroy all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. This is why I will destroy them and with them the earth. ¹⁴ As for you, build an ark of cypress wood. You will make rooms in the ark and coat it with pitch inside and outside. ¹⁵ This is the way you will do it: the length of the ark, four hundred and

fifty feet; the width, seventy-five feet; the height, forty-five feet. ¹⁶ You will put a roof on the ark and finish it within eighteen inches from the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and have lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷ I am about to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life. Everything on earth will perish, ¹⁸ but I will establish my covenant with you. You shall come into the ark, you, your wife, your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ You shall bring into the ark two of every kind of living thing, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ Of the birds, the animals and all creeping things on the ground, according to their kind, two of every sort shall come in to be kept alive with you.

²¹ Take with you every sort of food that is eaten. Make a store of it and it will be food for you and them."

²² And Noah did all as God had commanded him.

7 ¹ Yahweh said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I see that you are just in this generation. ² Of all the clean animals, you are to take with you seven of each kind, male and female, and a pair of unclean animals, a male and a female. ³ In the same way for the birds of the air, take seven and seven, male and female, to keep their kind alive over all the earth, ⁴ for in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights. I will blot out from the face of the earth all the living creatures I have created."

⁵ Noah did all as Yahweh had commanded. ⁶ Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters covered the earth.

4. Dt 2, 10; Sir 16, 7; Ba 3, 26

5. Ps 14, 2; Jer 5, 1; Mt 24, 37; 1 P 3, 20

7. 1 Sam 15, 35; Ex 32, 12; Jer 18, 8; Jon 4, 2

8. Sir 44, 17; Heb 11, 7

9. 2P 2, 5; 1P 3, 20

17. Ps 29, 10; 93, 2

1. Wis 10, 4; 2P 2, 5

2. Lev 11

ginning of the world, the angels were tested and many of them fell. At a later time this legend about the giants would no longer be mentioned, but instead that of the fallen angels would be confirmed (Mt 25:41; Rv 12:4; 12:7).

We must remember that, while we believe that humanity improves and progresses, ancient people thought that their ancestors were stronger and better formed than themselves. When they spoke of the pride of man who

intends to compete with God, they thought that it had been their ancestors' sin, but to us this arrogance seems more characteristic of future generations, who are conceived over technological development. The lesson, however, is clear: a superman – even if he believes himself to be the master of heaven – does not know the ways of God.

■ God is not prone to ecstasy or sadness as we are, but he is not indifferent to human wick-

⁷So Noah went into the ark with his children, his wife and his sons' wives to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸Clean animals and also unclean, birds, and all that crawls on the earth went into the ark with Noah; ⁹they went two and two, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. ¹⁰And after seven days the waters of the flood were over the earth.

¹¹*In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month and on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep burst forth ¹²and there was a downpour on the earth lasting forty days and forty nights.*

¹³*On that same day Noah went into the ark, as well as Shem, Ham and Japheth, his sons, and his wife and his daughters-in-law. ¹⁴All the animals according to their kind also entered into the ark, all the cattle, all the creeping things that crawl on the earth and all the birds according to their kind; all that flies and everything with wings. ¹⁵They came to Noah in the ark, two by two, all creatures that had the breath of life in them. ¹⁶And they that went in were male and female just as God had commanded.*

Then Yahweh closed the door on Noah. ¹⁷The flood lasted for forty days on the earth. The waters rose and lifted the ark and raised it above the earth.

¹⁸*The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth and the ark floated on the surface of the waters.*

¹⁹*The water rose more and more above the earth and all the high mountains under the heavens were submerged. ²⁰The waters had risen and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. ²¹Every living thing that*

moved on the earth died: birds, cattle, animals, everything that swarmed on the earth - and all humankind.

²²All on the face of the earth that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. ²³Every living being on the face of the earth, men and animals, and creatures that crawl and the birds of the air were wiped off the earth. Only Noah was left and those that were with him in the ark.

8 ¹*The waters flooded the earth for one hundred and fifty days. ¹Then God remembered Noah and all the animals and cattle that were with him in the ark. God made a wind blow over the earth and the waters subsided.*

²Then the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens were closed and the downpour from the heavens held back.

³*The waters receded from the earth and after one hundred and fifty days the waters had abated. ⁴In the seventh month, in the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested on Mount Ararat. ⁵The waters continued to recede until the tenth month. On the first day of the tenth month the mountain tops could be seen.*

⁶At the end of the forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had built ⁷and let the raven out. This went off and kept flying to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth.

⁸Then Noah let out the dove to see if the waters were receding from the earth. ⁹But the dove could not find a place to set its foot and flew back to

21. Mt 24, 37

23. Ekk 14, 14

edness. God does what is necessary to assure the future of his creation even when he must use radical means. Indeed, at times, it would seem that the only solution is to bring the actual world to the end.

According to Noah's story, this is God's intention with the Flood, except that God does not destroy everything. He saves Noah, the just one, so that a holy race may spring from him. Throughout sacred history God will bring the worst disasters on his unfaithful people, but he will always preserve a Remnant (Is 4:2-6; 6:13).

This is how God chooses Noah from all the sons of Adam; later he will choose Abraham from among Noah's descendants; then David from Abraham's sons and, finally, one of David's sons, Christ, the representative and Saviour of all men. The Bible brings out this contrast: while the sin of a single man, Adam, affects all people and frustrates the progress of civilization, God focuses all his attention on a single people, a single family, and a single man who will save everyone (Rom 5).

Like Noah, the believer is a person who will-

him in the ark for the waters still covered the surface of the whole earth. So Noah stretched out his hand, took hold of it and brought it back to himself in the ark. ¹⁰He waited some more days and again sent the dove out from the ark. ¹¹This time the dove came back to him in the evening with a fresh olive branch in its beak.

Then Noah knew the waters had receded from the earth. ¹²He waited seven more days and let the dove loose, but it did not return to him any more.

¹³*In the year six hundred and one, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and looked out and saw that the surface of the earth was dry. ¹⁴On the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the earth was dry.*

¹⁵*Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶"Come out of the ark, you and your wife, your sons and their wives with you. ¹⁷Bring out with you all flesh, that is, all the animals who are with you, all things of flesh; birds, cattle and all that crawls on the earth. Let them abound on the earth, be fruitful and increase in number. ¹⁸So Noah went out, with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹All the animals, all the birds, all that creeps on the earth, came out of the ark, one kind after another.*

²⁰Noah built an altar to Yahweh and, taking some of all the clean animals and all the clean birds, he offered burnt offerings on it. ²¹Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma and said to himself: "Never again will I curse the earth because of man, even though his heart is set on evil from childhood; never again will I strike down every living creature as I have done.

²²As long as the earth lasts, seedtime and harvest cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease to be."

The new world order

9 ¹God blessed Noah and his sons and he said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. ²Fear and dread of you will be in all the animals of the earth and in all the birds of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. They are given to you. ³Everything that moves and lives shall be food for you; as I gave you the green plants, I have now given you everything. ⁴Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is its blood.

⁵But I will also demand a reckoning for your lifeblood. I will demand it from every

22. Jer 31, 35; 33, 20

2. 1, 28

3. 1, 29

4. Lev 17, 11; Acts 15, 20; Rom 14

ingly enters into God's plans and cooperates with him in the salvation of the world. It is not enough to say: "I have my faith." Will this faith of mine lead me to sacrifice myself to change the world? Compared with the negligent, the lazy and the corrupt, Noah, the man of faith, begins to work and he does not doubt or become discouraged while he is building his ridiculous and apparently useless boat.

The time comes when God eliminates the unprepared, those who preferred to enjoy the now rather than work for the future God pointed out to them. (Mt 3:9-12; Zeph 2:1-3; Mt 24:38).

Noah's story has its source in very old legends. It was put in writing for the first time in the days of King Solomon. At a much later date the Jewish priests added the paragraphs indicated here in smaller italics.

The story of the flood is recalled in several places in the New Testament (see 1 Pt 3:10; and 2 Pt 2:5). This story teaches us that God wants to renew our sinful world. For that to be accomplished, we need a process of purification and

we need to revise not only our evil habits but even the very roots of our culture. To begin with, we must let go of our pride and admit that we need a Saviour.

In some way, the Church is this Ark which we enter through faith and baptism and where we are welcomed by Christ, the new Noah. It would obviously be wrong to lock ourselves in the Church as in a refuge of the saved and from there to condemn everything taking place in the world, forgetting that our mission is to save the world (Jn 3:17). Yet, we must not forget that the Church is the only hope of the world and not a single thing that man makes can enter the Kingdom without passing through purifying and destroying waters.

Never again, will I curse the earth because of man. With these words the Bible assures us that human errors and crimes cannot lead history to chaos. Not only will the sun give its warmth and the earth its bread, but in every century, humankind will find a solution to its problems.

• God's blessing on Noah and his children

animal; and from man too, I will demand a reckoning for the life of his fellow man.

* He who sheds the blood of man shall have his blood shed by man for in the image of God has God made man.

⁷As for you, be fruitful and increase. Abound on the earth and be master of it."

*God spoke to Noah and his son: ⁸"See I am making a covenant with you and with your descendants after you; ⁹also with every living animal with you: birds, cattle, that is, with every living creature of the earth that came out of the ark. ¹⁰I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹¹God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I make between me and you, and every animal living with you for all future generations. ¹²I set my bow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹³When I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁴I will remember the covenant between me and you and every kind of living creature, so that never again will floodwaters destroy all flesh. ¹⁵When the rainbow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of every kind that exists on the earth." ¹⁶God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have made between me and all that has life on the earth."

Noah and his sons

■ ¹⁸ The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham is the ancestor of Canaan. ¹⁹ These were Noah's three sons and from them the whole earth was peopled.

6. Ex 21, 23	10. 6, 18; Sir 44, 17	11. Hos 2, 20; Jon 4, 11	13. Ezk 1, 28; Rev 4, 3
	15. Is 54, 9	21. Pro 23, 29; Sir 31, 25; Eph 5, 18	

that is for all humankind) serves as a commentary on the previous promise. Let us note the following points:

Man is confirmed in his role as steward of creation (v. 2).

He may eat the flesh of animals (v. 3), but not their blood (compare with 1:29) because for the Hebrews blood was thought to contain the soul, that is the life of the living being. Thus, to eat the flesh of animals without draining their blood was considered as profaning the very sacredness of life (see Lv 17:10-24).

The covenant of God with men (v. 8) and with everything that came from the Ark, means that God is interested in everything made by men: their culture, inventions, and their legitimate ambitions. God is not only the God of believers, he is the God of everyone. God does

²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, set about planting a vineyard. ²¹ He drank the wine, became drunk, and lay uncovered in the middle of his tent. ²² When Ham, Canaan's ancestor, saw his father's nakedness, he told his two brothers outside the tent. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a cloak, put it on their shoulders, the two of them, then walked backwards and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned away and they did not see their father's nakedness.

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine he knew what his youngest son had done to him. ²⁵ And he said, "Cursed be Canaan! He shall be his brothers' meanest slave!"

²⁶ He then added: "Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem, let Canaan be his slave! ²⁷ May God extend (the territory of) Japheth, and may he live in the tents of Shem! And may Canaan be his slave!"

²⁸ Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. ²⁹ In all Noah lived for nine hundred and fifty years. Then he died.

The list of nations

+10 ¹ These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth; these are their sons who were born after the flood. ² Japheth's sons: Gomer, Magog, the Medes, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras. ³ Gomer's sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah. ⁴ Javan's sons: Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittim, the Dananites. ⁵ These were dispersed and peopled the islands of the nations.

These were Japheth's sons, according to their countries and each of their languages, according to their tribes and their nations.

*Ham's sons: Cush, Misraim, Put, Canaan. *Cush's sons: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah,

not want merely to save souls: through human creativity God enables people to grow in awareness and responsibility and he prepares them for divine union through the Holy Spirit.

As long as we live in sin, God cannot reveal himself openly. Yet he gives us signs of his providence and goodness in daily events: this is what is meant when he invites them to look at the rainbow to remember his covenant with them (v. 12).

■ In primitive cultures, men seeking supernatural experiences have turned drunkenness into a sacred ritual. They believed there were vital forces in wine which would permit them to escape from the passage of time. The Bible takes these concerns and prefers to honor Noah rather than to condemn him.

+ Noah's three sons symbolically represent

Raamah, Sabteca. Raamah's sons: Sheba Dedan.

⁸ Cush became the father of Nimrod who was the first great ruler on earth.⁹ He was a mighty hunter in the eyes of Yahweh, hence the saying, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter in the eyes of Yahweh."¹⁰ The beginning of his empire was Babel, with Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.¹¹ From this country came Ashur, the builder of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah,¹² and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (this is the great city).

¹³ Misraim became the father of the people of Lud, of Anam, Lehab, Naphtuh,¹⁴ Pathros, Cushlul and Capthor, from which the Philistines came.

¹⁵ Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, the Hittites,¹⁶ and the Jebusites, the Amorites, Girgashites,¹⁷ Hivites, Arkites, Sinites,¹⁸ Arvadites, Zemarites, Hamathites; later the Canaanite tribes scattered.¹⁹ The Canaanite frontier stretched from Sidon in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zebaim, and as far as Lesha.

²⁰ These were Ham's sons, according to their tribes and languages, according to their countries and nations.

²¹ There were also children born to Shem, the ancestor of all the sons of Eber, who are the Hebrews, and the elder brother of Japheth.

²² Shem's sons: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram.²³ Aram's sons: Uz, Hul, Gether and Mash.

²⁴ Arpachshad became the father of Shelah, and Shelah became the father of Eber.

²⁵ To Eber were born two sons: the first was called Peleg, because it was in his time that the earth was divided; and his brother was called Joktan.²⁶ Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,²⁷ Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah,²⁸ Obal, Abimael, Sheba,²⁹ Ophir, Havilah, Jobab; all these are sons of Joktan.³⁰ They occupied a stretch of country from Mesh in the direction of Sephar, to the eastern mountain range.

³¹ These were Shem's sons, according to their tribes and languages, and according to their countries and nations.

³² These were the tribes of Noah's sons, according to their descendants and their nations. From these came the dispersal of the nations over the earth, after the flood.

The tower of Babel

+ 11 ¹The whole world had one language and a common speech.² As people moved eastward, they found a plain in the country of Shinar where they settled.

³ They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them in fire." They used brick for stone and bitumen for mortar.⁴ They said also, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top reaching heaven; so that we may become a great people and not be scattered over the face of the earth!"

1. Wis 10, 5; Acts 2, 5; Rev 7, 9

4. Jer 51, 53; Is 14, 12

the three human groups which the Israelites believed formed humankind:

- Their group, blessed by God, the Semites (including Arabs, among others). They called their ancestor Shem, meaning "the Name," the one who knows and keeps the Name, that is to say the Presence of God.
- Another group, Japheth, including the people of Europe, who were to form the empires of the Greeks and the Romans.
- The other group was that of the African people, especially Mizraim or Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia and also the Canaanites who occupied the Holy Land before its conquest by the Israelites. Since sexual immorality was quite frequent among the Canaanites, a lack of modesty is attributed to their ancestor Ham.

In this list of forefathers, names of legendary heroes are mixed with lists of people and cities as "sons" of this or that race. For example all

those mentioned in verses 2-6 are people and tribes, not individuals.

+ It would be easy to show that the Tower of Babel story, reproduces in part, legend: about Babel, or Babylon, the most famous capital of the time, with its brick buildings and its strange, unfinished-looking towers. In 11:7 the biblical author retains an ambiguous expression from these pagan legends: when the gods were afraid before the arrogance of men who were threatening them in their celestial dwellings.

Obviously, this story condemns very real crimes committed in all times, but, just as in the case of the Flood, this is a comparison, parable, not history.

God has given the mission to occupy the land and make it fruitful. But, people prefer their own security to being creative and they see in national power a means to satisfy their pride. Rather than solving problems of injustice and

⁵Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower that the sons of man were building. ⁶and Yahweh said, "They are one people and they have one language. If they carry this through, nothing they decide to do from now on will be impossible. Come! Let us go down and confuse their language so that they will no longer understand each other."

⁸So Yahweh scattered them over all the earth and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth and from there Yahweh scattered them over the whole face of the earth.

¹⁰These are Shem's descendants:

When Shem was a hundred years old he became the father of Arpachshad, two years after the flood. After the birth of Arpachshad, Shem lived five hundred years and he had more sons and daughters.

¹²When Arpachshad was thirty-five years old he became the father of Shelah. ¹³After the birth of Shelah, Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years and he had more sons and daughters.

¹⁴When Shelah was thirty years old he became the father of Eber. After the birth of Eber, ¹⁵Shelah lived four hundred and three years and he had more sons and daughters.

¹⁶When Eber was thirty-four years old he became the father of Peleg. After the birth of Peleg, ¹⁷Eber lived four hundred and thirty

years and he had more sons and daughters.

¹⁸When Peleg was thirty years old he became the father of Reu; ¹⁹Peleg lived two hundred and nine years and he had more sons and daughters.

²⁰When Reu was thirty-two years old he became the father of Serug; ²¹Reu lived two hundred and seven years and he had more sons and daughters.

²²When Serug was thirty years old he became the father of Nahor. After the birth of Nahor, ²³Serug lived two hundred years and he had more sons and daughters.

²⁴When Nahor was twenty-nine years old he became the father of Terah. After the birth of Terah, ²⁵Nahor lived a hundred and nineteen years and he had more sons and daughters.

+ ²⁶When Terah was seventy years old he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

²⁷These are Terah's descendants: Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹Abram and Nahor both married: Abram's wife was called Sarai; Nahor's wife was called Milcah, the daughter of Haran, father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰Sarai was barren, having no child.

³¹Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram, and made them leave Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. But on arrival in Haran they settled there. ³²Terah lived two hundred and five years; then he died in Haran.

8. Acts 17, 26

9. Jn 11, 52; Acts 2

29. 22, 20

misunderstanding existing in every society, they prefer to concentrate their efforts on accomplishing projects which will add to their prestige.

The great projects for which the legitimate rights of millions of slaves have been lightly sacrificed remain unfinished. Resentment and oppression have contributed to irreparable divisions for the following generation or the next century.

God alone can bring us together: the first promise to Abraham was that he would gather all the nations in his sons (Gen 12:3). When the Holy Spirit would come into the hearts of believers on Pentecost (Acts 2), he would enable them to understand one another in the unique language of love. The church to be born would include men from various nations and languages. While the sinful man work alone and develop an oppressive and sterile male-centered

culture, the believer would willingly cooperate with God in creation and would care about people's bettering themselves through inter communication and communion in the same Spirit (Eph 2:14-22).

Some people wonder about the origin of human languages. Briefly, we can say that human languages are as ancient as humankind; but a language is something which is always evolving, and different languages developed inasmuch as people lived far away from one another and the different groups did not come in contact with each other.

+ Terah became the father of Abram. We must understand that the account of Abraham is not historical in every detail. It is like a faith book in which we are shown the most typical stages and trials which any believer goes through at one

SECOND PART OF GENESIS THE ANCESTORS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The call of Abram

12 ¹Yahweh said to Abram, "Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse, and in you all peoples of the earth will be blessed."

⁴So Abram went as Yahweh had told him, and Lot went with him.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ⁵Abram took Sarai, his wife, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set out for the land of Canaan.

They arrived at Canaan. ⁶Abram travelled through the country as far as Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." There he built an altar to Yahweh who had appeared to him.

⁸From there he went on to the mountains east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There also he built an altar to Yahweh and called on the name of Yahweh. ⁹Then Abram set out in the direction of Negeb.

■ ¹⁰There was famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to stay there for some time, for the famine was severe in the land.

¹¹Just as he was about to enter

1. Wis 10, 5; Acts 7, 2 2. Sir 44, 19; Jn 7, 2; Heb 11, 8
6. 13, 15; 15, 18; 17, 8; Dt 1, 8; Mt 5, 5

3. Is 51, 2; Jer 4, 2; Gal 3, 8; Num 24, 9; Acts 3, 25
8. 12, 8; 22, 14; 28, 18 10. 42, 1

time or another in his life. We see these played out by Abraham.

All of us believe in "something" more or less. It reassures us but we do not become involved and that is why atheists say that religion is like opium. But, Biblical faith consists in believing in Someone who calls us to enter into a history which moves forward. And it is precisely in Abraham that this sort of faith appears.

o On a map we can easily see the arc formed by the fertile valleys of Mesopotamia and the plains of Canaan. Inside this arc there were tablelands and deserts where half-starved, nomadic tribes used to travel, always looking for pastures for their sheep and donkeys.

These nomads looked at the peasants and the city dwellers of the plains with envy; at times they would try to take over their land, though usually they came into contact only for some trading deal, or when they were called on to give some service.

These nomads belonged to the *Amorites*. Abraham was one of them. Abraham and his family migrated with their flocks from Ur to Haran (11:31) where they settled.

When Abraham is already old (v. 4) many groups around him are going South in search of better lands. Why should he follow them? His life

is behind him and the worst part is that he does not have any sons. Will this man begin his life over again?

But God calls him: "You too, go; something is waiting for you." and Abraham leaves, just as in our own days, many immigrants are forced by economic circumstances to leave their own land, though they don't know where to go nor how their lives will turn out. All Abraham knows is that God is asking him to go and that God intends to give him something he has wanted during his whole life.

Leave for the land that I will show you. God promises him land and children and Abraham welcomes these promises. Even though he is old, in his heart he can still hope for the impossible and the openness of his soul, or this capacity to be renewed, is what pleases God. more than any good work.

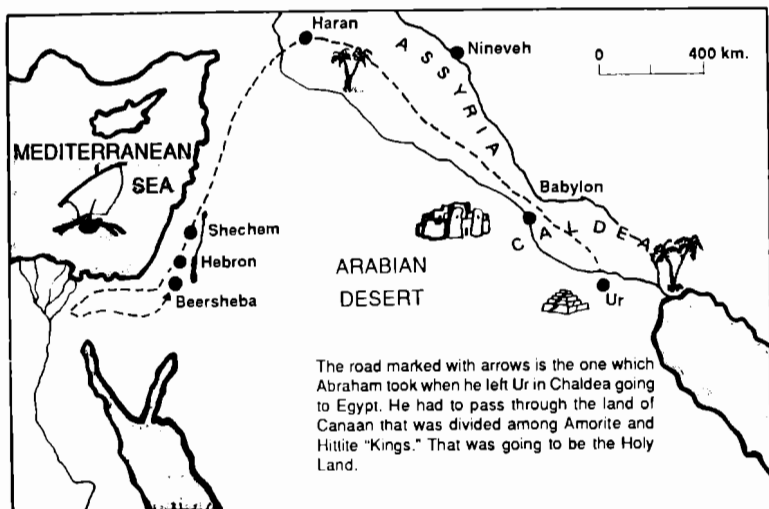
In you all people of the earth will be blessed. In a divided world, God has chosen a man who does not have his own land to begin the Kingdom in which he will gather all people. From then on, God will choose the poor and those whose lives are not secure, in order to save the world. To those, as to Abraham, God promises the final City (Heb 11:8).

I will make your name great. In fact, Abraham was as good as dead and his name was

Egypt he said to Sarai, his wife, "Now I know you are a beautiful woman. ¹² When the Egyptians see you they will say: 'That is his wife!' They will then kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say that you are my sister, so that

they treat me well on account of you
and my life be spared because of
you."

¹⁴In fact, when Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵Pha-



12, 20; 26, 1; Ps 105, 14

out to disappear and not be remembered by anyone, but God's call makes him spring forth from nothingness. He begins to be someone alive under the care of the living God (Mk 2:26).

AITH

Authentic faith, the faith of God's people,
began with Abraham's departure.

1) Faith comes with the call from God. We do not deserve credit for our own faith and conversion. Abraham did not take the initiative to save and he did not invent a new way of serving God. God did not extend an invitation to which we could have answered "yes" or "no". God's call is imperative: and the same thing happens with the great prophets and saints. In this way, God frees them since, on account of sin, every person is born and lives as if he were in a foreign land. His own reality is hidden from him as long as he is not rooted in God and in communion with him. Our religions and ideologies, products of our culture, do not permit us to go beyond the limits of a world we made to suit ourselves. To become aware of our vocation we need God's call to us and we need to be willing to get out of our vicious circle.

2) Faith places us at the service of God whose work is to save humankind. *In you all peoples of the earth will be blessed.* It may be that at first God attracted us by granting us some personal favor, but later he shares with us his own plans for the salvation of the world. In order to follow Christ and become a member of his People, we must believe in the promise God made to this people: God destined us to be the heaven and the light of the world.

3) Faith demands a breaking away from past securities; it forces us to look ahead without grieving over the loss of whatever has served to provide for us the warmth and security of a mother's womb. People grow by overcoming successive "crises" in life; they leave their families, begin to work and they marry ... Faith enables us to look upon each "letting go" with optimism and it prepares us to face other more painful relinquishments which commit us more fully to God's service: faith is the great means by which humans reach maturity.

4) Unlike the "worldly" man who builds his life according to the criteria of human wisdom, thinking he knows where he is going, the believer seeks God's signs to find out where God wants to lead him. To the end of his days, he will

raoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh. The woman was taken into Pharaoh's house ¹⁶and because of her he dealt well with Abram; he received sheep, cattle, donkeys, men-servants, maidservants, she-asses and camels.

¹⁷But Yahweh inflicted severe plagues on Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai. ¹⁸So Pharaoh summoned Abram and said, "What have you done to me? ¹⁹Why did you say: 'She's my sister,' so that I took her for my wife. Now, here is your wife! Take her and go!" ²⁰And Pharaoh gave orders to his men regarding Abram, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and all that was his.

13 ¹Abram went up from Egypt to the Negeb, he and his wife, with all he had and Lot with him. ²Now Abram was very rich in flocks, silver and gold. ³As he journeyed on, he went from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where he first pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai ⁴at the spot where he had formerly made an altar and called on the Name of Yahweh.

Abram and Lot separate

◆ ⁵*Lot who went with Abram also had flocks, cattle and tents. ⁶The land was not sufficient to allow them to stay together, for their possessions were too great for them to live together.*

⁷A quarrel arose between the herdsmen of Abram's flock and those of Lot. (The Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land at the time). ⁸Abram said to Lot, "Don't let there be a dispute between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and yours, since we are brothers!" Isn't the whole land there before you? Let us part company. If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left."

¹⁰Lot looked up and saw the whole valley of the Jordan: how well it was watered! Before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, this was like one of Yahweh's gardens, like the country of Egypt, on coming to Zoar. ¹¹Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley and journeyed eastward. In this way they separated from each other. ¹²Abram settled in the country of Canaan while Lot lived among the towns of the plain *and moved his tent as far as Sodom.* ¹³Now the men of Sodom were wicked, sinning greatly against Yahweh.

¹⁴Yahweh said to Abram after Lot had left him, "Raise your eyes and look from where you are, towards the north, the south, the east and the west; ¹⁵all the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. ¹⁶I will make your descendants as the dust of

4. 24, 35; Job 1, 3; Ps 112, 1 6. 36, 7 8. 26, 20 10. 2, 9; 19; 24

wander in search of another kind of justice and a perfection which surpasses human perfection (Mt 5:20; Lk 12:32; Heb 11:13).

Abraham's children: see Mt 3:7; Jn 8:33; Acts 3:25; 13:26; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8. *Abram and Abraham:* Gen 17:5.

■ *Say that you are my sister so that they will treat me well on account of you.* Some people are shocked at the low level of morality in those times, and in Abraham himself. When God called Abraham to make him his friend, he did not change him all at once. This moral change in his chosen people was to be accomplished over centuries: God is patient. Everything in its own time: we would do well to ponder this, since we tend to judge quickly.

◆ A quarrel occurs between Abraham's servants and those of Lot. Abraham values peace above his own interests and he allows Lot to choose his land.

If you go to the left, I will go to the right. Abraham already has the insight of faith. He still does not know that the land he is going to select is only an image of the mysterious land which is the kingdom of God within us. Yet, instead of being the one to choose, he lets Lot have the first option. He acts out of love without realizing it. Without trying, he has discovered the true land, man's heart, which is where the kingdom of God is realized. On the surface Lot chooses the better part, but in fact he loses it.

All the land that you see I will give to you.

he earth; if the grains of the dust can be counted, then your descendants may be counted. ¹⁷Come, travel through the length and breadth of the land, for it is to you that I am giving it."

¹⁸So Abram moved his tent and came to live by the oak of Mamre at Hebron. There he built an altar to Yahweh.

14 ¹At the time of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, ²these kings made war on Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³All these joined forces in the valley of Siddim (that is the Salt Sea). ⁴Twelve years they had been dominated by Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵In the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer and the king who were his allies, came and fought and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emin in Shaveh-kiriathaim ⁶ and the Horites in their Mount Seir as far as Elparan which is near the desert.

⁷They then turned back and came to the spring of Judgement (that is, Kadesh) and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, as well as that of Amorites who lived in Hazontamar. ⁸Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and took up battle positions in the valley of Siddim ⁹ against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar: four kings against five.

¹⁰Now there were many bitumen pits in the valley of Siddim, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them and the rest took refuge in the mountains.

¹¹The enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, all their provisions and went off. ¹²They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who lived in Sodom, and his possessions and went off.

¹³One who escaped came to tell Abram the Hebrew who was living by the oak of Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and of Aner: these were allies of Abram.

Abraham and Melchizedek

+ ¹⁴As soon as Abram heard that his brother had been taken away captive, he assembled and led forth his trained men born in his house, three hundred and eighteen men and set off in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵He grouped his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed and followed them to Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶Then he brought back all his possessions, his kinsman Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the people.

¹⁷On his return after defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were his allies, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is the valley of the king).

¹⁸Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High, ¹⁹and he

19. Ps 110, 4; Lk 14, 22; Heb 7, 1

20. 28, 22

ever. This is the land of Canaan, today's Palestine. It is a land flowing with milk and honey (Nm 13:27), that is to say, a land which is blessed with fertility. Abraham, however, will not yet own it himself: God only promises him that the land will be his. At the time it is occupied by the Canaanites.

It would be worthwhile to see why, for centuries, God formed people with the promise of a land they would have to conquer. It is because man cannot discover his dignity as a son of God if he is deprived of specific hopes such as land and a home. The human personality cannot develop unless a person has something to care for and to defend, something to fight for.

+ What is the origin of the legend in this chapter, a legend which was inserted much later

into the history of Abraham? Did it come from the desire to add to Abraham's glory by attributing a military feat to him?

In any case, God, the author of the Bible, wanted this apparently unimportant story to convey two things:

Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God. He had not received the word of God, as Abraham had; yet, in his own way he knew the one who had called Abraham and he also recognized Abraham. The people whom God calls are never isolated because they always meet some other friends of God. Abraham paid the tenth part, but he went away richer with the joy of having heard words which confirmed God's blessing on him from the lips of this stranger (see Lk 1:39).

blessed Abram saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth! ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hands!"

And Abram gave him a tenth part of everything.

²¹ The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." ²² Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I raise my hand to Yahweh God Most High, creator of heaven and earth, to swear ²³ that not one thread or thong of a sandal, or anything that is yours, would I take. Lest you say, 'Abram became rich at my expense,' ²⁴ I claim nothing for myself! Only what the young men have eaten and the share that is due to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, the men who came with me."

God's covenant with Abram

◆15 ¹ After this the word of Yahweh was spoken to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great!"

² Abram said, "My Lord Yahweh,

where are your promises? I am still childless and all I have will go to Eliezer of Damascus. ³ You have given me no children, so a slave of mine will be my heir."

⁴ Then the word of Yahweh was spoken to him again, "Eliezer will not be your heir, but a child born of you (your own flesh and blood) will be your heir." ⁵ Then Yahweh brought him outside and said to him, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that."

⁶ Abram believed Yahweh who, because of this, held him to be an upright man. ⁷ And he said, "I am Yahweh who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession."

⁸ Then Abram asked, "My Lord, how am I to know that it shall be mine?" ⁹ Yahweh replied, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Abram brought all these animals, cut them in two, and laid each half facing its other half, but he did not cut the birds in

1. Dt 33, 29; Ps 28, 7

5. Dt. 1, 10; Heb 11, 12; Ma 2, 52; Rom 4, 3; Gal 3, 6; James 2, 23
10. Jer 34, 18

Melchizedek brought bread and wine. What a strange person Melchizedek was! In Israel kings were not priests nor did they offer bread and wine in their sacrifices. But Psalm 110 and then the letter to the Hebrews (5:6 and chapter 7) see Melchizedek as a figure of Christ, the only Priest. Abraham, despite his greatness, only prepared for the coming of the one who would obtain the blessing promised by God for all the nations. Here Christ is foretold in a veiled form as the priest and king who consecrates the bread and wine.

◆ *Lord God, I am still childless.* At a certain age, a man begins to worry about what will remain of his life: his marriage, his children, his years of work. At that precise moment, Abraham proves his faith by believing in promises which are seemingly unattainable. Abraham's Covenant with God is the beginning of a reciprocal friendship.

Because of this Yahweh held him to be a just man. Not because you are a very good man

or because you have helped your neighbour, or because you have served me for many years ... but because I told you: "Do not be afraid" and you have placed all your concerns in my hands.

On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram (v.18). Throughout the Bible a lot is written about the *Covenant*. What is the meaning of God making a covenant with men?

God loves all men and women and he wants to save them all even when they do not know him. But he also wants to bring the human race to maturity. For this to come about, at least a minority of people in the world must have encountered God in a personal way, since this meeting is the start of the most valuable experiences.

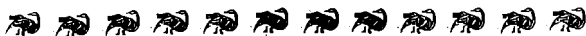
This is how, throughout history, God calls those whom he has chosen according to his plan and eternal selection. In making a pact or a *covenant* with them, he gives them the opportunity to enter into a life of faithfulness. They will know God as a living person and will deal with



Eve has just awakened and she discovers the world from herself. What a difference when the loving God reveals himself to her!



The tale runs that Abraham, Ruth and Joseph
took possession of the Promised Land.
But for the refugees and migrants nowadays
put to the storm at sea
solace in all affliction and mischance,
the tale continues...
God shall drive them to his shores!



half. ¹¹The birds of prey came down upon them, but Abram drove them away.

¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep came over Abram, and a dreadful darkness took hold of him.

¹³Then Yahweh said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be exiles in a land that is not theirs. They will be slaves there, oppressed for four hundred years.

¹⁴But I will judge the nation that oppresses them, and after that, they will not leave empty-handed. ¹⁵As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace, and be buried at a ripe old age. ¹⁶Your descendants of the fourth generation will come back here, for the wickedness of the Amorites has not yet deserved that I take the land from them."

¹⁷When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between the halves of the victims. ¹⁸On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this country from the river of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates.

¹⁹The land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

Birth of Ishmael

■16 *Sarai, Abram's wife had not borne him a child, but she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar, and she said to Abram, "Now, since Yahweh has kept me from having children, go to my servant; perhaps I shall have a child by her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.*

³Abram had been in the land of Canaan ten years when Sarai, his wife took Hagar, her Egyptian maid and gave her to Abram her husband, as wife. ⁴He went in to Hagar and she became pregnant.

When she was aware of this, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵Sarai said to Abram, "May this injury done to me be yours. I put my servant in your arms and now that she knows she is pregnant, I count for nothing in her eyes. Let Yahweh judge between me and you." ⁶Abram said to Sarai, "Your servant is in your power; do with her as you please." Then Sarai treated her so badly that she ran away.

12. 2, 21; Job 4, 12 14. Ex. 12, 40; Gal 3, 17 16. Lev 18, 24 19. Ex 3, 8; Dt. 7, 1 2. Gal 4, 21 4. 21, 9

him as such.

Therefore in beginning his work of salvation in human history, God wants at least one man to share his secret and to know the depth of his designs: *Abram believed Yahweh.*

Through such faith, God's eternal decrees edges in the heart and mind of one believer and his is worth more than many good works. From that moment on a mysterious complicity will unite Abram and God forever: this is the Covenant.

God makes a Covenant with Abraham according to the customs of that time. When signing a pact, both parties would pass between the two halves of a sacrificed animal (see Jer 34:18). Abraham follows this ritual and as for God, there passes a fire which represents God. It is God who commits himself and who makes the promise.

Faith makes us friends of God: Hab 2:4; Rom 4:2; Gal 3:6; Heb 11:11.

■ Abraham is concerned that God's promise is not being fulfilled. This son whom God has promised to the old man, could he not perhaps have it with Hagar, his other wife? For the child to be considered a son of Sarai, would it not be enough for her to adopt him according to the customs of those days? God remains silent and lets Abraham solve these problems in the way his still primitive conscience tells him to.

But Abraham's plan fails: the heir that God promised him will not be a son conceived and born "according to the flesh," that is, by human means, but the son of a miracle. In this we see the freedom of God who prefers to fulfill his promises at the very time when they appear most impossible to achieve.

VISIONS AND ANGELS

What are we to think of these appearances of angels? Did they really happen or are these passages merely a way of speaking? Let us clarify the following:



o ⁷The angel of Yahweh found her near a spring in the wilderness ⁸and said to her, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I'm running away from Sarai, my mistress." ⁹The angel of Yahweh said to her, "Go back to your mistress and humbly submit yourself to her." ¹⁰The angel of Yahweh said to her, "I will so increase your descendants, that they will be too numerous to be counted." ¹¹Then the angel of Yahweh said to her, "Now you are with child and you will have a son, and you shall name him Ishmael, for Yahweh has heard your distress. ¹²He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone

and everyone's hand against him, defiant towards all his brothers."

¹³Hagar called upon Yahweh who spoke to her, and said, "You are a God *who sees*." ¹⁴That is why this well is called the well of *Lahai-roi*. It is between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵Hagar gave birth to a son and Abram called the child Hagar bore him, Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.

Abram becomes Abraham

+17 ¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty. Walk in my presence and

7. Ex 15, 22	9. 1 P 2, 18	11. Lk 1, 31	1. 28, 3; 35, 11; Ex 6, 3
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- We must not confuse *angels* and the *Angel of Yahweh*. Only in the last books of the Old Testament (and naturally in the New Testament) are *angels* mentioned with the meaning that we give them: spiritual creatures who have their place in the ordering of the world and in the salvation of humans as for example in Zec 1 and 2 and also in Dn 9:21 and 10:21. Ancient Israelites did, however, sometimes speak of the Angel of Yahweh, or a Messenger of Yahweh to express things which they could not explain but which indicated an intervention by intervention by God.

When an epidemic providentially destroyed the Assyrian army, it was attributed to the *angel of Yahweh*: see Is 37:36 and also 2 Sam 24:16. Since they knew that no one could see God, when someone had a vision, they spoke of the Angel of Yahweh: see Jgs 6:11.

- The whole Bible shows that God reveals himself in many different ways to those who seek him. He speaks through events; he enlightens the hearts of those who read his Word; he speaks through our intuition and our dreams; he speaks through visions or words, and sometimes, as in the case of the prophets, in a more direct manner, in an intimate and spiritual way.

- We cannot, however, take literally all that is said about visions or words received from God because ancient people did not express themselves the way we do. When a man was reflecting or was tempted by evil, they sometimes expressed this inner meditation as a dialogue with different characters and they would say that the devil or God dialogued with this man: see Jos 7:10 and 1 Kgs 3:4.

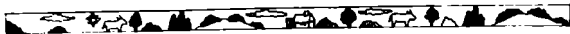
- It is quite possible that God did not act with ancient biblical people in the same way that he acts in our days. Now, after the coming of Christ, we have everything in him and in his church and we have no need of visions and appearances. God usually reserves them for those he leads on a special path. However, in the first centuries of biblical times, God revealed himself much more through those more visible but inferior ways.

o *Go back to your mistress*. This is a word of the Lord for so many people who suffer injustice, for girls who, in a liberal, class-conscious society, must accept humiliating tasks in order not to die of hunger with their parents; for the young people who, after a university education, realize that, except for a select few, modern society needs only sweepers and labourers.

Humbly submit yourself to her, not because her tyranny is just but because you, too, need to be freed from your arrogance. You are right in thinking that you are worth more than what society offers you, but if, through circumstances, the Lord humiliates you, trust in him and think that this humiliation prepares you for a greater mission than the one you were thinking about. If you remain conscious that God calls you to be a free person and one who frees others, he will give you the opportunity of doing it.

Lahai-roi can be translated as: the one who lives and sees.

+ *Abram* means: venerated father, and *Abraham*: Father of a multitude. In changing the name of his servant, God enables him to begin a new life and to really become what his new name expresses. Jesus will proceed in the same



be without blame! ²I will make a covenant between myself and you, and I will multiply your race." ³Abram fell face down and God said to him, ⁴"This is my covenant with you: you will be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram, but Abraham, because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you more and more famous; I will multiply your descendants; nations shall spring from you, kings shall be among your descendants. ⁷And I will establish a covenant, an everlasting covenant between myself and you and your descendants after you; from now on I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you, for generations to come. ⁸I will give to you and your descendants after you the land you are living in, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession and I will be the God of your race."

The circumcision

◆ ⁹God said to Abraham, "For your part, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. ¹⁰This is my covenant with you, that

you will keep, you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹you shall circumcise your foreskin and that will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²When he is eight days old, every male among you will be circumcised, generation after generation; ¹³those born in your household or bought from a foreigner to be slaves. Whether born in your household or bought to be slaves, they must be circumcised. So my covenant will be written in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people for having broken my covenant."

¹⁵God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai, your wife, no longer are you to call her Sarai, but Sarah. ¹⁶I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her. I will bless her and from her will come nations: kings and peoples shall come from her."

¹⁷Then Abraham fell face down, and he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? And can Sarah who is ninety have a child?" ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, "If only you would accept Ishmael as yours!" ¹⁹But God said, "Not at all! It is Sarah, your wife, who will give birth to your son and you will name him Isaac."

5. Rom 4, 17; Ne 9, 7	8. 12, 7; 48, 4	11. Ex 12, 48; Rom 4, 11; Col 2, 11
12. Lev 12, 3; Lk 2, 21	13. Ezk 37, 26; Rom 9, 4; 11, 29	14. Dt 10, 16; Jer 4, 4
17; 18, 12; 21; 6; Jn 8, 56		

may with the first leader of his church: Jn 1:42.

◆ Circumcision, cutting of the skin called *fore-skin* of the male organ, was an ancient custom of Oriental people. It was one of those initiation rites which, among some people, mark the passage of an adolescent into adult society. Circumcision was a religious rite intended to ensure fertility.

Circumcision took on a new meaning for Israel: it was considered the distinct sign of their belonging to the chosen people. A foreigner could enter the religious community of Israel only by being circumcised.

My covenant will be written in your flesh. A married woman wears the ring her husband puts on her finger. Something similar happens to people who enter into a community: they like to have a sign of their membership in the commu-

nity. Similarly, every male descendant of Abraham must have an indelible sign of his belonging to the chosen race: this sign is circumcision.

Yet, the prophets teach that the circumcision of the flesh is worth nothing without the circumcision *of the heart*, which means getting rid of one's vices. The external rite is worthless if one does not live what the sign expresses. See Jer 9:24; Dt 10:16; Gal 5:4; Phil 3:3; Rom 2:25.

For Christians "being circumcised or not" is irrelevant: Acts 11:3-15; 1 Cor 7:8; Gal 6:15. This particular obligation, as well as obligations regarding the Sabbath, abstinence from pork, the temple sacrifices and rituals were only valid until the coming of Christ and only for the Jewish people: Col 2:11 and 2:16-22.

Why do so many people who are indifferent to their faith baptize their children? Why do they come to receive ashes?

I will establish my covenant with him and his descendants after him forever. ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I heard you. I will bless him and make him fruitful, and I will multiply his race. He shall be the father of twelve princes and I will make of him a great nation. ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, the child Sarah will have this time next year. ²² When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went away from him.

²³ Abraham then took Ishmael, his son, as well as all those born in his house and all those he had bought to be slaves, all the males in the household of Abraham, and circumcised their foreskins that same day as God had told him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵ and his son, Ishmael, was thirteen. ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised that same day. ²⁷ And every male in his household, whether born in his household or bought with money from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

Yahweh visits Abraham

+18 ¹Yahweh appeared to Abraham near the oak of Mamre. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent, in the heat of the day, ²when he looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them. He bowed to the ground ³and said, "My Lord, if I have found favour in your sight do not pass your servant by. ⁴Let a little water be brought. Wash your feet and then rest under the trees. ⁵I shall fetch some bread so that you can be refreshed and

continue on your way, since you have come to your servant." They then said, "Do as you say." ⁶Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said to her, "Quick, take three measures of flour, knead it and make cakes."

⁷Abraham then ran to the herd, took a fine, tender calf, gave it to the servant who hurried to prepare it. ⁸He took butter and milk and together with the calf he had prepared laid it all before them. And while he remained standing, they ate. ⁹They then asked, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" Abraham answered, "She is in the tent." ¹⁰And the visitor said, "At this same time next year I will return and Sarah by then will have a son."

Now Sarah was behind him, listening at the entrance to the tent. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were old, well on in years, and Sarah no longer had her monthly periods. ¹²Sarah laughed to herself saying, "Now that I am old and worn and my husband is an old man, am I to have this pleasure?" ¹³Yahweh said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying: 'Am I really going to have a child now that I am old?' ¹⁴Is there anything that is impossible for God? At this same time next year I will return and Sarah by then will have a son."

¹⁵Sarah denied saying, "I did not

20. 25, 12

2. Heb 13, 2

9. 15, 2

11. 17, 17; Rom 9, 9

14. Jer 32, 17; Mt 19, 26;

Lk 1, 36; Heb 11, 11

Ex 32, 11; Am 7, 1; Jer 15, 1

+ God's promises were meant for the descendants of Abraham; he, himself would never see their fulfillment. But God gave his friend a proof of what he was going to accomplish: Isaac was born in miraculous circumstances. It was logical to fear that Abraham's descendants would feel superior to other people and would think they were saved simply by belonging to his race (Lk 3:8). Indeed God acknowledged as heirs of Abraham only the direct descendants of Isaac: the son of a miracle, Sarah's son and not the sons born of slave women. In this we are taught that no one has any claim on God simply because of being born into a particular family. God's promises will be fulfilled for us to the extent that we imitate Abraham in his faith (Gal 4:21-31; Rom 4:13-17).

We marvel at this simple story: God, showing human traits, comes to ask for his friend's hospitality before he showers him with his favours. Commentators will not dare say whether it happened that way or it was merely a way of speaking, but the believer knows that this is the way God acts.

God does not appear alone but with two angels as if to dispel the image of a solitary God, common among those who still do not know about the mystery of the Three divine Persons.

Why did Sarah laugh? Sarah's laughing is another one of those popular explanations which the Bible supplies about names of places and of people; her son will be called Isaac, a name which sounds like "laughed" in Hebrew.

laugh," for she was afraid. But he said, "You did laugh."

Abraham intercedes for Sodom

16 The men went away and turned towards Sodom. Abraham walked with them to set them on their way. 17 And Yahweh said, "Can I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do?" 18 Abraham, in fact, is going to become a great and powerful nation and through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed, for I have chosen him to command his sons and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that Yahweh may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

20 Then Yahweh said, "How great is the cry for justice against Sodom and Gomorrah! And how grievous is their sin! 21 I am going down to see if they have done all that they are charged with in the outcry that has reached me. If it is not so, I will know."

22 The men with him turned away and went towards Sodom, but Yahweh remained standing before Abraham. 23 Abraham went forward and said, "Will you really let the just perish with the wicked?" 24 Perhaps there are fifty good people in the town. Are you really going to let them perish? Would you not spare the place for the

sake of these fifty righteous people? 25 It would not be at all like you to do such a thing and you can't let the good perish with the wicked, nor treat the good and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the judge of all the earth be just?" 26 Yahweh said, "If I find fifty good people in Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

27 Abraham spoke up again, "I know that I am very bold to speak like this to my Lord, I who am only dust and ashes! 28 But perhaps the number of the good is five less than fifty. Will you destroy the town because of five?" Yahweh replied, "I will not destroy the town if I find forty-five good people there." 29 Again Abraham said to him, "Perhaps there will be only forty." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." 30 Abraham went on, saying, "May my Lord not be angry, but let me speak. Maybe only thirty good people will be found in the town." Yahweh answered, "I will not destroy it if I find thirty there." 31 Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to my Lord, what if only twenty can be found?" He said, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy the place."

32 But Abraham insisted, "May my Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found?" And Yahweh answered, "For the sake of ten good

16. Is 53, 12; Jn 17, 20; James 5, 16 17. Am 3, 7; Jn 15, 15 22. Ps 106, 23; Ezk 22, 30 24. Num 16, 22

Is there anything impossible for God? See Lk 1:37; 18:27; Mk 11:22.

16 Can I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do? When God makes us his friends he gives us responsibility for the world. Just as with friendship between people, friendship with God means sharing everything. God teaches us to think as he does and to act with him and he invites us to make requests.

We should not think that if we insist a lot in prayer, we will get whatever we ask for. If what we ask for is not good of us, God will not grant it. But God is pleased when we know how to struggle and to insist in order to obtain what he,

himself, wants to give us in his mercy. He does not want to merely impose this but to grant it to those capable of wishing for it in the same way that he does. "I do not wish the wicked man's death, but rather that he change his evil ways and live" (Ez 33:11).

I know I am very bold to speak this way to my Lord. The boldness of Abraham who begins to bargain discretely and firmly demonstrates his faith. The old man converses with God just as he would with a friend in making a deal. Note how Abraham remains seated while the Lord is standing in front of him. This candid approach appeared as a lack of respect to those who read



people, I will not destroy Sodom."³³ When Yahweh had finished speaking with Abraham, he left and Abraham went home.

The destruction of Sodom

■ 19 ¹When the two angel reached Sodom in the evening, Lot was sitting at the gate of the town. As soon as he saw them, he rose to meet them, bowed with his face to the ground, ²and said, "My lords, I pray you come to your servant's house to stay the night. Wash your feet and then in the morning you may rise early and go on your way." They said, "No, we will spend the night in the square."³ But so strongly did he insist that they went with him to his house; there he prepared a meal for them baking bread without yeast. This they ate.

⁴They had not yet gone to bed when men from the town surrounded the house; they were the men of Sodom, young and old, the entire population. ⁵They called Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who arrived here tonight? Send them out so that we may have sex with them."

⁶Lot went out to meet them, shut the door behind him and said, ⁷"I beg you, my brothers, don't do such a wicked thing. ⁸I have two daughters

who are still virgins; let me bring them out to you; you may do with them as you please, but don't do anything to these men, for they have come to shelter under my roof."⁹ But they replied, "Get out of the way! This fellow is a foreigner and he wants to play the judge! Now we will do worse with you than with them." They pressed hard against Lot and drew near in order to break the door. ¹⁰But the men inside the house stretched out their hands to bring Lot inside and then shut the door. ¹¹As for those at the entrance to the house, they were struck with blindness, from the smallest to the largest, so that they were unable to find the door.

¹²The two men said to Lot, "Who is still here with you? Your sons-in-law? Get them out of the place; your sons, your daughters and all your people in the town. We are about to destroy this place. ¹³The cry for retribution against it is great before Yahweh who has sent us to destroy it."

¹⁴Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, those who were to marry his daughters, saying, "Hurry, leave, for Yahweh is about to destroy the town." But they took what he said as a joke.

¹⁵At daybreak the Angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and two daughters who are here, lest

4. Jdg 19, 22

7. Lev 20, 13; Rom 1, 24

11. 2K 6, 18

17. Mt 24, 15

the Bible later; thus they changed the phrase: Abraham was standing to speak with Yahweh who was seated. Jesus said that he would wait on his faithful servants as a servant on his masters (Lk 12:37).

■ The salt of the Red Sea and the ruins of two cities destroyed by earthquakes: Sodom and Gomorrah – perhaps give food for thought. We must remember that in those days people looked upon catastrophes as punishments from God and upon prosperity as a blessing from God. Such was the origin of this story which teaches us some truths:

- respect for guests who must be welcomed as angels of the Lord.
- the horror of homosexuality.

Sodom and Gomorrah will remain tragic names in sacred history, and serve as proof that we must not make fun of God's judgements nor take them lightly. The prophets will recall this catastrophe when they threaten those who refuse to be converted (see Is 1:9; Ez 16:49) and so will Jesus (Mt 10:15; Lk 17:29).

The present story does not fail to emphasize – in Lot's case – that God never forgets a single one of his children, even when they are isolated in the midst of wickedness.

Lot's answer (v. 8) seems incredible to us, but, it coincides with ideas of those distant days when women were not considered as human persons. It seemed normal to sacrifice a daughter in order to save a friend. See something similar in Judges 19.



they perish because of the sin of the town." ¹⁶ As he hesitated, the men took him by the hand and his wife and two daughters with him, because Yahweh had mercy on him. And they led him outside the town.

¹⁷ When they were outside, the men said to him, "Flee for your life and don't look back and don't stop anywhere in the plain. Flee to the mountain lest you perish."

¹⁸ But Lot replied, "My lords, your servant has found favour with you, ¹⁹ and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot flee to the mountains for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die. See, there is a town near enough for me to flee to and it's a small one. ²⁰ Let me flee there: it is very small (that is why the town is called Zoar). So I will be safe." ²¹ And the angel answered, "I grant you this favour as well by not destroying the town you speak of. ²² But flee fast for I can do nothing until you arrive there."

²³ The sun had risen on the earth when Lot reached Zoar. ²⁴ Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah burning sulphur out of the heavens from Yahweh. ²⁵ And he completely destroyed those towns and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the towns and everything that grew there.

Other legends

◆ ²⁶ Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷ Early next morning Abraham returned to the place where he had stood before Yahweh. ²⁸ He looked towards Sodom and Gomorrah and towards all the land of the valley and he saw smoke rising from the earth like the smoke from a furnace.

²⁹ So when God destroyed the towns of the plain he remembered Abraham and made Lot escape from the catastrophe while he destroyed the cities where Lot had lived.

³⁰ Lot went up from Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, because he was afraid to live in Zoar. He lived in a cave, he and his two daughters. ³¹ The elder said to the

younger, "Our father is old and there is not a man in the country to lie with us as is the custom all over the world. ³² Come, let us make our father drunk with wine; we shall lie with him and have the race survive through our father." ³³ So they made their father drink wine that night and the elder went to lie with her father. He knew nothing of it, neither when she lay down nor when she left.

³⁴ The next day the elder daughter said to the younger, "Last night I lay with my father. Let us give him wine again tonight and you go and lie with him. In this way we shall continue the race through our father." ³⁵ Again that night they got their father to drink wine. The younger went and lay with him. He was aware of nothing, neither when she lay with him nor when she left. ³⁶ And the two daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. ³⁷ The elder gave birth to a son and named him Moab. He was the ancestor of the Moabites who live today. ³⁸ The younger, also gave birth to a son and named him Ben-ammi. He is the ancestor of the Ammonites who exist to this day.

Abraham and Sarah at Gerar

20 ¹ Abraham left there for the territory of the Negeb, and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he stayed for a time in Gerar. ² Abraham had said of his wife, "She is my sister"; so Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and had her brought to him.

³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream at night. He said to him, "You are a dead man because of this woman you have taken, for she is a married woman." ⁴ But Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "My Lord, are you going to kill a pagan who acted with a good intention? ⁵ Didn't he say to me: 'She is my sister'? And she said to me: 'He is my brother.' I acted in the simplicity of my heart and with innocent hands." ⁶ God said to him in the dream, "I knew that you did that in the simplicity of your heart and I prevented you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now give the woman back to the man for he is a prophet; he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not give her back, know that you will surely die; you and all yours will die."

⁸ So Abimelech rose early in the morning

24. Wis 10, 7; 2 P 2, 6; Dt 29, 22; Lk 17, 29; Is 34, 9
28. Lam 4, 6; Mt 10, 15; 11, 23

25. Rev 14, 10

26. Wis 10, 7; Lk 17, 32

2. 12, 10; 26, 1; Ps 105, 11

◆ We should remember that these are legendary traditions of the Israelites through which they attempted to explain the origins of different peoples and their connection with them. Since in age-old hatred separated the Israelites from the Ammonites and the Moabites, the present

explanation was not meant to praise them.

■ The Israelites remembered the conflicts between their wandering ancestors and the people among whom they lived. The present event is related in three different parts of Genesis with



and called all his officials and told them all these things. The officials were terrified. ⁹ Abimelech then called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? In what way have I wronged you, for you to bring against me and my kingdom such a grave sin? You have done to me things that should not be done." ¹⁰ Abimelech said to Abraham, "Why did you act as you did?" ¹¹ Abraham said, "I thought there is no fear at all of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife. ¹² Yet it is true that she is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not of my mother, and she became my wife. ¹³ So, when the gods made me wander far from my father's family, I said to her: Now, if you love me, I beg you to say that I am your brother wherever we go." ¹⁴ Abimelech then brought sheep and cattle, male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he had Sarah returned to her husband. ¹⁵ And he told Abraham, "See, you have the run of my land; live wherever you please." ¹⁶ And to Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand silver coins. It will be as a protection for you, and an evidence for all those who are with you. So none of them will think ill of you." ¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his servants, so that they were able to have children again. ¹⁸ For Yahweh had made it impossible for Abimelech's wife and maids to have more children, because of Abraham's wife, Sarah.

Birth of Isaac

21 ¹ Yahweh was kind to Sarah as he had said, *and fulfilled his promise to her.* ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham

in his old age, at the very time Yahweh had promised. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son that Sarah bore him ⁴ and circumcised him when he was eight days old, as Yahweh had commanded. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter and everyone who hears of this will laugh with me." ⁷ She added, "Who would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have given birth to a son for him in his old age."

Abraham dismisses Hagar

⁸ The child grew and on the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast. ⁹ Sarah saw the child that Hagar, the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, mocking her son ¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Send this slave girl and her son away; the child of this slave must not share the inheritance with my son, Isaac."

¹¹ This matter distressed Abraham because it concerned his son, ¹² but God said to him, "Don't be worried about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to Sarah and do whatever she says, because the race which is called by your name will spring from Isaac."

17. Dr 32, 29; 2 K 20, 5	1. 17, 5; 18, 9	9. 16, 5; Gal 4, 22	10. Jn 8, 31
12. Rom 9, 7; Heb 11, 18		14. 1 K 19, 3	

different people as protagonists and in different circumstances (see 12:14 and 26:7). But a person reading these stories one after the other will notice some progress: on one hand, a greater tactfulness in speaking of their ancestor's behaviour; and also a clearer sense of sin.

• *Yahweh was kind with Sarah as he had said.* And so, after some years, God fulfills his promise to Abraham. Isaac is the son of the *promise* because he was born contrary to all human hope and to fulfill God's promise (see Gal 4:22; and Rom 9:7).

Sarah, in her old age, gave birth to Abraham's son. In the Bible we find some births which occur outside of the normal laws of nature: Samuel, Samson, John the Baptist...all are saviours. These births announce and prefigure the virginal birth of the Saviour, Jesus. They

also anticipate the second birth which the church accomplishes through baptism.

So "the son of the promise" is born: see chapter 18.

■ There are problems in Abraham's family as in any other family, and God uses them to carry out his plan. It is good for Hagar to leave with her son so that Isaac may receive all of his father's care. Isaac will inherit, not something material for himself, but God's promises to his children. God steadfastly realizes his plans, but he does not trample on anyone: see how compassionate he is with Hagar.

Abraham had several wives, as important men in his community usually did. The Israelites kept on considering this custom as normal for many years. It was only gradually that God led them to discover the demands of marriage.



¹³But from the son of your servant I will also form a nation, for he too is your offspring."

¹⁴Abraham rose early next morning and gave bread and a skin bag of water to Hagar. He put the child on her back and sent her away. She went off and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. ¹⁵When there was no more water in the skin, she pushed the boy under one of the bushes, ¹⁶and then went and sat down about a hundred yards away, for she thought, "I cannot bear to see my son die."

But as she sat there, the child began to wail. ¹⁷God heard him and the Angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said, "What is the matter Hagar? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy crying. ¹⁸Get up, pick the boy up and hold him safely, for I will make him into a great nation."¹⁹God then opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰God was with the boy. He grew up and made his home in the wilderness and became an expert archer.

²¹He lived in the desert of Paran and his mother chose a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

²²At that time Abimelech came with Phicol, the commander of his army, to speak to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do, ²³swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely either with me or my descen-

dants, but instead you will show to me and the country where you are living the same kindness that I have shown to you." ²⁴And Abraham said, "Yes, this I swear."

²⁵Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well that Abimelech's servants had seized. ²⁶Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this; you did not tell me and I only heard about it today." ²⁷Abraham then took sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech and the two men made a treaty. ²⁸Abraham set aside seven ewe lambs from the flock. ²⁹Abimelech said to him, "Why have you put aside these seven ewe lambs?" ³⁰Abraham replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as evidence that I dug this well." ³¹So the place was called Beersheba because the two men took an oath there. ³²After making the treaty at Beersheba, Abimelech went away with Phicol, the commander of his army, and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba and there he called on Yahweh, the everlasting God. ³⁴And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Sacrifice of Isaac

+ 22 ¹Some time later God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am." ²Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I shall point out to you."

³Abraham rose early next morning and saddled his donkey and took with him two of his young men and

19. 16, 10; 17, 20

22. 26, 15

31. 26, 33

34. 4, 26; 12, 8

1. Wis 10, 5; Sir 44, 20;

Heb 11, 17; James 2, 21; 1 M 2, 52

2. Mt 6, 7; Mt 10, 37

"The son of the slave girl will not inherit with the son of the free woman": Gal 4:28; 2 Cor 3:14.

+ God does not forget his friends but rather puts them to the test so that they can grow in faith. God saves his best gifts for those who remain faithful during times when he takes all hope away from them. In the course of his life Abraham had trusted in God's promises for his son. Now, would Abraham be willing to sacrifice his son and the promises? God has placed him on a road. What will Abraham do when the road appears closed?

After the test, Abraham would know that he loves his son in the same way God loves, because

he chose God over his son. We know without doubt that God approves our dedication to a particular task if on some occasion we have shown that we are willing to let go even of that task, if God wills it so.

Likewise, when our hope in God's promises to us seems to fall to pieces, we need a lot of love to keep on seeking his will.

Among the Canaanites, the sacrifice of sons was a religious custom: they thought that in order to be legitimate fathers, they had to sacrifice their first male child to God. Abraham surely approved of these customs and so the sacrifice of his son did not appear as something inhuman to him, as it does to us. Yet it meant the



his son Isaac. He chopped wood for the burnt offering and set out for the place to which God had directed him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance, ⁵and he said to the young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship and then we will come back to you."

⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. He carried in his hand the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, "Father!" ⁸And Abraham replied, "Yes, my son?" Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" Abraham replied, "God himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice."

They went on, the two of them together, ⁹until they came to the place to which God had directed them. When Abraham had built the altar and set the wood on it, he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the wood placed on the altar. ¹⁰He then stretched out his hand to seize the knife and slay his son. ¹¹But the Angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹²"Do not lay your hand on the boy; do not harm him, for now I know

that you fear God, and for me you have not held back your only son."

¹³Abraham looked around and saw behind him a ram caught by its horns in a bush. He offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴Abraham named the place 'The Lord will provide'. And the saying has lasted to this day.

¹⁵And the Angel of Yahweh called from heaven a second time, ¹⁶"By myself I have sworn, it is Yahweh who speaks, because you have done this and not held back your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the lands of their enemies. ¹⁸All the nations of the earth will be blessed through your descendants because you have obeyed me."

¹⁹So Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba and it was there that Abraham stayed.

²⁰Some time after this Abraham was told that Milcah too, had borne children for Nahor, Abraham's brother: ²¹Uz, the firstborn, Buz, his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, ²²Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel. ²³Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight children Milcah gave Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴He also had a concu-

6. In 19, 17 12. In 3, 16; Rom 8, 32 16. Heb 6, 13 18. 12, 2; 15, 5 21. Job 1, 1 23. 24, 15 16. Jer 32, 9

sacrifice of all his hopes. God asked for this sacrifice in such a demanding way so that Abraham could serve as the model for other fathers of whom God would ask the sacrifice of time and attention owed their own children in order to work with Christ and the church in the labour of saving their brothers. Surely, some of the apostles, like Peter, had to leave a wife and children, in order to follow Jesus (Mk 10:28).

When this text was written the sacrifice of a son did not seem so barbaric but later when believers among the Israelites had better-formed consciences, they thought such a sacrifice intolerable unless Isaac had consented: father and son united in the same sacrifice. Thus, they pre-figured Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. God the Father sacrificed his own Son to save sinners. Even if the terms sacrifice, suffering, love do not have the same meaning for God as they do for

us, we must not think that an indifferent uncompassionate God demands sacrifices of us of which he has no experience (Rom 5:8; 8:31).

But no explanation can soothe our wounded sensibilities at seeing how God imposes on Abraham the most costly sacrifice for a father. Is there no other way to bring us to perfect love? Though Abraham is a believer and God's friend, he is also a sinful man and only surgery can purify his heart. Here, it is Abraham who dies, not Isaac; and yet through his sacrifice, Abraham achieves life (see Lk 17:38; Rom 4:17; Heb 11:19).

He offered the ram in place of his son. The conclusion teaches us that God condemns human sacrifice. Prophets will have to struggle for centuries against this established custom of the sacrifice of children (see Kgs 16:34).



bine, named Reumah, who gave birth to Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

The tomb of Abraham and Sarah

■23 ¹Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years. ²She died at Kiriath-arba—that is Hebron—in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to weep and mourn for Sarah.

³Abraham left his dead one ⁴and spoke to the Hittites. ⁵"I am only a stranger among you; give me a burial place among you, so that I may bury my dead." ⁶The Hittites answered Abraham. ⁷"Hear us, my lord. You are God's prince among us; bury your dead in the best of our tombs; none of us would refuse you a tomb to bury your dead." ⁸Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land, ⁹and then spoke to them. ¹⁰"If you are willing that I bury my dead, hear me and plead with Ephron, the son of Zohar, ¹¹to give me the cave of Machpelah belonging to him at the edge of his field. For the full price and in your presence, let him give it to me for a burial place." ¹²Now Ephron was there sitting among the Hittites, and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all who were seated at the gate of the town. ¹³"No, my lord, listen! I give you the field and I give you the cave in it. In the presence of the sons of my people, I give it to you. Bury your dead there."

¹⁴Abraham bowed before the people of the land and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land. ¹⁵"Ah, if only you will listen to me, I will give you the price of the land. Accept it from me that I may bury my dead there." ¹⁶Ephron replied to Abraham, "My lord, hear me. ¹⁷Four hundred silver coins for a piece of land, is it not the right price for both of us? Bury your dead." ¹⁸Abraham agreed with Ephron and he weighed out for Ephron the silver he had insisted on in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred silver coins, in merchants' coins.

¹⁹And so Ephron's field in Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave in it,

and all the trees in the field, throughout its entire area, ²⁰was acquired by Abraham as his possession in the presence of the Hittites and of all who went in at the gate of their city. ²¹After this Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah. ²²The unused field and the cave that is in it were given to Abraham as a possession for a burying place by the Hittites.

Eliezer finds a wife for Isaac

◆24 ¹Abraham was now old and well on in years, and Yahweh had blessed him in every way. ²Abraham said to his senior servant, who was his steward, "Put your hand under my thigh and ³you will swear to me by Yahweh, God of heaven and earth, that you will not choose a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom we live; ⁴rather it is to my country and my kinsfolk that you will go to choose a wife for my son, Isaac."

⁵The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not want to follow me to this country. In that case should I take your son to the country you came from?" ⁶Abraham said to him, "In no way will you take my son back. ⁷For Yahweh, God of heaven and God of earth, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, spoke to me and swore to me that he would give this country to my race. He will send his angel before you, that you may find a wife for my son. ⁸But if the woman is unwilling to follow you, you will be free of this oath. In

2. 47, 29

3. Dt. 3, 4

■ Abraham travels throughout Palestine without ever having a place of his own (6-7:9); he holds everything as a promise and that is why he is the model for believers who, until death, place their hopes in the promises of God. However, Sarah's death gives Abraham the opportunity, at least, to buy a place for her burial.

◆ You will not choose a wife from among the Canaanites for my son. Isaac is the "son of the promise" and faithfulness to this promise is Abraham's great concern. The marriage of his

son to a Canaanite woman, whose people are accustomed to pagan worship, would endanger this faithfulness.

To belong to Abraham's family and to become the mother of the chosen people, Rebekah must also give up her home and her land.

Let her be the one you have chosen for Isaac. God guides those who seek to do his will above all when they marry; he will enable them to meet the person best suited to help them best realize this desire. This is the lesson in the book of Tobit.



any case you are not to take my son down there." ⁹ So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham, his master, and swore to him that he would do it.

¹⁰ The servant took ten of his master's camels and set out taking with him something of the best from all that his master owned. He rose and went off in the direction of Aram Naharaim, towards the town of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel outside the town, near the well, in the evening when the women go to draw water.

¹² The steward then prayed, "Yahweh, God of my master Abraham, be with me and show your loving kindness to Abraham, my master. ¹³ See, I am standing at the spring while the girls of the city are coming to draw water. ¹⁴ Now I will ask them like this: 'Please tilt your pitcher that I may drink.' Now, the first girl who will say: 'Drink and I will water your camels as well'; let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. In this way I shall know you have shown kindness to my master."

¹⁵ He had not finished praying when Rebekah came out. She was the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah wife of Abraham's brother, Nahor. She had a pitcher on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The girl was very beautiful and a virgin for no man had lain with her. She went down to the well, filled her pitcher and came up again. ¹⁷ The servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher." ¹⁸ She said, "Drink, my lord!" and at once lowering her pitcher to her hand she let him drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished letting him drink, she said, "I am going to water your camels as well, until they have had enough." ²⁰ She hurried to empty

her pitcher into the trough, and then ran again to draw water for all his camels, ²¹ while the man watched in silence to find out whether Yahweh was making his journey successful or not.

²² So when the camels had finished drinking the man took out a gold nosering weighing half a shekel and for her arms two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. ²³ He then said, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me! Is there room in your father's house where we can spend the night?"

²⁴ She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son Milcah bore to Nahor." ²⁵ She continued, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, and room for you to spend the night."

²⁶ Then the man knelt and worshipped Yahweh ²⁷ saying, "Blessed be Yahweh, God of my master Abraham, who has not stopped showing kindness and faithfulness to my master. Yahweh has guided me to the house of my master's brother." ²⁸ The girl ran to her mother's house and related all these things. ²⁹ Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban and Laban ran out to the man, near the spring. ³⁰ As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, as soon as he heard his sister Rebekah saying, "This is what the man said to me...", he came towards Abraham's steward who was standing near the camels by the spring. ³¹ He said to him, "Come in, you who are blessed by Yahweh. Why do you stay outside? I have prepared the house and there is room for your camels." ³² So the man entered the house and unloaded the camels. Straw and fodder were given to the camels and water to wash the feet of the man and of those who were with him. ³³ Then they gave him food to eat, but he said, "I won't eat until I



have said what I have to say!" Laban said, "Speak!"

³⁴ Then he spoke like this, "I am the servant of Abraham. Yahweh has greatly blessed my master and he has become very rich. ³⁵ Yahweh has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and donkeys. ³⁶ Now Sarah, my master's wife, bore him a son in her old age; ³⁷ so my master has given him all he owns and he made me swear an oath saying: 'You will not choose a wife for my son from the daughters of these Canaanites in whose country I live; ³⁸ rather you will go to my father's house, to my kinsfolk and there you will choose a wife for my son.' ³⁹ I then said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not agree to come with me!' ⁴⁰ And his reply was: 'Yahweh, in whose presence I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey successful. You will choose a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father's house.' ⁴¹ This is what you have to do to be released from your oath. 'Whether they refuse you or not you will be free of the oath'.

⁴² So on arriving at the spring, I prayed, "Yahweh, God of my master, Abraham, if you wish my journey to be successful, let it happen like this: ⁴³ as I stand by the spring a girl will come to draw water and I will say to her: Let me drink a little from your pitcher. ⁴⁴ If she answers me: Yes, drink, and I will draw water for your camels as well, let it be that she is the wife Yahweh has chosen for my master's son.' I was still thinking this over, ⁴⁵ when Rebekah came out with a pitcher on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please, let me drink!' ⁴⁶ She immediately lowered the pitcher and said, 'Drink! I will water your camels as well!' I drank and she watered the camels. ⁴⁷ I questioned her saying, 'Who is your father?' And she said, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor and Milcah.' I then put this ring through her nostril and bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I knelt in worship and blessed Yahweh, God of my master, Abraham, who had led me to choose the daughter of my master's brother for his son. ⁴⁹ Now let me know whether you intend to show kindness and faithfulness to my master; if not, tell me and I shall know which way to turn."

⁵⁰ Laban and Bethuel replied, "This is God's doing. It is not for us to decide either way. ⁵¹ Here is Rebekah, take her and go. Let her become the wife of your master's son as Yahweh

has directed." ⁵² When Abraham's servant heard this answer, he bowed to the ground before Yahweh. ⁵³ He then took the gold and silver jewelry as well as the clothes and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave costly gifts to her brother and mother. ⁵⁴ They ate and drank, he and his companions, and spent the night there.

When they were up next morning, the servant said, "Let me return to my master." ⁵⁵ Rebekah's mother and brother replied, "Let the girl remain with us for a few days, about ten. After that she may go." ⁵⁶ He said, "Do not delay me; since Yahweh has made my journey successful, let me leave and return to my master." ⁵⁷ They then said, "Call the girl and ask her about it." ⁵⁸ They called and questioned Rebekah, "Do you want to leave with this man?" She said, "I will go." ⁵⁹ So they let Rebekah, their sister, go with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ They blessed Rebekah with these words,

"Sister of ours, may you increase to thousands upon thousands, may your descendants take possession of the cities of their enemies."

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her maids got ready, mounted the camels and followed Abraham's servant. So it was that he departed bringing Rebekah.

⁶² Now Isaac had come from the well of Lahai-roi, for he was living in the Negeb. ⁶³ As Isaac went out in the early evening to meditate in the field, he looked up and saw camels coming. ⁶⁴ Rebekah also looked up and when she saw Isaac she alighted from her camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, "Who is this man in the field coming to meet us?" He replied, "It is my master!" She then covered her face with her veil. ⁶⁶ The servant related to Isaac all that he had done ⁶⁷ and Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of Sarah, his



mother. He made her his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Abraham and his descendants

+ 25 ¹Abraham married another wife named Keturah. ²She love him Zimram, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. ³Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan, and the sons of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites, and the Leummmites. ⁴The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

⁵Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. ⁶To the sons of his concubines Abraham gave presents, and as long as he lived he sent them away from his son Isaac, to the land of the east.

⁷Abraham had lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Then at a good old age Abraham breathed his last, an old man, after a full span of years, and was gathered to his ancestors. ⁹His sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave at Machpelah, ¹⁰in the field of Ephron the Hittite, son of Zohar. This was the field near Mamre that Abraham bought from the Hittites. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were buried there. ¹¹After Abraham's death God blessed his son Isaac who lived near the well of Lahai-roi.

¹²These are the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian.

¹³These are the names of the sons of Ishmael in order of their birth. Ishmael's firstborn was Nebaioth, and after him Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. ¹⁶These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, according to their settlements and camps, twelve tribal princes. ¹⁷Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people.

¹⁸His descendants lived in the territory stretching from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt in the direction of Assyria. They have been fighting continually among themselves.

¹⁹This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. ²⁰Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, the Aramean from Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean.

The birth of Esau and Jacob

²¹Isaac prayed to Yahweh for his wife, because she could not have children. Yahweh heard Isaac's prayer and Rebekah, his wife, conceived. ²²As the children struggled together within her, she said, "If it is like this, why do I continue to live?" She went to consult Yahweh, ²³and Yahweh

2. Ex 2. 15	22. 38. 27	23. Mal 1. 2: Rom 9. 12
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+ Medan, Midian, Sheba, Dedan: these are names of tribes and peoples of Arabia. Since the Israelites considered them their relatives by race and language, they wanted them to be Abraham's descendants, also.

• At the beginning of chapter 12, we saw how the authors of Genesis depicted their ancestor Abraham as the father and model of believers. Yet, the Israelites preferred to call themselves "sons of Jacob." They portrayed him with more human and less idealized traits. If, indeed, they looked upon Abraham as a model, they recognized themselves better in Jacob, a clever and somewhat tricky man, though very firm in his faith.

God had committed himself to Abraham's descendants, but he freely picked the one among them who would benefit from the promises. The promises did not go to Isaac's elder son who, according to custom, should have inherited almost all the father's possessions.

There are two nations in your womb (v. 23). We must not forget that in this story, each character represents some people bearing the same name. Just as Jacob-Israel was consid-

ered the ancestor of the Israelites, so Esau or Edom (25:31) was considered the ancestor of the Edomites, neighbors and rivals of the Israelites.

These chapters show the freedom of God who chooses these people before those to be the instrument of his salvation; also, among the Israelites God chooses whom he wants to put in charge of a more or less transcendent mission.

In this chapter we are given three reasons for the rejection of Esau:

- A passage in chapter 25 shows Esau to be guilty: he himself scorned his sacred rights as eldest son.
- Another passage, 26:34, mentions his marriage to foreign women.
- A third passage (in chapter 27) shows how God takes advantage of one of Jacob's tricks to achieve his goals. The Israelites were not that scrupulous about lying. For them Jacob's trick only showed that he was determined to get God's promises by any means, and in so doing, he becomes deserving of these promises.

In Hebrews 12:16 Esau will be presented as an example of a godless person, one who sells



said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will be born of you; one nation will be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger."

²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first to be born was red and his whole body was like a hairy garment, so they called him Esau. ²⁶ Then his brother was born and his hand had gripped Esau's heel so he was named Jacob. *Isaac was sixty at the time of their birth.*

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country; Jacob was a quiet man living in tents. ²⁸ Isaac who had a liking for game loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹ Once when Jacob was making a stew, Esau came back from the country and he was famished; ³⁰ and he said to Jacob, "Let me have some of that red stew, for I am famished." That is why he was also called Edom. ³¹ Jacob said, "First sell me your right as the firstborn." ³² Esau said, "Since I am to die soon, what good is my right as the firstborn to me?" ³³ Then Jacob said, "Give me your oath first." So he

swore to him and sold his firstborn-right to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave him bread and the lentil stew. Esau ate and drank and then got up and went his way. So it was that Esau thought nothing of his right as the firstborn.

Events in Isaac's life

■ 26 ¹ There was a famine in the land - a second one after the famine that had taken place in the time of Abraham - and Isaac went to Gerar, the land of Abimelech, king of the Philistines. ² For Yahweh appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land I shall tell you of. ³ Remain in this land, and I will be with you and I will bless you. I will give all these lands to you and your race, and I shall keep the oath I swore to your father, Abraham. For I told him: ⁴ I will make your descendants as many as the stars in the heavens, and to them I will give all these lands; and through your descendants all nations in the world will be blessed ⁵ because you were obedient and kept my charge, my commandments, my decrees and my laws."

⁶ So Isaac stayed in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of that place questioned him about his wife, he replied, "She is my sister." He would not say, "She is my wife", for he was afraid and he thought "The men of this place might kill me because of Rebekah who is very beautiful."

⁸ When Isaac had been there a long time, it happened that Abimelech, looking out of a window, saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. ⁹ Abimelech called Isaac and said, "So she really is your wife! Why did you tell me that

26. Hos 12, 4 28. 27, 3 31. Dt 21, 17 34. Is 22, 13; Heb 12, 16 6. 22, 18

God's blessing for a meal. We can easily think of so many men who - for a glass of wine or some privilege - sell their rights (e.g. by ceding their labor union's freedom) or sacrifice their children's future.

■ About verses 7-11, see 20:2.

In chapters 12-33 we become acquainted with two realities in the lives of the patriarchs: they are nomads who live in tents; they roam in search of water and dig wells (see 21:21-34).

They live in camping tents, that is to say, as transients without a permanent home. The Bible appreciates the work of men who build something lasting in this world. Those who found a home, plant a vineyard or build a house are praised (Dt 20:5-7) since all of this is connected with the creative mission of men and women. Yet, the Bible also remembers the nomadic life of Israel's forefathers as an ideal which should not be lost (Jer 35). The believer does not become attached to anything in this

world...to family, homeland or lifestyle. He pitches his tent wherever he can expand his experience but he does not settle in any place. Living as a stranger in this world, it will be easier for him to encounter God who also passes as a stranger among us (in Jn 1:14 the exact translation should be: *the Word pitched his tent among us*). See Ex 33:7; 40:34; 2 Sam 7:7; Sir 24:14; 2 Cor 5:1-4; Pt 2:11.

The patriarchs *dig wells*. They do not find fountains of spring water in the desert, instead they must painfully dig the wells which make the desert fertile and provide drink for their flocks. At times the water runs out; at other times, the Philistines plug up their wells with dirt. All of this represents human effort to find wisdom; people are often left thirsty and there are always those who muddy the fountains of wisdom. And so people will run from one well to another until Christ gives them the spring water *springing from the Rock* which is himself. See Ex 17:1; Jn 4:5-10; 7:38; 1 Cor 10:4; Jer 2:13.

she was your sister?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought that they might kill me on her account." ¹⁰ Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of my people could have slept with your wife and you would have brought guilt on us." ¹¹ So Abimelech gave an order to all the people: "Whoever molests this man or his wife will be put to death."

¹² Isaac sowed crops on this land and that same year he harvested a hundredfold. Yahweh blessed him ¹³ and he prospered. He continued to prosper until he was very rich. ¹⁴ He had flocks and herds and many servants so that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ All the wells dug by his father's servants in Abraham's time were stopped up by the Philistines and filled with earth. ¹⁶ Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us for you are more powerful than we are." ¹⁷ So Isaac left that place and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there.

¹⁸ Isaac opened up again the wells that had been dug in the time of his father, Abraham, and that the Philistines had blocked up after Abraham's death. He gave these wells the names his father had given them. ¹⁹ Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered there a fresh water spring. ²⁰ The herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herdsmen saying, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they *squabbled* about it. ²¹ They dug another well and there was *quarrelling* about that as well, so he called it Sitnah. ²² He moved away from there and dug another well and as no one quarrelled over it, he called it Rehoboth saying, "Now the Lord has *made room* for us, we shall prosper in the land."

²³ From there Isaac went to Beersheba, ²⁴ and Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham, your father; do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bless you and increase your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham. ²⁵ Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of Yahweh. It was there he pitched his tent and there his servants dug a well.

²⁶ Abimelech went to him from Gerar together with Ahuzzath, his friend, and Phicol, the commander of his forces. ²⁷ Isaac said to him, "Why have you come after me seeing that you hate me and have sent me away?" ²⁸ They answered, "We have clearly seen that Yahweh is with you, so we said: Let peace be sworn between us and you, and let us make a treaty: ²⁹ you will do us no harm, just as we have not interfered with you, but always treated you

well and sent you away in peace. We know that you have Yahweh's blessing."

³⁰ Isaac then made a feast for them and they ate and drank. ³¹ Next morning they rose early and swore an oath to each other. Isaac then set them on their way and they left him in peace.

³² That day Isaac's servants came and told him of the well they had dug: "We have found water." ³³ He called the well Shibeah and that is why the name of the town has been Beersheba to this day.

³⁴ When Esau was forty, he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon, the Hittite. ³⁵ They made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

Jacob obtains the blessing by deceit

27 ¹ When Isaac was old and his eyes so weak that he could no longer see, he called Esau, his older son, and said to him, "My son." "Here I am," he answered. ² Isaac continued, "You see I am old and I don't know when I shall die; ³ so take your weapons, your bow and arrow, go out into the country and hunt some game for me. ⁴ Then prepare some of the savoury food I like and bring it to me so that I may eat and give you my blessing before I die."

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau went into the country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father talking to your brother Esau: ⁷ Bring me some game and prepare food for me that I may eat and bless you before Yahweh before I die." ⁸ Now my son, listen and do what I command you. ⁹ Go to the flock and bring me two fine kids so that I can prepare for your father the food that he likes. ¹⁰ You will bring it to your father and he will eat it and give you his blessing before he dies."

¹¹ Jacob said to Rebekah, "My brother Esau is a hairy man and I am

16. Ex 1, 9

22. Dt 28, 4; Lev 26, 3

25. 8, 20; 4, 26; 12, 7

28. 39, 3; 1 S 18, 14

30. 31, 54; Ex 24, 11

34. 36, 1

8. 1 K I 16

smooth-skinned. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me and I will seem to be tricking him and so bring a curse on myself instead of a blessing." ¹³ But his mother said, "Let the curse fall on me, my son! Only do what I tell you; go and get the kids for me." ¹⁴ So he went and got them and took them to his mother to prepare food that his father like. ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best clothes of her elder son Esau that she had in the house and put them on Jacob, her younger son. ¹⁶ With the goatskin she covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ and she handed to him the bread and food she had prepared.

¹⁸ He went to his father and said, 'Father!' He answered, "Yes, my son, who is it?" ¹⁹ and Jacob said to his father, "It is Esau, your firstborn; I have done what you told me to do; come, sit up and eat my game so that you may give me your blessing." ²⁰ Isaac said, "How quick you have been my son!" Jacob said, "Yahweh, your God, guided me." ²¹ Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near and let me feel you, my son, and know that it is you, Esau my son, or not."

²² When Jacob drew near to Isaac, his father felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³ He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like the hands of Esau his brother and so he blessed him. ²⁴ He asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" and Jacob answered, "I am." ²⁵ Isaac said, "Bring me some of your game, my son, so that I may eat and give you my blessing." So Jacob brought it to him and he ate. And he brought him wine and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." ²⁷ So Jacob came near and kissed him.

Isaac then caught the smell of his clothes and blessed him, saying,

"The smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed.

²⁸ May God give you of the dew of heaven;

and of the richness of the earth;
and abundance of grain and wine.

²⁹ Let peoples serve you
and nations bow down before you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and let your mother's sons
bow down to you.

Cursed be everyone that curses you
and blessed be everyone
that blesses you!"

³⁰ When Isaac had finished blessing him and Jacob had just left Isaac's room, Esau came in from hunting. ³¹ He also prepared food and brought it to his father and said to him, "Father, sit up and eat the game your son has prepared, so that you may give me your blessing." ³² Isaac said, "Who are you?" "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." ³³ Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it all before you came and I blessed him and he will be blessed."

³⁴ On hearing his father's words, Esau gave a loud and bitter cry and said, "Bless me, too, father." ³⁵ But Isaac said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." ³⁶ Esau said, "Is it because he is called Jacob that he has supplanted me twice? First he took my birthright and now he has taken my blessing." Then he asked, "Haven't you kept a blessing for me?" ³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, "I have made him your lord. I have given him all his brothers as servants; I have provided him with grain and wine. What can I do for you, my son?"



³⁸ Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing? Father, bless me, too." Then Esau wept aloud.

³⁹ Isaac then gave him this answer,

"Your dwelling place shall be far away from the richness of the earth, away from the dew of heaven above.

⁴⁰ You shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother;

but when you win your freedom you will throw off his yoke from your neck."

Jacob flees to the house of Laban

⁴¹ Now Esau continued to hate his brother because of the blessing his father had given him and he thought to himself, "The time of mourning for my father is near; I shall then kill my brother Jacob." ⁴² When Rebekah was told what her elder son had said, she sent and called her younger son, Jacob, and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. ⁴³ Now my son, listen to me and flee to Laban, my brother, in Haran.

⁴⁴ You will stay with him for a time ⁴⁵ until your brother's fury has cooled; and when he has forgotten his anger and what you did to him, I will send someone to bring you back. Why should I lose both of you on the same day?"

⁴⁶ Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a woman from this land, a Hittite like these, what value is there left in life for me?"

28 ¹ Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him and commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. ² Go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father and choose a wife for yourself from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. ³ May God Almighty bless you and make you increase to become a group of nations. ⁴ May he grant you and your descendants the blessings of Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you live now, and that Yahweh gave to Abraham. ⁵ Isaac sent Jacob away and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, the son of Bethuel, the Aramean, brother to Rebekah.

⁶ Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to choose a wife for himself, and in blessing him had commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman." And in obedience to his father and mother, Jacob had gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸ So Esau understood how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac. ⁹ So he went to Ishmael and chose a wife for himself besides those he already had - Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham and sister of Nebaioth.

Jacob's dream

+ ¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. ¹¹ When he reached a certain place and since the sun had set, he spent the night there. He took one of the stones that were there and using

42. Wis 10, 10

1. 26, 35; 27, 43;

Ezr 10; Ne 13, 23

12. Jn 1, 51

+ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. Jacob goes to the land of his forefathers in search of work and a wife. On the road, he has a vision in which God renews his Covenant with him.

Unlike Abraham, whom God called when he was already old and who knew the value of life, Jacob is a man who becomes aware of his vocation gradually. First, he buys the rights of the firstborn from Esau whom he has judged and considered irresponsible; but he still does not know the price of God's blessing to his fathers. Then, his mother has to give him courage so that he can take the risk of stealing the blessing. He lets her persuade him and only afterwards does he understand the consequences of his action: he has to escape in order to save his life.

But, just when Jacob has to face the hazardous life of a foreigner and a fugitive, he meets God and for the first time he becomes conscious of his own responsibility: he is the bearer of God's promises to the world. People are responsible when they realize that they are accountable to others and they must answer for their actions.

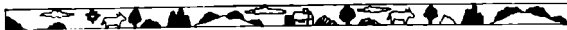
Jacob understands that he will be accountable to the God who has chosen him.

Yahweh was in this place! Jacob, alone and defenseless, goes to sleep near a city inhabited by strangers. But God renews with him the promises made to his fathers and assures him of his protection: some day this land will be his.

This is the gate to heaven. Jacob has seen the heavens open and the angels of God forming a living bridge between heaven and earth: this is an image of the communion with God which people seek in vain with their various religions. These may give us some external knowledge of God and satisfy our religious instincts. But even if he interiorizes his search for God, sinful man cannot find him within himself: in a direct and personal encounter.

The only bridge between God and men is Christ: Son of God become man, both God and man. Later, in referring to this text (Jn 1:51) Jesus will declare that he is the Gate to heaven, because in him, God has embraced humanity.

He called it Bethel. Here, as in previous chapters, we find popular legends. Bethel!



it as a pillow, he lay down to sleep.

¹²While Jacob was sleeping, he had a dream in which a ladder stood on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and on it were angels of God going up and coming down. ¹³And Yahweh was standing there near him and said, "I am Yahweh, the God of your father, Abraham, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you sleep, I give to you and your descendants.

¹⁴Your descendants will be numerous like the specks of dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and the east, to the north and the south. Through you and your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. ¹⁵See, I am with you and I will keep you safe wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land and not leave you until I have done what I promised."

¹⁶Jacob woke from his dream and said, "Truly Yahweh was in this place and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷He was afraid and said, "How full of awe is his place! It is nothing less than a house of God; it is the Gate to heaven!"

¹⁸Then Jacob rose early and took

the stone he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He named that place Bethel although before that it was called Luz. ²⁰Then Jacob made a vow, "If Yahweh will be with me and keep me safe during this journey I am making, if he gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear, ²¹and if I return in peace to my father's house, then Yahweh will be my God. ²²This stone which I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me, I will give back a tenth."

Jacob arrives at Laban's home

■ 29 ¹Jacob set out and came to the land of the people of the east. ²There he saw a well and lying beside the well were three flocks of sheep, for it was at this well that the flocks were watered, and a large stone covered the mouth of the well. ³Then when all the flocks gathered there, the shepherds rolled away the stone from the opening of the well, watered their flocks and replaced the stone at the mouth of the well. ⁴Jacob said to them, "Brothers, where are you from?" "We are from Haran," they replied. ⁵He then said, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's son?" "Yes, we know him," they replied. ⁶And Jacob asked, "Is he well?" "Yes, he is well," they said, "and here is Rachel, his daughter, coming with the sheep!" ⁷Jacob then said, "Look! The sun is still

13. 12, 3; 15, 5; 26, 4

17. Ex 3, 5; Is 6, 5

18. 35, 14

19. Hos 12, 5; Jdg 1, 22

20. 31, 13

22. 14, 20; Am 4, 4

2. 24, 11; Ex 2, 16

6. 24, 15

means the house of God and the biblical author attributes to Jacob this naming of the place as well as the custom of paying at the temple of Bethel.

DREAMS

All of us are impressed by dreams and we try to interpret them. Most of the time they do not announce anything but simply indicate what is going on within us, in our subconscious and disclose a bit of what we cannot now clearly about our own spirit. Psychology may use dreams to discover significant experiences or wounds suffered in the past.

Dreams may also indicate and express premonitions and intuitions. The Bible shows us God (or his angels) using dreams to communicate with us. In this, God accepts man as he is and takes into account his way of thinking.

When God intervenes through a dream, we know it by the consequences. Jesus says "The

tree is known by its fruits." In such cases, it is God himself who gives the interpretation: we do not need to resort to anyone and God fills us with a sense of complete peace.

People whose faith has been purified and formed cannot attribute to dreams the same importance given them by the primitive people of biblical times. We also know that the Spirit of Darkness can disguise himself as an angel (2 Cor 2:10). When, in our days, large segments of humankind tend to lead their lives according to dreams, it has nothing to do with faith. In the very Bible itself, besides the condemnations of Dt 18:10, we can also read in Jer 29:8 his attack directed against those who induce the dreams they wish to have. See also Sir 24:1.

■ Chapters 29-31 present Jacob as an astute and enterprising worker who trusts in God's promises. He succeeds in the end, less because of his own efforts than because of God's blessing on his fathers.



high; it's not yet time for the flocks to be gathered together. Water the sheep and let them graze." ⁸ But they said, "We cannot do that until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled away from the mouth of the well; it's then we water the sheep."

⁹ He was still speaking when Rachel arrived with her father's flock, for she looked after them. ¹⁰ As soon as Jacob saw Rachel he went forward and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and then watered Laban's flock. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud.

¹² Jacob told Rachel he was her father's kinsman and Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father. ¹³ As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob being his sister's son, he ran to meet him; and after embracing and kissing him he brought him into his house. Jacob told Laban all that had happened ¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Truly you are my bone and flesh!" And Jacob stayed there a month with him.

Jacob's two marriages

¹⁵ Laban said to Jacob, "Even if you are my kinsman, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me, what wages do you want?"

¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were weak but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel and he said, "I will work for you for seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better for me to give her to you than to any other man; stay with me."

²⁰ To win Rachel, Jacob worked for seven years which seemed to him only a few days, because he loved her so much. ²¹ Jacob then said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for I have served my time and I want to lie with her." ²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and gave a feast. ²³ But when night came he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob and he lay with her. ²⁴ Laban gave his slave girl Zilpah to Leah to be her maid.

²⁵ When morning came, there was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What have you done to me? Haven't I worked with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?" ²⁶ Laban said, "It is not our custom to give the younger daughter before the firstborn. ²⁷ As soon as the marriage week is over, I will give you my younger daughter as well, but you must work with me for another seven years. ²⁸ Jacob agreed to this and when he completed

the week with Leah, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

²⁹ Laban gave Rachel his slave girl, Bilhah, to be her maidservant. ³⁰ So Jacob slept with Rachel as well, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he continued working for Laban another seven years.

Jacob's children

³¹ As Yahweh saw that Leah was not loved, he let her have children; but Rachel was barren. ³² Leah gave birth to a child and named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has seen my affliction; my husband is sure to love me now." ³³ She gave birth to another son and said, "Yahweh saw that I was neglected and has given me this son as well"; and she called him Simeon. ³⁴ Again she gave birth to a son and said, "This time my husband will be united to me because I have borne him three sons." That is why he was called Levi. ³⁵ She again gave birth to a son and said: "This time I will praise Yahweh." That is why she named him Judah. After that she had no more children.

30 ¹ When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister, and so she said to Jacob, "Give me sons or I shall die." ² Jacob became angry and said to her, "Is it my fault that God has deprived you of children?" ³ She then said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; sleep with her so that she may give birth on my knees; so the child will be mine." ⁴ And she gave Bilhah her servant as wife to Jacob. ⁵ She became pregnant and bore him a son. ⁶ Rachel then said, "God has done me justice! He has heard my prayer and given me a son. That is why she named him Dan." ⁷ Bilhah, Rachel's servant, bore a second son to Jacob. ⁸ And Rachel said, "I have had a mighty struggle with my sister and I have won!" And so she named her son Naphtali.

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant, Zilpah, and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰ Zilpah gave birth to a son for Jacob. ¹¹ Leah said "How fortunate!" and named him Gad. ¹² Leah's servant bore a second son to Jacob. ¹³ Leah said, "How happy I am! Women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

¹⁴ At the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben went out to the fields and found some mandrake plants which he brought to his mother, Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." ¹⁵ But Leah replied, "Isn't it enough for you to have taken



my husband? Now you want to take my son's mandrakes as well!" Rachel then said, "He will sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

¹⁶ In the evening when Jacob came in from the fields Leah went to meet him and said, "You will sleep with me tonight for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes!" So he slept with her that night. ¹⁷ Yahweh heard Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Leah said, "God has given me my reward because I gave my maidservant to my husband." She named the child Issachar.

¹⁹ Leah bore another son to Jacob. ²⁰ Then she said, "God has offered me a beautiful gift; this time my husband will honour me for I have given him six children." She named the child Zebulun. ²¹ She later gave birth to a daughter and called her Dinah.

²² Then Yahweh remembered Rachel and let her have a child. ²³ She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. "Yahweh has taken away my shame," she said. ²⁴ And she called the child Joseph saying, "May Yahweh give me another son."

Other legends

²⁵ After Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Let me go, so that I may return to my homeland. ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, and let me go, for you know how well I have served you." ²⁷ Laban said, "If I have won your friendship... I have learned from signs that Yahweh has blessed me because of you." ²⁸ He then added, "Say what you want for wages and I will pay you." ²⁹ Jacob said, "You know how well I have served you and how your cattle have prospered with me. ³⁰ For you had little when I came, but since I have been with you there has been a considerable increase and Yahweh has blessed you. But now, when am I to do something for my own household?" Laban asked, "what shall I give you?"

Jacob replied, "You will give me nothing, but if you do for me what I ask, I will continue to pasture and look after your flock. ³¹ Today I shall go through your flock removing from it every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; these shall be my wages. ³² My honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages. Any goat among my herd that is not spotted or speckled, any lamb found among the sheep in my possession that is not black will be counted as stolen." Laban said, "Agreed, it will be as you say."

³³ That same day Laban put aside the he-goats that were streaked, every one that had

white on it, and all the black sheep. These he handed over to his sons. ³⁴ and he put a distance of a three days' journey between himself and Jacob. So Jacob looked after the rest of Laban's flock.

³⁷ Jacob then gathered fresh branches of poplar, almond and plane. He peeled white streaks in them, letting the white of the stems be seen. ³⁸ Then he placed the branches he had peeled in front of the channels of the watering troughs where the animals came to drink and where they could be clearly seen by the animals. And as they mated there in front of the branches when they came to drink, ³⁹ the animals produced streaked, spotted and speckled young. ⁴⁰ He put the sheep apart but made the rest face the streaked and dark coloured animals that belonged to Laban. In this way he built up droves of his own and did not add them to Laban's flock. ⁴¹ Whenever the stronger of the ewes were breeding, Jacob put the branches in the channels in front of the eyes of the ewes so that they would mate there among the branches. ⁴² But for the feebler ewes he did not put them there so that the feebler were for Laban and the more robust for Jacob. ⁴³ In this way he became extremely rich with a great number of sheep, maidservants and menservants, camels and donkeys.

Jacob returns to his land

31 ¹ Jacob learned that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned, and it is at our father's expense that he has accumulated this fortune." ² Jacob understood from Laban's expression that his attitude towards him was no longer the same.

³ Then Yahweh said to Jacob, "Go back to your homeland, the country of your kinsmen. I will be with you." ⁴ Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field where his flocks were. ⁵ There he said to them, "I see that your father no longer looks kindly on me, but the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ You yourselves know that I have served your father with all my strength. ⁷ But your father has not been straight with me, changing my wages ten times. But God has not allowed him to do me harm. ⁸ Whenever he said: 'The spotted ones will be your wages,' then all the ewes had spotted lambs. And whenever he said: 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the ewes produced streaked lambs.

⁹ It is God who has taken your father's livestock in that way and has given it to me. ¹⁰ For, in the breeding season, when I was looking up, I saw in a dream that the rams mating with the ewes were streaked, spotted or speckled.

¹¹ And the angel in the dream said to me: 'Jacob.' 'Here I am,' I replied. ¹² He then said: 'Look up and see that all the rams mating with the ewes are streaked, spotted or speckled. I have seen all that Laban has done to you.' ¹³ I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel where you anointed a pillar and vowed to me by oath. Now get ready, leave this country and return to the land of your birth."

¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Have we still any share in the inheritance of our father's estate?" ¹⁵ Haven't we been regarded by him as foreigners since he has sold us, and well and truly used up our money? ¹⁶ Surely all the fortune that God has taken from our father belongs to us and to our children. So do then all that God has told you."

¹⁷ So Jacob got ready and put his children and his wives on camels. ¹⁸ He also took with him all his livestock and all that he had accumulated (the livestock he had acquired at Paddan-aram) to return to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. ¹⁹ In that moment Rachel took advantage of Laban. While he was shearing his sheep she stole her father's family gods.

²⁰ So Jacob tricked Laban in not letting him know he was running away. ²¹ He fled with all he had, and after crossing the river Euphrates he made for the hill country of Gilead.

²² Three days later Laban heard that Jacob had fled. ²³ Taking his brothers with him, he followed Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴ God appeared to Laban in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything – either good or bad – to Jacob." ²⁵ Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him. Laban and his brothers also encamped on the hills of Gilead. ²⁶ Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, tricking me and carrying my daughters off like prisoners of war?"

²⁷ Why did you run away secretly and cheat me? Why didn't you tell me? I could have sent you off with joy and singing and the music of tambourine and harp. ²⁸ You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and daughters goodbye. You have done a foolish thing ²⁹ and I have power to harm you, but last night the God of your father warned me saying: 'Be careful not say anything – good or evil – to Jacob.' ³⁰ Now if you have gone off because you were planning to return to your father's house, why did you steal my gods?"

³¹ Jacob replied to Laban, "It was because I was afraid you would take your daughters from me! ³² But whoever is found in possession of your gods will not live. In the presence

of our relations see for yourself if anything that belongs to you is here with me and, if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

³³ Laban entered Jacob's tent, then Leah's and then the tent of the two maidservants, but he found nothing. When Laban came out of Leah's tent, he entered the tent of Rachel.

³⁴ Rachel had taken the gods, but put them into the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent but did not find them. ³⁵ Rachel said to her father, "Do not be angry with me, my lord, if I do not stand in your presence, for I am having my period." So he searched but did not find the gods.

³⁶ Then Jacob became angry and rebuked Laban. "What is my crime?" he asked him. "What sin of mine makes you hound me down?" ³⁷ Now that you have searched through all my belongings, have you found anything that belongs to your household? If so, let it be seen here in the presence of your family and mine and let them judge between the two of us.

³⁸ During the twenty years I have been with you, your ewes and your she-goats have not miscarried and I haven't eaten any of the rams from your flocks. ³⁹ I haven't brought you any animal torn by a wild beast. I suffered the loss and you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. ⁴⁰ During the day I have been stifled by the heat and at night I have suffered from the cold, and sleep has left my eyes. ⁴¹ It's twenty years that I've been with you. I worked fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and ten times you have altered my wages. ⁴² If the God of my father Abraham and the Fearsome God of Isaac had not been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands and last night he passed sentence."

⁴³ Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, these sheep are my sheep and all that you see are mine. How can I harm today these daughters of mine or their children? ⁴⁴ Come now, let us make a treaty, you and me, and let it be a witness between us."

⁴⁵ Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ He then said to his kinsmen, "Collect stones." So they gathered stones and piled them up, and they ate there by the pile. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, and Jacob called it, Galeed. ⁴⁸ Laban said, "This pile of stones is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed; ⁴⁹ and it was also known as Mizpah because Laban had said,

"May Yahweh watch between me and you when we are no longer in sight of each other.⁵⁰ If you harm my daughters or take other wives besides my daughters, even though no man is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me."

⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Here is the pile and the pillar which I have set between you and me.⁵² This pile and this pillar will witness that I will not pass beyond this pile to harm you and that you will not pass beyond this pile and pillar to harm me.⁵³ May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us!" So Jacob swore by the Fearful God of his father Isaac.⁵⁴ Jacob also offered a sacrifice on the mountain and invited his brothers to the meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

♦ 32 ¹ Next morning Laban rose early and, after kissing his sons and daughters, he blessed them and left for home.

² As for Jacob, he went on his way and met Angels of God.³ On seeing them Jacob exclaimed, "This is *God's camp*," and he named the place Mahanaim.⁴ And going on his way, he sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

Jacob's struggle with God

⁵ Jacob told Esau these words, "I have been staying with Laban until now. I have oxen, asses, flocks, men-servants and maidservants. I have sent to tell you this, my lord, that you may receive me kindly."

⁶ The messenger returned and said to Jacob, "We went to your brother Esau and he is already coming to meet you with four hundred men."

26. Mt 11, 12; Col 4, 12

30. Ex 3, 13; Jdg 13, 17

31. Is 6, 5

♦ God's blessings are with the fugitive Jacob. He works untiringly and after fifteen years he has two wives, many children and countless possessions. It is at this time that he returns to his homeland and gets ready to face Esau, his brother and rival. *Jacob was full of fear and distressed*. In his anguish Jacob prays to God, precisely to remind him of his promise and his "faithfulness", that is to say, all that God has done for him and his fathers. God responds to him in his own way a somewhat mysterious way in the vision at night.

o A man wrestled with him until dawn. It is a struggle between God and Jacob. God accepts defeat and confirms his blessing on Jacob.

⁷ Jacob was full of fear and distressed. He then divided the people with him and the flocks, the herds and camels into two camps, ⁸ thinking, "If Esau attacks one camp, the other will escape."

⁹ And Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham and my father Isaac, Yahweh, who said to me: 'Return to your country, to your fatherland, and I will make you prosper,' ¹⁰ I am unworthy of the kindness and faithfulness you have shown to me, for with only my staff I crossed the Jordan and now I have enough to form two companies. ¹¹ Deliver me from the hands of my brother Esau for I am afraid lest he come and kill us all, even the mothers and their children. ¹² Yet it was you who said: I will be good to you and make your descendants like the sand on the seashore, so many that they cannot be counted." ¹³ So Jacob spent the night there.

Then he took what he had with him, a present for his brother Esau: ¹⁴ two hundred she-goats, and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty camels in milk and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me and leave a space between each herd." ¹⁷ He instructed the leader, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'To whom do you belong? And where are you going? Who is the owner of the animals you are driving?' ¹⁸ Then you shall

Occasionally we discover ourselves better in sleep than when we are awake. This is what happens with Jacob in his night struggle with God. He understands that his labours and trials have been more than a confrontation with society and men; they have been a wrestling with God. God promises success but he will not grant it until Jacob exhaust all his strength.

Because Jacob understands better the reason for so many trials and delays, he personally addresses the one who blocks his way and who, alone, can change Esau's disposition. Jacob becomes strong against God; he does not ask for a favor, a little help, but instead he demands that he keep his promises: *I will not let you go until you have given me your blessing.*

say: They belong to your servant Jacob. It is a present he is sending to my lord Esau. He himself is coming along behind us!"

¹⁹Jacob ordered the second and third servants and all who were following the herds in the same way, "That is what you shall say to Esau when you meet him: ²⁰Your servant Jacob is following!" For he thought to himself, "I may pacify him with the present I sent ahead, so that when I meet him face to face, he may perhaps receive me kindly." ²¹So the present went ahead of him, but he himself spent that night in the camp.

²²That same night Jacob got up and taking his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons, crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream and likewise everything he had. ²⁴And Jacob was left alone.

Then a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he could not get the better of Jacob, he struck him in the socket of his hip and dislocated it as he wrestled with him.

²⁶The man said, "Let me go, for day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you have given me your blessing." ²⁷The man then said, "What is your name?" "Jacob" was the reply. ²⁸He answered, "You will no longer be called Jacob,

but Israel, for you have been *strong-with-God* as you have been with men and have prevailed."

²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "What is your name?" He answered, "Why do you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "I have seen *God face to face* and survived." ³¹The sun rose as he passed through Peniel, limping because of his hip.

³²That is why to this day the Israelites do not eat the sciatic nerve which is in the hip socket because the sciatic nerve in Jacob's hip had been touched.

The meeting of Esau and Jacob

33 ¹Jacob looked up and saw that Esau was coming with four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. ²He then put the maidservants in front with their children, then Leah with her children and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³He himself went on before them and bowed to the ground seven times until he came near his brother.

⁴Esau ran to meet him, took him in his arms, kissed him; and both wept. ⁵Esau looked up and seeing the women and the children said, "Who

Jacob's prayer does not show the resigned attitude characteristic of a believer, according to some. Praying does not consist only in accepting God's will as a thing written in advance in heaven, or in asking for the strength to accept it: praying consists also in putting pressure on God, confident in his promises and knowing that he listens to us. If we could not have some part in the divine decisions concerning us and the governing of the world, the Covenant would be a fraud.

At the crossroads of life, pressed between the possibilities of becoming stagnant or surpassing himself, the believer knows that God will bring him beyond if he asks for it with faith.

He dislocated his hip. Jacob faces God when, after a long exile, he wants to force his entrance into the Promised Land. In fact, to enter this Land is simply to enter into the mystery of God who wants to share his life with us, and this is impossible for the person who feels strong,

sure of himself and of his ways. Therefore, when we are about to enter, God tests us. Whatever blow, or misfortune or crisis we may be going through, it leaves us wounded and like strangers in this world. Jacob enters the Promised Land with a limp because Jesus also keeps the Land for those who weep, those who thirst for justice, those who are not violent.

You will be called Israel. He does not lose the name of Jacob nor its meaning: the Activist, the Trickster. Yet at the same time he will be Israel: *Strong with God.* Jacob-Israel will be the name of the people of God. Throughout their history, Israel will never stop sinning and God will make them bend many times; yet, God will always allow himself to be conquered and he will forgive people when they remind him of his promises.

After Jacob's victory, events must be under God's plans. Esau does not oppose Jacob's return to the land of his ancestors.

the gate of their city and spoke to their fellow citizens, ²¹"These men are peaceful. Let them settle here and move around freely. The land is vast enough for them. We shall marry their daughters and give our daughters in marriage to them. ²²But on one condition will these men agree to live with us and become one people with us, and that is, that every male be as they are and be circumcised. ²³If we agree with them, their flocks, their possessions, their cattle will be ours. Let's do what they ask and they will settle with us." ²⁴All those who went out to the gate of the city agreed with Hamor and Shechem and every male was circumcised.

²⁵Three days later when they were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, taking their swords, entered and took the town by surprise ²⁶and slew Hamor and Shechem and all the males. They took Dinah from Shechem's house and went off.

²⁷Jacob's sons attacked the wounded and plundered the city because their sister had been violated. ²⁸They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the fields. ²⁹all their wealth, all their women and children. They plundered all that was in their houses.

³⁰Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me hateful to the people of this land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I have only a few men and if the others unite against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, myself and my household. ³¹But their reply was, "Is it right for him to treat our sister as a prostitute?"

Jacob at Bethel

+35 ¹God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." ²Jacob said to his family and to all those who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, purify yourselves and change your clothes. ³We will then go up to Bethel. There I will make an altar to God who helped me when I was in trouble and who was with me during my journey."

1. 28, 10	2. Jos 24; Ex 20, 3; 1 S 7, 3	8. Jdg 2, 5	10. 32, 29	11. 17, 1
18. 1 S 4, 20	20. Rt 1, 2; Mi 5, 1; Mt 2, 18; Mt 2, 6; Jer 31, 15			

+ One cannot live one's faith in isolation; thus Jacob begins to form a community by first requiring that his people get rid of their idols: when they take this concrete and visible step which is a great sacrifice for them, they become the first community capable of giving witness to the world, of faith in the one God.

⁴So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had as well as their earrings and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem. ⁵They then left and a terror fell on all the surrounding towns with the result that no one followed in pursuit of them.

⁶When Jacob and all those with him came to Luz in Canaan – which is Bethel – ⁷he built an altar there and called the place El-bethel because it was there that God had shown himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother. ⁸At that time Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, died and was buried below Bethel near the oak. That is why it was called the Oak of Tears.

⁹God appeared again to Jacob when he arrived from Paddan-aram and blessed him ¹⁰and said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but no longer will you be called Jacob for Israel will be your name." ¹¹So he was called Israel. ¹²Then God said to him, "Be fruitful and grow in number! A nation or rather a group of nations will come from you. ¹³The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you and to your descendants after you." ¹⁴Then God left him.

¹⁴Jacob set up a stone in the place where God had spoken to him and offered a libation on it and poured oil on it.

¹⁵Jacob called the place where God had spoken to him, Bethel.

¹⁶They moved on from Bethel and were still some distance from Ephrath when Rachel gave birth and the delivery was very difficult. ¹⁷When she was in great pain the midwife said to her, "Courage! For now you will have another son." ¹⁸And as she breathed her last – for she was dying – she called him Benoni (which means: son of my pain), but his father named him Benjamin. ¹⁹So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath – that is Bethlehem – ²⁰and Jacob placed a pillar over her tomb which marks the place of the tomb to this day.

²¹Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder. ²²While Israel was living in that region, it happened that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it.

The twelve sons of Jacob

■ Jacob had twelve sons. ²³By Leah:

■ We mentioned that the Bible preserves some memories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in legends (see 11:16). Outside of those three, it has been proven that the other names such as Reuben, Simeon, Judah... are not referring to real people. Wandering tribes had their own way of recording the events of the past. They created

Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, then Simeon, Levi, Juda, Issachar and Zebulun. ²⁴ *The sons by Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.* ²⁵ *The sons by Bilhah, Rachel's slave girl: Dan and Naphtali.* ²⁶ *The sons by Zilpah, Leah's slave girl: Gad and Asher. These were the sons born to Jacob in Paddan-aram.*

²⁷ *Jacob came home to his father Isaac at Mamre or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) where Abraham and Isaac had lived.* ²⁸ *After living a hundred and eighty years.* ²⁹ *Isaac breathed his last and was gathered to his people at a good old age. His sons Esau and Jacob buried him.*

Esau the father of the Edomites

36 ¹ These are the descendants of Esau, that is, Edom. Esau married women of Canaan: ² Adah, the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah, the son of Zibeon the Horite. ³ Basemath, the daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. ⁴ Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz, Basemath bore Reuel. ⁵ Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These are the sons of Esau born to him in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Esau, with his wives, his sons and daughters, all the members of his household, his livestock, all his cattle and all the goods he had acquired in the land of Canaan, left for the land of Seir far removed from his brother Jacob. ⁷ For they had acquired too much to live together. The land where they were living at that time could not support them both because of their cattle. ⁸ That is why Edom settled in the hill country of Seir. Esau is Edom.

⁹ These are the descendants of Esau, the father of Edom, in the mountainous region of Seir.

¹⁰ These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah, Esau's wife, and Reuel the son of Basemath, Esau's wife.

¹¹ The sons of Eliphaz were: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, Kenaz. ¹² Eliphaz son of Esau had Timna for concubine and she bore him

Amalek. These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.

¹³ These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, Mizzah. These are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife.

¹⁴ These are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah son of Zibeon: she bore him Jeush, Jalam and Korah.

¹⁵ These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau.

The sons of Eliphaz, firstborn of Esau: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, ¹⁶ chief Kenaz, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Adah.

¹⁷ And these are the sons of Reuel son of Esau: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, Mizzah. These are the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife.

¹⁸ And these are the sons of Oholibamah, Esau's wife: chief Jeush, Jalam, Korah. These are the chiefs of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah.

¹⁹ These are the sons of Esau. This is Edom and these are their chiefs.

²⁰ These are the sons of Seir the Horite, inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ²¹ Dishon, Ezer, Dishan, these are the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. ²² The sons of Lotan were Hori and Heman and Lotan's sister was Timna. ²³ These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, Onam. ²⁴ These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah, Anah – the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness as he pastured the donkeys of his father Zibeon. ²⁵ These are the children of Anah: Dishon, Oholibamah daughter of Anah. ²⁶ These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, Cheran. ²⁷ These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, Akan. ²⁸ These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

²⁹ These are the chiefs of the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah,

stories in which each tribe was represented by a person of the same name. So, for example, if twelve tribes had merged into a single people: they would express that by saying that 12 ancestors with the names of those tribes, were the sons of only one father, Jacob-Israel! Moreover, as four of those tribes, those of Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah formed a different group from the tribes of Joseph and Benjamin, the members of the first group were considered to be the sons of Leah, one of Jacob's wives and the others, sons of Jacob's other wife, Rachel.

The story in chapter 34 refers to a violent episode when the tribes of Simeon and Levi

were in conflict with the people of Shechem. (Shechem is a city, not a person). We must interpret what is said of "Laban, the Aramaean" (chapter 31) and of Judah and his sons (26:30 and 36:1) in a similar way.

This explains why, ever since ancient times, biblical experts have interpreted many things in the history of the patriarchs symbolically.

Twelve tribes made up the people of Israel and they always wanted to remember this number which was considered sacred (see chapter 48). Jesus will later remember this ancient structure of the people of God when he establishes his church as the new people of God and chooses twelve apostles to lead it.

³⁰ chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These are the chiefs of the Horites according to their clans in the land of Seir.

³¹ These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before an Israelite king reigned. ³² In Edom these reigned: Bela son of Beor, his city was called Dinhabah. ³³ Bela died and Johab son of Zerah, from Bozrah, succeeded him as king. ³⁴ Jobab died and Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded. ³⁵ Husham died and Hadad, son of Bedad succeeded; he defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, and his city was called Avith. ³⁶ Hadad died and Samlah of Masrekah succeeded. ³⁷ Samlah died and Shaul of Rehoboth-hannah succeeded. ³⁸ Shaul died and Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded. ³⁹ Baal-hanan died and Hadad succeeded; his city was called Paul; his wife's name was Mehetabel, daughter of Matred, from Mezahab.

⁴⁰ These are the names of the chiefs of Esau according to their clans and localities, by name: chiefs Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, ⁴¹ Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁴² Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁴³ Magdiel, Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom according to their families and residence in the land that was theirs. (This is Esau, father of Edom).

37 ¹ Jacob lived in the land where his father had settled, in the land of Canaan. ² This is the history of Jacob's family.

Joseph and his brothers

o Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was shepherding the flock with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph informed his father of the bad reputation they had. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children, for he was the son of his old age and he had a coat with long sleeves made for him. ⁴ His brothers who saw that their father loved him

more than he loved them, hated him and could no longer speak to him in a friendly way.

⁵ Joseph had a dream which, when he told it to his brothers, made them hate him the more: ⁶ "Listen to the dream I had. ⁷ We were binding sheaves in the field when my sheaf rose and stood up and your sheaves gathered round and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "So you want to rule us or lord it over us!" They hated him even more because of his dreams and what he said.

⁹ Joseph had another dream which he told to his brothers, "I saw the sun, the moon and seven stars bowing down before me." ¹⁰ When he told this to his father and brothers his father rebuked him, "What is this dream of yours? Are all of us, myself, your mother and your brothers to bow to the ground before you?" ¹¹ His brothers were jealous of him but his father kept in mind what he had said.

Joseph sold by his brothers

+ ¹² His brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing the flock at Shechem; come along, I'll send you to them." Joseph replied, "Here I am." ¹⁴ Then his father said, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flock; then come back and tell me." Jacob sent him from the valley of Hebron and Joseph arrived at Schechem.

8. Ex 2, 14; 1 S 10, 27; Ps 118, 22; Lk 19, 14

11. Dn 7, 28; Lk 2, 19

o *The story of Joseph begins here and continues until the end of Genesis as a kind of transition between the Patriarchs and the events of Exodus which follow.*

Joseph, next to the last of Jacob's sons, is shown as the most important of the twelve brothers. The dreams of the young Joseph tell us that what will happen to him will not be pure coincidence, but rather will serve God's plans: through him God will save the whole family.

The long and moving story of Joseph, who is sold by his brothers and then becomes their saviour, is the first image of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ in the Bible.

Jacob loved him for he was a child of his old age: The son most loved and also the most delicate. Among his crude and unscrupulous brothers, Joseph shows nobility: from his youth this child of shepherds reveals that a great future awaits him.

¹⁵A man met him as he was wandering through the countryside and said to him, "What are you looking for?" ¹⁶He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers, please tell me where they are pasturing the flock." ¹⁷The man said, "They have gone from here, for I heard them say: Let's go to Dothan!" So Joseph went off after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸They saw him in the distance and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹They said to one another, "Here comes the specialist in dreams! ²⁰Now's the time! Let's kill him and throw him into a well. We'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we'll see what his dreams were all about!" ²¹But Reuben heard this and tried to save him from their hands ²²saying, "Let us not kill him; shed no blood! Throw him in this well in the wilderness, but do him no violence." This he said to save him from them and take him back to his father.

²³So as soon as Joseph arrived, they stripped him of his long-sleeved coat that he wore ²⁴and then took him and threw him in the well. Now the well was empty, without water.

²⁵They were sitting for a meal when they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels laden with spices, balm and myrrh, which they were taking down to Egypt. ²⁶Judah then said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and hiding his blood?" ²⁷Come! We'll sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on

him, for he is our brother and our own flesh!" His brothers agreed to this.

²⁸So when the Midianite merchants came along they pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the well. For twenty pieces of silver they sold Joseph to the Midianites, who took him with them to Egypt. ²⁹When Reuben went back to the well, Joseph was no longer there. He tore his clothes ³⁰and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy has disappeared, and what am I to do?"

³¹They then took Joseph's coat, killed a goat and dipped the coat in its blood. ³²They sent the long-sleeved coat and had it taken to their father, saying, "This we have found; see if it is your son's coat or not." ³³He recognized it and said, "It is my son's coat. Joseph has been attacked by a wild animal and torn to pieces." ³⁴Jacob then tore his garments, put on sackcloth and mourned his son for a long time. ³⁵All his sons and daughters came to comfort him but he refused to be consoled saying, "No, I shall go down to the land of Shadows, mourning for my son." Thus his father wept for him.

³⁶Meanwhile the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the commander of the guard.

The story of Judah and Tamar

◆ 38 ¹It happened at this time that Judah left his brothers and went to stay with an Adullamite by the name of Hirah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a Canaanite called Shua. He married her ³and she gave

16. Song 1, 7 20. Jer 11, 21; 12, 6; Mt 27, 1

22. Jer 38, 6

28. Za 11, 12; Mt 26, 15

Two of the twelve tribes stand out: the tribe of Judah and that of Joseph. See the commentary on Joshua 13 on this subject. That is why the traditions about the "patriarchs," or fathers, mention especially these two sons of Jacob.

+ Envy in brothers reaches madness and crime. God lets the brothers follow opposite paths, some good, others evil but that does not

mean that those who are "good" abandon and forget those following "evil" ways. Joseph will save his brothers.

◆ In the following event, the patriarch Judah does not appear in a very favorable role according to our Christian ideas. Yet, in those days of very primitive customs and morality, the Bible does not insist so much on the aspect of sexual

birth to a son whom he called Er. ⁴ She had another child and called him Onan. ⁵ And then she had a third child whom she called Shelah. She was at Chezib when she gave birth to him.

⁶ Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn son. Her name was Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in Yahweh's sight and the Lord took his life. ⁸ Then Judah said to Onan, "Lie with your brother's widow and fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law; the child to be born will be the heir of your brother." ⁹ But Onan knew the child would not be his, so whenever he slept with his brother's widow, he spilled the semen on the ground lest he give an heir to his brother. ¹⁰ What he did was displeasing to Yahweh who took his life as well. ¹¹ Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law, "Live as a widow in your father's house until Shelah, my son has grown up," for he was afraid that Shelah, like his brothers, might die. So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

¹² After a long time, the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter died. When Judah became consoled, he went up to Timnah to his sheep-shearers with his friend Hirah, the Adullamite. ¹³ It happened that Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." ¹⁴ She at once took off her widow's clothes, wrapped herself in a veil and sat down at the entrance to Enaim which is on the road to Timnah, for she knew that Shelah was a grown man and had not been given to her in marriage.

¹⁵ Judah saw her and as her face was veiled he took her for a prostitute. ¹⁶ He went over to her on the roadside and said, "Allow me to sleep with you," for he didn't know she was his daughter-in-law. She asked, "What will you give me to sleep with you?" ¹⁷ He said, "I will send you a kid from my flock." She replied, "Will you give me a pledge till you send it?" ¹⁸ "What pledge shall I give you?" he asked.

She answered, "Give me your seal, your cord and the staff in your hand." So he gave them to her and slept with her; ¹⁹ then she rose and left him and, taking off her veil, she put on her widow's clothes. And she became pregnant.

²⁰ When Judah sent the kid by his friend, the Adullamite, to recover the pledge from the woman, he did not find her. ²¹ So he questioned the local people, "Where is the prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?" "There has been no prostitute there," they said. ²² He returned to Judah and said, "I didn't find her and even the local people said that there was no prostitute there." ²³ Judah then said, "Let her keep it all for herself lest the people finally laugh at us. At least I sent her the kid even if you didn't find her."

²⁴ About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar, your daughter-in-law played the prostitute and moreover she is now with child." Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned." ²⁵ As they were bringing her out she sent word to her father-in-law, "I have become pregnant by the man who owns these things. Find out to whom this seal, cord and staff belong!" ²⁶ Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more righteous than I am since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he had no further intercourse with her.

²⁷ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb. ²⁸ And when she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand and the midwife tied a scarlet thread around his wrist saying, "This one is the firstborn." ²⁹ But he withdrew his hand and his brother came out first and she said, "What a rift you have made for yourself!" And he was called Perez. ³⁰ Then his brother with the scarlet thread on his wrist came out and he was given the name Zerah.

39 ¹ Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of

5. Num 26, 19

11. Rt 1, 11

30. Rt 4, 12; Mt 1, 3

3. 26, 3; 1 S 18, 14; Ps 1, 3

morality, but rather on the duty to have sons so that God's promises to their ancestors could become effective.

Onan's sin consists in having refused to father a son who, later, would not belong to him (see Ruth 3:7 about the obligation to give a child to the widow of one's brother).

Tamar's nobility lies in her determination, by all means, to have a son who would bear the name of her first husband, Er, and who would, therefore be Judah's heir. It is rare for women to figure in the Bible, but when they do appear, it is often to give men a lesson in being human. Here, after the event by which Tamar enters into his life, Judah begins to reflect, which is something new for him.

Tamar appears in the list of the ancestors of Jesus (Mt 1:3).

■ After his misfortune Joseph behaves as a model of honesty, faithfulness and perseverance. In the Bible, he is the first of the humiliated, just ones who look to God for their reward.

In the Bible there were many liberators and saviours before the coming of the Son of God, the Saviour. They were all tested before succeeding and many were despised by their people.

The story about Joseph and Potiphar's wife is a lesson in genuine manliness. The Bible views faithfulness and respect for marriage as one of the virtues of authentic men.



Pharaoh, commander of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ismaelites who had brought him there. ²Yahweh blessed Joseph while he lived in the house of his master, the Egyptian, and everything went right for him.

³The Egyptian could see that God was with him and everything worked well for him. ⁴So Joseph pleased his master who made him overseer of his house and of all that he owned, ⁵and from that time God blessed the Egyptian's house because of Joseph; he blessed all that the Egyptian owned, his household and his land. ⁶The Egyptian left all he had to the care of Joseph and, with Joseph fully in charge, he concerned himself with nothing except the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was a handsome man and well-built. ⁷After some time his master's wife kept noticing him and said, "Sleep with me." ⁸But he refused and said to her, "With me in charge, my master has no concern about anything in the house and has entrusted to me all that he has. ⁹He is no more master in this house than I am and he refuses me nothing, except yourself, of course, because you are his wife. How then could I do such an evil thing and sin against God?" ¹⁰Now although day after day she spoke to Joseph, he would not agree to sleep with her or give himself to her.

¹¹It happened that one day, when he entered the house to attend to his duties, none of the servants were in the house. ¹²Then Potiphar's wife caught hold of Joseph by his cloak saying, "Come to bed with me." But Joseph left his cloak in her hands and ran out of the house. ¹³As soon as he had run out of the house, ¹⁴she called her servants and said, "Look, a Hebrew has been brought here to make fun of us; he came here to lie with me; so I screamed ¹⁵and when he heard me

scream he left his cloak with me and ran out of the house." ¹⁶Then she kept the cloak by her until the master came home. ¹⁷She then told her story, "That Hebrew slave of yours came to make sport of me ¹⁸but when I screamed, he left his cloak with me and ran out of the house."

¹⁹When his master heard what his wife told him, "This is how your servant treated me," he blazed with anger. ²⁰He took Joseph and put him in the Royal Prison where the king's prisoners were kept. But while Joseph was in prison ²¹Yahweh was with him and showed him kindness so that he was well-liked by the warden of the prison. ²²The warden put him in charge of all the prisoners and made him responsible for all that was done there. ²³The warden did not interfere with anything that was under Joseph's care, because Yahweh was with him and gave him success in everything he did.

Joseph interprets the dreams

40 ¹Some time after this it happened that the cupbearer of the king of Egypt, who prepared the drinks for Pharaoh, and his chief baker, offended their lord. ²Pharaoh was angry with his two officers ³and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was kept. ⁴So the captain of the guard appointed Joseph to attend to their needs, for they were under arrest for some time.

⁵One night both of them dreamed, each one his own dream, and each dream had its own meaning. As the two officers were with Joseph in custody in his master's house, ⁶when Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷So he questioned them, "Why do you look sad today?" ⁸They answered, "Both of us have had a dream, but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Is it not God who interprets dreams? Tell me what they were."

⁹Then the chief cupbearer told Joseph what his dream had been. "In my dream there was a vine in front of me ¹⁰and on the vine



there were three branches. As it grew and flowered, its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in his hand."

¹² Joseph said to him, "Here's the interpretation: the three branches are three days. ¹³ Within three days Pharaoh will release you and restore you to your office and you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as before when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But when things go well with you, remember me and be kind enough to speak my name to Pharaoh and get me out of this place, ¹⁵ for I was, in fact, kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and even here I have done nothing to deserve imprisonment."

¹⁶ The chief baker, seeing that the interpretation was favourable, said to Joseph, "In my dream I had on my head three baskets of cakes. ¹⁷ In the top basket there were all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it from the basket above my head." ¹⁸ Joseph said, "The three baskets are three days, ¹⁹ and before three days have passed Pharaoh will take off your head and hang you on a tree and the birds will eat your flesh."

²⁰ It so happened that on the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his officers and remembered the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. ²¹ The cupbearer was restored to his office and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; ²² but the chief baker was hanged, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

The dreams of Pharaoh

+ 41 ¹After two whole years Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile ²when seven cows, sleek and fat, were coming up from the Nile and beginning to feed among the rushes. ³Behind them came seven other cows, lean and scraggy that stood beside the cows already there. ⁴These devoured the sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.

⁵He fell asleep again and had a second dream. He saw growing on one

stalk seven ears of corn that were full and ripe. ⁶And after these, there sprouted seven more ears of corn that were small and scorched by the east wind. ⁷Now the small ears of corn swallowed the plump and ripe ones. Then Pharaoh awoke.

⁸In the morning he was uneasy and called all the magicians and wise men in Egypt. He told his dreams to them but not one among them was able to interpret his dreams. ⁹Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, "This reminds me of my wrongs. ¹⁰Pharaoh was angry with his servants and had me put in custody in the house of the captain of the guard and with me the chief baker. ¹¹Once on the same night we both had a dream, each with its own meaning. ¹²With us was a young Hebrew, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him our dreams he interpreted them giving to each one its own meaning. ¹³What he interpreted for us happened. I was restored to my office and the chief baker was hanged."

¹⁴Pharaoh then had Joseph summoned. They took him quickly from the prison, shaved him, changed his clothes and he presented himself to Pharaoh. ¹⁵Then Pharaoh addressed him, "I have had a dream which no one can explain; now I have heard that when you hear a dream you are able to interpret it." ¹⁶Joseph replied, "It's not I but God who will give Pharaoh a favourable answer." ¹⁷Pharaoh then began telling his dream.

"I was beside the Nile ¹⁸when seven fine cows, sleek and fat, came up from the river and began to feed in the rushes. ¹⁹Then seven other cows came up behind them. These were poor, scraggy and lean. I had never seen any so ugly

23. Ec19, 15; Lam 3, 26

8. Dn 2, 27; Ex 7, 11; 8, 1

+ These dreams and the events accompanying them give us a vivid picture of the drama that Egypt was undergoing with rains, irrigation and droughts. Hebrew tradition credits Joseph for

organizing the storage of surplus grain in Egypt with a view to the drought. Joseph's faithfulness and the fact that God never failed him are emphasized.



Justice: a basic thirst of the human heart, an essential word in the Bible.



I am proud to be... Freedom begins with a national Exodus. But God's people needed twelve centuries to learn all that human liberty demands.



in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ The thin, gaunt cows ate up the seven fat cows, ²¹ but after eating them, it was as if they had not eaten them at all because they remained as lean and scraggy as they were before. And then I woke. ²² I also saw in my dream seven ears of corn growing on one stalk, full and ripe. ²³ Then, after them, there sprouted seven ears of corn that were hard and small and withered by the east wind. ²⁴ The withered ears of corn swallowed the good ears. I told this to the magicians but none of them could explain its meaning."

²⁵ Then Joseph said, "Pharaoh's dream is one and the same. Yahweh has just revealed to Pharaoh what he will do. ²⁶ The seven fat cows are seven years and the seven good ears as well. It's one dream! ²⁷ The seven lean cows coming after them are seven years as are the seven withered ears of corn scorched by the east wind, and they are seven years of famine. ²⁸ As I said to Pharaoh, God is revealing to him what he is about to do. ²⁹ There will be seven years of plenty throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but they will be followed by seven years of famine. Then the time of abundance will be forgotten and famine will exhaust the land. ³¹ So severe will the famine be that no one will remember the time of plenty."

³² If the dream has been repeated twice for Pharaoh it is because God has so determined and will soon make it happen. ³³ Now it is for Pharaoh to choose an intelligent and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. Pharaoh could have supervisors in the land and could levy a tax of one fifth of the produce of the land during the seven years of plenty. ³⁵ They must gather up all the food of these productive years that are coming and, by the authority of Pharaoh, store grain for food in the towns and keep it. ³⁶ This food will be a reserve for the seven years of famine coming to the land of Egypt so that the people will not die."

Joseph, the head minister

³⁷ The proposal of Joseph pleased Pharaoh and his ministers, and Pharaoh asked them, ³⁸ "Where shall we find such a man possessed with the spirit of God?" ³⁹ And to Joseph he said, "Since it is to you that God has made known all this, there can be no one as intelligent and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people will obey your orders. Only I myself will be greater than you."

⁴¹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." ⁴² He then took the signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He clothed him in fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³ He had him ride in the chariot that was second only to his and they cried out before him. "Make way." Thus he was put in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

⁴⁴ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh! Without your consent no one is to raise hand or foot in the whole land of Egypt." ⁴⁵ Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah and gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. After that Joseph travelled throughout the land of Egypt. ⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he was summoned to the presence of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. After taking his leave of Pharaoh he journeyed through the entire land of Egypt.

⁴⁷ During the seven years of plenty the land produced abundantly. ⁴⁸ So Joseph gathered up all the food that was produced during these years, storing in each town the food from the fields around it. ⁴⁹ Joseph stored huge quantities of wheat, like the sand from the sea, so much that they lost count of the amount.



⁵⁰Before the years of famine came, Asenath, Joseph's wife, had two sons.

⁵¹Joseph called the first Manasseh, for he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."⁵²He called the second by the name of Ephraim, for he said, "God has given me children in the land of my sorrow."

⁵³When the seven years of plenty throughout the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴the seven years of famine began as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all the countries but bread was to be had in every part of Egypt. ⁵⁵When the land of Egypt began to suffer from the famine, the people came to Pharaoh for bread. But Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do as he tells you."

⁵⁶When the famine had spread throughout the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians for the famine was indeed severe over the land. ⁵⁷As the famine had worsened throughout the whole world, people came from other countries to buy grain from Joseph.

The sons of Jacob go down to Egypt

o 42 ¹When Jacob heard there was wheat in Egypt he said to his sons, "Why do you stand looking at one another? ²I've heard there is grain in Egypt, so go down and buy some for us so that we may stay alive and not die!" ³Joseph's brothers – ten of them – went down to Egypt to buy wheat ⁴but Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, for he said, "Something might happen to him."

⁵So the sons of Israel were among those going to buy grain, for there was

famine in Canaan. ⁶It was Joseph, as governor of the land, who sold the grain to all the people. When his brothers arrived they bowed before him, with their faces to the ground. ⁷Joseph recognized his brothers but did not make himself known and, instead, said harshly to them, "Where do you come from?" And they answered, "We come from the land of Canaan to buy grain for food."

⁸Joseph had recognized his brothers but they had not recognize him. ⁹And he remembered the dreams he once had concerning them. He told them, "You are spies, and it is to discover the weak points of the land that you have come." ¹⁰They said, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy grain for food. ¹¹We are all sons of the same man. We are honest men; your servants are not spies."¹²Joseph replied, "No, it is to find out the weak points of the country that you have come." ¹³They said, "Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; the youngest is today with our father and the other is no more." ¹⁴But Joseph insisted, "It's just as I said, you are spies!" ¹⁵And this will be proved. By the life of Pharaoh you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶One of you is to go and fetch your brother. The others will be imprisoned while I verify whether you are telling the truth. If not, then as true as Pharaoh lives, you are spies." ¹⁷And so he put them all in prison for three days.

¹⁸On the third day Joseph said to them, "I will help you to save yourselves, for I am a man who fears God. ¹⁹If you are sincere, let one of your

o This is the beginning of the long story of Joseph's meeting with his brothers.

Note how Joseph, the saviour, forces his brothers to atone for the crime they had committed.

One of them must sacrifice himself before his brother Joseph reveals who he is. Forgiveness does not cancel out the necessity to make amends for the evil we have done.



brothers remain prisoner in the house of the guard where you now are, and the rest of you take the grain to save your families from famine. ²⁰Then you will bring back your youngest brother; so the truth of what you say will be proved and your lives spared." They did as they were ordered ²¹and said among themselves, "Alas! We are guilty because of the way we treated our brother when he pleaded with us for mercy, but we didn't listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us."

²²Reuben answered them, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy, but you did not listen and now we are brought to account for his blood." ²³Now they did not know that Joseph understood them as there was an interpreter between them. ²⁴As for Joseph, he withdrew and wept. When he came back, he spoke to them and took Simeon and had him bound and put in prison while they looked on.

²⁵Joseph ordered their sacks to be filled with wheat and their money replaced in the sack of each one and provisions be given them for the journey. All this was done; ²⁶they loaded the grain on their donkeys and set off. But in the evening one of them emptied his sack to feed his donkey at the lodging place, and he saw his money at the mouth of the sack, so he said, "My money has been put back; here it is in my sack." Their hearts failed them and they trembled and turned to each other and said, "What is this that God has done to us!"

²⁹When they came back to Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him about all their adventures:

³⁰"The man who is governor of the country spoke harshly to us and treated us as spies, but we said: 'We are honest men, not spies. We were twelve brothers, sons of the same father; one is no more and the youngest is with our father in the land of Canaan.' ³³Then the

man who is lord of the land said: By this I will know if you are honest. Leave one of your brothers here; take grain to save your families from the famine and go. ³⁴Bring back your youngest brother and let me see you are not spies but honest men. Then I shall release your brother and you can trade in the land."

³⁵Now, when they emptied their sacks, each one found his money bag in his sack. When they saw this, they were afraid and their father as well. ³⁶Jacob their father said to them, "You are taking my children from me. Joseph has gone; Simeon has gone and now you are taking Benjamin. I have all this to bear!"

³⁷Then Reuben said to his father, "You may have the lives of my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to me and I shall see that he comes back." ³⁸But Jacob said, "My son will not go with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he were to meet with some misfortune on the way, you would send my grey head to the land of Shadows in sorrow."

The second journey to Egypt

43 ¹Now the lack of food was severe in the land, ²and when they had eaten the grain they brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go down again and buy us a little food." ³But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us that our brother had to come with us. ⁴If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy food for you; ⁵but if you don't send him, we will not go, for the man said: You will not be admitted to my presence if your brother is not with you." ⁶Israel then said, "Why did you bring this misery on me by letting the man know you have another brother?" ⁷They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kinsfolk saying: 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' And so we answered



these questions. Could we have known that he would tell us to bring our brother?"

⁸Judah then said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me. Let us go so that we, you and our children may live and not die. ⁹I will guarantee his safety. If I do not bring him back and set him here before you, I will bear the blame forever. ¹⁰If we hadn't delayed for so long we could have been there and back twice over."

¹¹Israel their father said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some choice products of the land in your bags and a gift for the man – some balm, a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. ¹²Take double the money with you and you will repay what was put in your sacks; it may have been a mistake. ¹³Take your brother and go back to the man. ¹⁴May God Almighty grant you mercy in his presence, so that he will allow you to bring back your other brother and Benjamin. As for myself if I am bereaved of my children, then bereaved I shall have to be."

¹⁵The men took the gift and the double amount of money as well. And taking Benjamin they set off and went down to Egypt and were admitted to the presence of Joseph.

¹⁶When Joseph saw that Benjamin was with them, he said to his steward, "Bring these men to my house. Have an animal slaughtered and a meal prepared, for these men will eat with me at noon." ¹⁷The steward did as Joseph directed and brought the men to Joseph's house.

¹⁸They were afraid and said to each other, "It's because of the money that was placed in our sacks the last time, that we are brought in. He wants to attack and overpower us and have us as slaves and take our donkeys."

¹⁹So they approached Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the door of the house. ²⁰"By your leave, sir, we came down here the first time to buy food, ²¹and when we reached a lodging place and opened our sacks, we found in the mouth of the sacks each one's money to the full weight. We have brought it back with us ²²as well as additional money to buy food. We don't know who put the money in our sacks." ²³The steward said, "Be at peace! Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father put a treasure in your grain sacks. Your money reached me safely." He then brought Simeon out to them.

²⁴The steward took them into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and fodder for their donkeys. ²⁵They prepared their present and waited for Joseph's arrival at midday, for they heard they were to dine there.

²⁶When Joseph came into the house, they offered him the gift they had with them and bowed to the ground before him. ²⁷He asked them how they were and said, "Is your father well, the old man you spoke about? Is he still alive?" ²⁸They answered, "Your servant our father is well and is still alive." ²⁹He looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, the son of his own mother, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he added, "God be good to you, my son!" ³⁰So deeply moved was Joseph, on seeing his brother, that he wanted to cry and went out quickly and wept in his own private room. ³¹After he had washed his face and come out, controlling himself, he said, "Serve the meal." ³²He was served separately and so were they, and the Egyptians as well, for the Egyptians cannot share a meal with Hebrews; for the Egyptians this



would be a shame.³³ They were seated opposite him in the order of their ages from the eldest to the youngest and they looked at each other in astonishment.

³⁴ Joseph had portions from his own dish taken to them and Benjamin's portion was five times more than that of the others. So they feasted with him and were happy.

Joseph's cup in Benjamin's sack

44 ¹ Now Joseph gave this order to his steward. "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry and put back each man's silver in the mouth of his sack.² and put my cup, the silver cup with the money for the grain in the sack of the youngest." The steward did as Joseph had directed.

³ As soon as it was light next morning the men were sent away with their donkeys. "When they had gone but were still not far from the city, Joseph said to his steward, "Go quickly after those men and when you have caught up with them, say this: Why have you repaid good with evil?⁵ Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and uses for divination? You have done a wicked thing."

⁶ When he caught up with them he repeated these words.⁷ They said to him, "Why does my lord speak like that? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing."⁸ The money we found in the mouths of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan! How then could we have stolen silver or gold from your lord's house?⁹ If one of your servants is found with the object, he will die and we too will become my lord's slaves."¹⁰ "Very well then," he said, "it will be as you say. The one who is found to have the cup will become my master's slave; the rest of you will go free."¹¹ Then

each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it.¹² And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.¹³ Then they tore their clothes and, reloading their donkeys, they returned to the city.

¹⁴ Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers returned and they threw themselves on the ground before him.¹⁵ Joseph said to them, "What have you done? Didn't you know that a man such as I am is able to divine?"

¹⁶ Then Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servant's guilt; we are my lord's slaves, we and the one who has been found with the cup."¹⁷ But Joseph said, "Far be it for me to do that. Only the man found to have the cup will be my slave. As for the rest, go back in peace to your father."

¹⁸ Judah then went forward and said, "My lord, allow your servant to speak. Do not be angry with your servant, although you are equal to Pharaoh himself."¹⁹ The last time you questioned your servants saying: 'Have you a father or a brother?'²⁰ We said to my lord: 'We have an aged father who had a child in his old age. His brother is dead and he is the only one left of his mother's children. And his father loves him.'²¹ Then you said to us: 'Bring him down so that I can see him for myself.'²² We told my lord that the boy could not leave his father, for if he did, his father would die.

²³ You then told us that if our youngest brother did not come with us, we would not be admitted to your presence.²⁴ All this we said to our father on returning there.²⁵ So when he told us to come back and buy a little food,²⁶ we said: 'We cannot go down again unless our youngest brother is with us. We shall not be admitted to the lord's presence unless our brother is with us.'²⁷ Then my father said: 'You

know that my wife had two children. ²⁸ One went away from me and has surely been torn to pieces since I have not seen him any more. ²⁹ If you take this one from me and something happens to him you will bring my gray hair in sorrow to the grave.' ³⁰ Now I can't return to my father without the boy, for my father loves him very much. If he sees that the boy is not there, ³¹ he will die and we will have sent the gray hairs of our father in sorrow to the grave.

³² Now I, your servant, guaranteed the boy's safety and said to my father: 'If I do not bring him back, I will bear the blame before you all my life.' ³³ So now let me take the place of the boy and stay here as slave and let the boy go with his brothers, ³⁴ for I can't return to my father without the boy. Do not let me see the misery that would be too much for my father."

Joseph reveals himself

45 ¹ Now Joseph could no longer control his feelings in the presence of all those standing by and he called out, "Leave my presence, everyone!" And only his brothers were with him when Joseph made himself known to them. ² He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard and the news spread through Pharaoh's house.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" And his brothers could not answer because they were terrified at seeing him. ⁴ Joseph said, "Come closer," and they drew nearer. "I am Joseph your brother, yes, it's me, the one you sold to the Egyptians. ⁵ Now don't grieve and reproach yourselves for selling me, because God has sent me before you to save your lives. ⁶ It's two years since famine has been in the land and there will be another five years without tilling and without harvest. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to make our race survive there and to save many of you. ⁸ So it was not you but God who

sent me here, and made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of his household, and ruler also of all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Go back quickly to my father and say to him: 'Joseph your son sends you this message: God has made me lord of all Egypt; so come down to me without delay; ¹⁰ you shall live in the land of Goshen and you shall be near me, you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and your herds, all that you have. ¹¹ And there I will provide for you (for there will be five more years of famine) lest you and your household and all who belong to you, be in need. ¹² Now you can see for yourselves, and your brother Benjamin can see that it is I myself who speak to you. ¹³ You will tell my father of the glory I have in Egypt and of all that you have seen. Go quickly and bring my father down here."

¹⁴ Joseph then threw his arms around Benjamin and wept. ¹⁵ Then weeping he kissed and embraced his brothers and they began to talk with him.

¹⁶ The news spread through Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers are here," and the news pleased both Pharaoh and his officials.

¹⁷ Pharaoh told Joseph, "Let your brothers load their beasts, return to the land of Canaan ¹⁸ and bring their father and their families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will enjoy the fat of the land! ¹⁹ As for yourself give them this order: Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives; get your father and come! ²⁰ Never mind the things you leave there, for the best in all Egypt is yours!

²¹ The sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had ordered, and provisions for the journey. ²² To each one he gave a festal garment but to Benjamin he gave three hundred silver coins and five festal garments. ²³ To his father he sent ten asses loaded with all the best goods in Egypt and ten donkeys loaded with grain, bread and provisions for his father on the journey. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers away and as they left he said: "Don't quarrel on the way."

²⁵ They returned from Egypt and came back to Jacob their father in Canaan. ²⁶ They



told him: "Joseph is alive and he is the ruler of all Egypt!" Jacob was stunned for he could not believe them.²⁷ But they told him all that Joseph had said and showed him the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him. Then Jacob's spirit revived and he said,²⁸ "It's enough, my son Joseph is alive; I will go and see him before I die."

Jacob goes down to Egypt

+46 Israel left with all he owned and reached Beersheba where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.² God spoke to Israel in visions that he had during the night. "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am, he said."³ "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation."⁴ "I will go with you to Egypt and I will bring you back again and Joseph's hand will close your eyes."

⁵ Jacob left Beersheba and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father with their little children and their wives in the wagons that Joseph had sent to fetch him.⁶ They also took their flocks and all that they acquired in Canaan. And so it was that Jacob came to Egypt and with him all his family,⁷ his sons and his grandsons, his daughters and his granddaughters. In short all his children he took with him to Egypt.

⁸ Here are the names of the descendants of Israel who came to Egypt:

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn,⁹ and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.¹⁰ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, whose mother was a Canaanite.¹¹ The sons of Levi: Gershon, Canath, and Merari.¹² The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.¹³ The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Job, and Shimron.¹⁴ The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Ahilel.¹⁵ These are the sons of Leah, Jacob's wife, who were born in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.¹⁶ The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggai, Jumi, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.¹⁷ The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriath, with their sister. And the sons of Beriath: Jeber and Malchiel.¹⁸ These are the sons of

Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and Jacob was their father—sixteen persons.¹⁹ The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin.²⁰ And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whose mother was Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On.²¹ And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.²² (these are the sons of Rachel—fourteen persons).²³ The sons of Dan: Hushim.²⁴ The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.²⁵ (these are the sons of Bilhah whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and Jacob was their father—seven persons in all).

²⁶ The total number of all the persons who came to Egypt with Jacob, all who were of his own blood, not counting the wives of his sons, was sixty-six.²⁷ With the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt, the total number of Jacob's household that came to Egypt was seventy.

Jacob meets Joseph

²⁸ Jacob sent Judah ahead to let Joseph know he was coming and that he would soon arrive in the land of Goshen.

²⁹ Joseph got his chariot ready in order to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself, threw his arms around his father and wept on his shoulder for a long time.³⁰ Israel said to Joseph, "Now I can die, for I have seen your face and know you are alive."

³¹ After that Joseph said to his brothers and all his father's family, "I will go and give the news to Pharaoh and tell him that my brothers and my father's family who were in the land of Canaan have come to me.³² I will also tell him that you are shepherds, keeping livestock, and have brought your flocks and cattle and all your belongings."³³ So when Pharaoh summons you and says: "What is your occupation?"³⁴ you will say: "Your servants keep flocks and herds: it has been so since our youth, and for our fathers before us." Then you will settle in the land of Goshen, for the Egyptians detest all shepherds."

47 Joseph went and told Pharaoh. "My father and brothers with their sheep and cattle and all their possessions have come from the land of Canaan to Goshen."² He then presented five of his brothers to Pharaoh.³ Pharaoh asked, "What are your occupations?"

26, 10 7. Dt 26, 5; Num 20, 15; Is 52, 4
+ Here, the adventures of Joseph have an important consequence: Jacob comes to Egypt with his entire family. The Hebrews settle in Egypt and seem to forget the land of Canaan through which Abraham and Jacob had traveled

8. Ex 1, 1 27. Ex 1, 5; Dt 10, 22; Acts 7, 14
with their flocks and which God had promised to them. They are going to remain in Egypt for several centuries until Moses leads them back to the land of the promises. This long delay was part of God's plan.

and they replied, "Your servants are shepherds as were our fathers before us.⁴ We have come to settle in the land for there is no more pasture for our sheep, so severe is the famine in the land of Canaan. And now we pray you, may we stay in the land of Goshen?"⁵ Pharaoh then spoke to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you.⁶ The land of Egypt is before you; let your father and brothers settle in the best part; let them settle in Goshen, and if among them there are capable men, put them in charge of my cattle."

The sons of Jacob in Egypt

⁷ Joseph brought in Jacob his father and presented him to Pharaoh^{*} who then asked him, "How old are you?"⁸ Jacob replied, "The years of my wanderings are one hundred and thirty. Brief and difficult have been the years of my life, and not as many as those of my fathers."⁹ *Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and withdrew from his presence.*

¹¹ *So Joseph had his father and brothers settled giving them property in the best part of Egypt, in the land of Rameses as Pharaoh had commanded.* ¹² Joseph provided his father, his brothers and his father's entire household with food according to the number of their dependents.

■ ¹³ Now so severe was the famine that no bread was to be had in all the land. Both Egypt and Canaan were exhausted because of the famine. ¹⁴ Joseph then collected all the money that had been given to buy bread in the lands of Egypt and Canaan. All this money Joseph took to Pharaoh's house.

¹⁵ When all the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan had gone, all Egypt came to Joseph saying, "Give us bread! Why must we die before your eyes, for want of money?" ¹⁶ Joseph told them, "Give me your cattle to pay for bread since you have no money." ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for their horses, sheep and cattle and even their donkeys. In what way he supplied them with food for that year.

¹⁸ The following year they came again to him and said, "We will not hide from our lord that all our money has gone and that our cattle now belongs to you. All that is left to us are our persons and our land. ¹⁹ Why should we die

while you look on, ourselves and our land? So buy us and our land for bread; we shall be in bondage to you and Pharaoh. Give us grain that we may live and not die and our land remain desolate."

²⁰ So it was that Joseph acquired all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; all the Egyptians sold their fields, so cruelly hard-pressed were they by the famine. Pharaoh became owner of the land²¹ and Joseph reduced the people to servitude from one end of Egypt to the other.²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy, because by a decree of Pharaoh they lived on what has been given to them by Pharaoh. For that reason they did not sell the land that belonged to them.

²³ Then Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. ²⁴ At harvest time you will give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths will be yours for seed for sowing, for food for yourselves and your families." ²⁵ They said, "You have saved our lives. If it please my lord, we shall be Pharaoh's serfs." ²⁶ So Joseph introduced a statute that remains to this day, whereby a fifth of the produce goes to Pharaoh. Only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ So Israel lived in Egypt in the land of Goshen. *They became owners of this land; they had many children and greatly increased in number.*

²⁸ Jacob lived for one hundred and forty-seven years, seventeen of them in the land of Egypt.

²⁹ When his life was drawing to a close he called for his son Joseph and said to him, "If you wish to be faithful and kind to me, place your hand under my thigh and promise me that you will not bury me in Egypt!" ³⁰ But when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their tomb." Joseph said, "I will do as you say." ³¹ Jacob insisted, "Swear to it!" He swore to him and Israel fell back on his pillow.

Jacob adopts Joseph's children

◆ **48** ¹ Some time later, when Joseph was told that his father was ill, he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² So they told Jacob that Joseph his son had come. Then Israel, mustering his strength, sat up in bed.

9. 47, 28
3. 17, 1

10. Job 14, 1; Ps 90, 9; Eph 5, 16

19. Lam 1, 11; Ne 5, 3

2. Jos 14, 4

■ *In Egypt, the land belonged to the Pharaoh: a very strict administration allowed him to require part of the crop from all the farmers. Here this administration is attributed to Joseph.*

◆ The twelve tribes of Israel were actually thirteen. But the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, together, were called the tribes of Joseph, and that is the way they arrived at the number twelve. The present chapter explains this: Ephraim and

³ And he said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me ⁴ saying, 'I will make you fruitful and increase your number, and I will make of you a group of nations, and I will give this land to you and to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.' ⁵ From now on your two sons who were born in Egypt, before I came to you here, are mine! Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. ⁶ Only the children born after them will be yours and the land they inherit shall be known by the names of Ephraim and Manasseh. ⁷ When I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died on the journey at some distance from Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem."

⁸ When Israel saw Joseph's sons he said, "Who are these?" ⁹ Joseph told his father, "They are the sons that God has given me here." Jacob said, "Bring them to me that I may bless them." ¹⁰ As Israel's eyes were dim with age, he could no longer see. When Jacob brought them near, he kissed and embraced them. ¹¹ and said to Joseph, "I didn't expect to see you again and now God is letting me see your children as well!" ¹² Joseph lifted them from Israel's knees and he himself bowed low, his face to the ground.

¹³ Joseph then took them both, Ephraim by his right hand to Israel's left, and Manasseh by his left hand to Israel's right. ¹⁴ Israel raised his right hand and placed it on Ephraim's head, although he was the younger, and placed his left hand on Manasseh's head even though Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵ Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God in whose presence my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day, ¹⁶ the Angel who has saved me from every evil, bless these boys, and in them may my name live on and that of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. And may they increase greatly on the earth!"

¹⁷ Joseph was displeased when he saw his father had placed his right hand on Ephraim's head. So he took his father's hand from Ephraim's head to place it on Manasseh ¹⁸ and said, "Not like that father, for this one is the elder. Place your right hand on his head." ¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he too will be great and become a nation. Nevertheless his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations."

²⁰ He blessed them that day in these words: "Through you Israel will bestow this blessing: May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!"

So he placed Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. ²¹ Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am going to die. God will be with you and he will bring you back to the land of your fathers. ²² And to you, over and above what goes to your brothers, I give a mountain slope that I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow."

The blessing of Jacob

o 49 ¹ Jacob then called his sons and said,

² "Gather round, sons of Jacob. And listen to your father Israel!"

³ Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the firstfruits of my manhood! excelling in honour and excelling in power.

⁴ Restless as water, you will excel no more for you went to your father's wife, on to my bed and defiled it.

⁵ Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are weapons of violence. ⁶ Let me not share their counsel! Let my heart keep far from their company, for in anger they killed men, and hamstrung oxen at their pleasure. ⁷ A curse on their anger for it is fierce; A curse on their fury, so cruel! I will divide them among Jacob, and scatter them among Israel.

⁸ Judah, your brothers will praise you! You shall seize your enemies by the neck!

4. 35, 11 9. Heb 11, 21 10. 27, 1
3. 29, 32; 35, 22 6. 34, 25 9. Rev 5, 5

15. 49, 24; Ps 23, 1; 80, 2; Ezr 14, 15
10. Num 24, 17; Mt 5, 1; Lk 9, 5

Manasseh will be considered as two sons of Jacob to replace Joseph. Jacob's blessing, like the blessing of Isaac, his father, goes to the younger son and not to the elder. God favours whom he wishes, and is not bound to regard the right of succession, or the parents' wishes.

o Jacob's blessings do not go to his sons but to the twelve tribes bearing their names. The future destiny of these tribes will vary greatly. Jacob's blessing is a way of saying that these destinies were known to God beforehand and that they were part of his plan of salvation which

benefits everyone, but does not give the same gift to everyone.

The two tribes of Judah and Joseph stand out. For Judah there is a prophecy that his tribe will dominate the others until the coming of the Saviour "the one who will be in charge." In fact, the kings of the people of God, and after them, Jesus himself, will come from the tribe of Judah. Judah then becomes the one who receives the promises made to Abraham and Jacob.

The prophecy for Joseph deals with greatness and material prosperity.

Your father's sons shall bow before you.

⁹ Judah, a young lion!

You return from the prey, my son!

Like a lion he stoops and crouches,
and like a lioness, who dares to rouse

him?

¹⁰ The sceptre shall not be taken from
Judah,

nor the ruler's staff from between his
feet,

until he comes to whom it belongs,
and who has the obedience of the

nations.

¹¹ He ties his foal to a vine,

and his ass' colt to the choicest branch.

He washes his garments in wine
and his robe in the juice of grapes.

¹² His eyes shall be red with wine,
and his teeth whiter than milk.

¹³ Zebulun lives by the seashore; he is a
haven for the ships, and his flank stretches to
Sidon.

¹⁴ Issachar is a sturdy ass, lolling beside the
sheepfolds.

¹⁵ He saw that a resting place was good,
and that the land was pleasant. He bends his
back to the burden and submits to forced
labour.

¹⁶ Dan shall judge his people as one of the
tribes of Israel. ¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent in the
way, a viper on the path, that bites the horse's
heels, making the rider fall backwards!

¹⁸ In your salvation, I hope, O Yahweh!

¹⁹ Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid
at their heels.

²⁰ Asher's food will be rich, and he will
provide delicacies fit for a king!

²¹ Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears
beautiful fawns.

²² Joseph is a fruitful vine.

a fruitful vine near a spring.

whose branches climb over a wall.

²³ Archers attacked him fiercely

and sorely provoked him;

²⁴ but his bow remained steady,

and his arms nimble,

because of the hand of the Mighty One of
Jacob;

because of the Shepherd, the Rock of

Israel;

²⁵ because of the God of your father,
your Helper!

because of God Almighty who blesses
you

with blessings from heaven above,
with blessings from the deep below!
with blessings of the breast and the
womb!

²⁶ The blessings of your father are greater
than the blessings of the ancient mountains,
the bounty of the everlasting hills! May they
all rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of
the one who is a prince among his brothers!

²⁷ Benjamin is a ravenous wolf!

In the morning he devours his prey,
and in the evening he divides the spoil!"

The death and funeral of Jacob

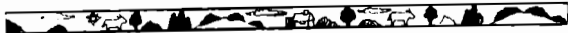
²⁸ These are all the twelve tribes of Israel,
and this is what his father said when he blessed
them, giving each one a special and appropriate
blessing. ²⁹ He then gave them these in-
structions: "I am soon to be gathered to my
people; bury me near my fathers, in the cave in
the field of Ephron, the Hittite; ³⁰ in the cave
in the field of Machpelah, to the east of Mamre
in Canaan, the field that Abraham bought
from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place. ³¹ It
was there that Abraham and his wife Sarah
were buried. There they buried Leah. ³² The
field and the cave in it were purchased from
the Hittites."

³³ When Jacob had given these instruc-
tions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the
bed; he breathed his last and was gathered to
his people.

50 ¹ Joseph threw himself on his father,
wept over him and kissed him. ² Then
as Joseph had instructed them, his physicians
embalmed Israel his father. ³ This took a full
forty days, the length of time required for
embalming. the Egyptians mourned him for
seventy days.

⁴ When the days of mourning were over,
Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's household, "If you
wish to show me kindness, please let Pharaoh
know ⁵ that when my father was dying he made
me swear that I would bury him in the tomb he
had made ready for himself in Canaan. Ask
him to let me go up and bury my father. I will
come back again." ⁶ Pharaoh said, "Go and
bury your father as he made you swear to do."

⁷ Joseph went up to bury his father and
with him went all Pharaoh's officials, the elders
of his household and all the elders of Egypt,
⁸ as well as all belonging to the household of
Joseph, his brothers and his father's house-
hold. Only their children, their flocks and
herds were left in the land of Goshen. ⁹ With
the chariots and horsemen that went up with



him it was a very imposing caravan. ¹⁰ When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they carried out a solemn and long lamentation and there Joseph mourned his father for seven days. ¹¹ When the Canaanites witnessed this mourning they said, "This is a solemn mourning ceremony of the Egyptians." That is why this place which is east of the Jordan was called Abel Mizraim.

¹² *Jacob's sons did as he had ordered them. They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre that Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial place.*

¹⁴ After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all those who had gone up with him for the burial.

The last years of Joseph

+ 15 When Joseph's brothers realized that their father was dead they said, "What if Joseph turns against us in hate because of the evil we did him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph saying, "Before he died your father told us to say this to you: ¹⁷ Please forgive the crime and the sin of your brothers in doing evil to you.

Forgive the crime of the servants of your father's God." When he was given the message, Joseph wept. ¹⁸ His brothers went and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph reassured them, "Don't be afraid! Am I in the place of God?" ²⁰ You intended to do me harm, but God intended to turn it to good in order to bring about what is happening today – the survival of many people. ²¹ So have no fear! I will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he touched their hearts and consoled them.

²² Joseph remained in Egypt together with all his father's family. He lived for a hundred and ten years, ²³ long enough to see Ephraim's great-grandchildren, and also to have the children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, placed on his knees after their birth.

²⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am going to die, but God will surely remember you and take you from this country to the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." ²⁵ Joseph then made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God comes to bring you out from here, carry my bones with you." ²⁶ Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten; they embalmed him and laid him in a coffin in Egypt.

20. Rom 12, 1; 1 Thes 5, 15; Rom 8, 28

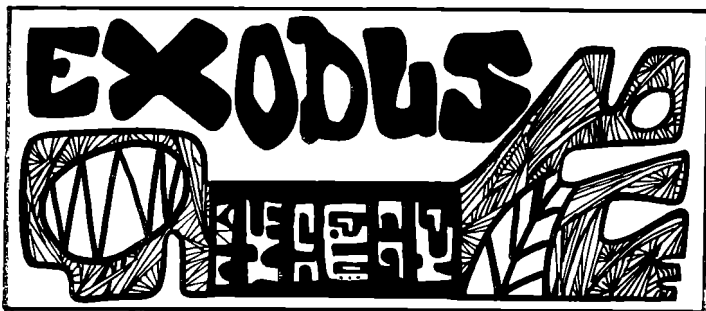
25. Ex 13, 19; Jos 24, 32; Heb 11, 22

+ Note how Jacob and Joseph die: believers of ancient times were still ignorant of the resurrection of the dead. They lived the lives God gave them on this earth to the fullest; they were aided by the conviction that in their faithfulness to their mission, they were labouring for a better world which their children would see. The long and happy years that God had given them after their trials led them to understand that God was just and generous with all people.

Yet, while they did not hope for a life beyond, they were lacking a great deal to be fulfilled persons. They thought that when a man died, part of his spirit went to live below the earth next to his fathers in a place from which God was

absent as were the worries and noises of the living. God their friend and faithful defender allowed them to be lost forever! They must have had to repress their longing and silence their doubts to convince themselves that such a thing was just and good.

Their efforts to be resigned made them serious, conscientious men, subject to the mysterious will of God: but in exchange they were not given the happiness and spontaneity of children and a passionate love for their Saviour. In that, they were not very different from good atheists or people of good faith though poorly informed, who live without faith in the resurrection.



The Exodus is the liberation from Egypt. This, in the Bible, is the great deed of God: the liberation from the land of slavery to the land of promise. God liberates his people "with great power, with a strong arm and outstretched hand" opening a way in the sea.

The Exodus is the heart of the Old Testament and what gives it significance is that it shows us a God who liberates people. How is it that many people (non-believers) say: "Fear creates gods." And Lenin adds in his book, *Socialism and Religion*, "Religion teaches patience and resignation to those who toil during a lifetime of misery, and puts them to sleep with the hope of heavenly reward."

But it is not so. In the Exodus, God does not come to instill fear, he listens to the cry of the oppressed – giving them trust, awakening in them the hope of a real and total liberation and raising a generous leader for them. The Exodus is the model of all genuine human liberation.

To understand this liberation of the people of God, it is necessary to recall the historical situation at that time.

Historical Data

Five centuries had passed since Abraham's time. At one time the Egyptians had been routed by invaders coming from Asia who brought with them numerous nomads of the desert (see the story of Joseph). When the Egyptians could re-establish their own kings, these nomads were treated less considerably by the Egyptians, and many of them fled to avoid taxes or forced labour. Some were expelled (Ex. 12:31); others escaped under cover of night. (Ex. 12:38).

One of these groups, pursued by a detachment of Egyptian charioteers, was protected by an extraordinary intervention of God: *the Israelites saw the Egyptians dead on the seabanks* (Ex. 14:30). This miracle of the Crossing of the Red Sea, was effective because the man who directed the fugitives was Moses, God's prophet. He was capable of interpreting this divine work: Yahweh, the one and only God, had chosen Israel to be his people, and taken them from the slavery of Egypt to make them a holy people among the rest of the peoples.

The Exodus, or liberation from Egypt, initiated the history of the people of God. Moses and his own people remained a good time in the oasis of Sinai. There, Moses gave them the Law of Yahweh with its basic commandments: – Yahweh, a jealous God would not permit Israel to retain any of its traditional gods; instead, they were to serve him exclusively.

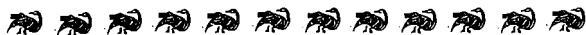
- Yahweh who surpassed the ideas that men had of him would not permit them to represent him under any image: "You shall not make images of God."
- Yahweh entrusted them the mission of conquering the land of Canaan to Israel.

The long history of the People of God began with the Exodus. This initial experience made other experiences possible which some day would culminate in the coming of the Saviour.

The Book of Exodus

The Book of Exodus was written by the same people who wrote Genesis. (See the introduction to Genesis regarding the *Yahwist*, the *Eloist* and the *Priests*.)

Do we have to believe that everything happened as related in Exodus? One has to make distinction. The ancient writer (the Bible scholars call him the *Yahwist*) composed his story from various documents of great historical value, although at times, happenings were



described with some poetical amplification. Subsequent writers, however, took much liberty with the story and were concerned, above all, with gaining new religious insights from these ancient happenings which God had chosen for Israel in order to educate and liberate it.

Throughout the ages the Biblical writers commented again and again on the Exodus event, always with the purpose of showing their people how God continued to guide them to new liberations (Is. 43:16-19). In the same way, we recognize in the Exodus, the foreshadowing of the actual struggles of the People of God, the Church, vis-a-vis violence, alienations and fears.

The Hebrews increase in Egypt

1 *'Here are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin, ⁴Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵These descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; apart from these, Joseph was already in Egypt.*

⁶Then Joseph died as did all his brothers and all that generation. ⁷The sons of Israel were fruitful and kept increasing. To such an extent did they multiply and grow in strength that the land teemed with them.

The Hebrews reduced to slavery

⁸Then a new king who had not known Joseph came to power ⁹and said to his people, "The Israelites are more numerous and stronger than we are. ¹⁰Let us deal warily with them lest they increase still more and, in case of

war, side with our enemy, fight against us and escape from the land."

¹¹So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. In that way they built the storage towns of Pithom and Rameses. ¹²But the more they oppressed the Hebrews the more they increased and spread, until the Egyptians dreaded the Israelites ¹³and became ruthless in making them work. ¹⁴They made life bitter for them in hard labour with bricks and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields. In all their work the Egyptians treated them harshly.

¹⁵Then the king of Egypt gave orders to the Hebrew midwives — one of whom was called Shiprah and the other Puah — ¹⁶that when they attended Hebrew women who were on the birthstool and saw that it was a boy, they were to kill it, but if it was a girl they were to let it live. ¹⁷But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded but let the children live. ¹⁸The king called

5. Gen 46, 8

7. Ps 105, 24; Dt 26, 5

14. Dt 11, 10

o For centuries a great part of humanity has lived under oppression. Historians speak little of humanity's life of suffering. Rebelliousness was scarce since the great majority were resigned, and even came to believe that slavery was a normal situation for them. But God willed to intervene, at least once, in a manifest form to liberate the Hebrew people. This was the first step in the history of the People of God.

The Bible traces in bold strokes the sub-human conditions of the Hebrews in Egypt:

- The Egyptian lords were afraid of a people who, according to them, grew in irresponsibility (v. 10 & 12);
- They imposed hard work on the Israelites in order to build and defend a society which did not promote their welfare or recognize their rights (v. 11);
- Exploitation and oppression went hand in hand with inhuman labour and political repression enforced by the Egyptian overseers;

the midwives and said, "Why have you acted like that and let the children live?" ¹⁹The midwives replied, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are vigorous and give birth even before a midwife arrives."

²⁰God blessed the midwives, and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹Because the midwives revered God, he made them mothers of families.

²²Pharaoh then gave this order to all the people: "Every infant boy born to the Hebrews must be thrown into the Nile, but every girl may live."

Moses saved from the river

2 ¹Now a man belonging to the clan of Levi married a woman of his own tribe. ²She gave birth to a boy and, seeing that he was a beautiful child, she kept him hidden for three months. ³As she could not conceal him any longer, she made a basket out of papyrus leaves and coated it with tar and pitch. She then laid the child in the basket and placed it among the reeds near the bank of the Nile; ⁴but the sister of the child kept at

a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile; her attendants meanwhile walked along the bank. When she saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid-servant to fetch it. ⁶She opened the basket and saw the child — a boy, and he was crying! She felt sorry for him, for she thought: "This is one of the Hebrew children."

⁷Then the sister of the child said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" ⁸Pharaoh's daughter agreed, and the girl went to call the mother of the child. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take the child and nurse him for me and I will pay you." So the woman took the child and nursed him ¹⁰and, when the child had grown, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him as her son. And she named him Moses to recall that she had drawn him *out of the water*.

Moses discovers his people

■ ¹¹After a fairly long time, Moses, by now a grown man, wanted to meet

Ex 6, 20

3. Acts 7, 20; Heb 11, 23

– Finally, an alien authority imposed drastic population control on the Israelites. (v. 16)

Situations of oppression can be found in 1 Mac 1:2; Mac 4:2; Mac 6; Is. 5:8; Am 5:10; Ex. 34; Mi 2:1; Job 24. 2:1; 25:9; Lam. 3:3.

Who were *Shiprah* and *Puah*? These are names of Egyptian women, who because of their compassion for the oppressed people, made mockery of the king's order and refused to execute what their conscience condemned.

+ The liberation of the Hebrew people begins with a simple, solitary act – that of a mother risking her life to save her son.

Her action is the manifestation of a mother's love. It is the rebellion of a conscience that refuses to obey an inhuman law. It is the act of faith of a mother who anticipates the wonderful future that God opens to a newly-born life, knowing also that children are the future of her people. (See Hebrews 11:21.)

Historians explain that the details of this story were inspired by the legend of King Sargon, who was saved from drowning when he was a boy. Perhaps. But Israel knew that Moses had been saved from the common fate of the Hebrews.

God prolongs this first liberating act. He gives the boy the opportunity to receive in the Pharaoh's court an education which he would never have received within his own family. It was necessary for the future liberator of slaves to have an experience of liberty. The Hebrew slaves, on the other hand, had no knowledge of what it means to be a free person.

■ Moses lived a prince's life. Nevertheless, he went to meet his brothers who lived in poorer conditions.

He noticed how heavily they were burdened. He did not respond like many culturally privileged who, rather than acting in solidarity with their people, act contrary to their interests.

his fellow Hebrews. He noticed how heavily they were burdened and he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his own people. ¹²He looked around and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

¹³When he went out the next day he saw two Hebrews quarrelling. Moses said to the man in the wrong, "Why are you striking a fellow countryman?" ¹⁴But he answered, "Who has set you prince and judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must be known."

¹⁵When Pharaoh heard about it he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian. There he sat down by a well.

Moses in Midian

◆ ¹⁶A priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's sheep. ¹⁷Some shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses

went to their help and watered the sheep.

¹⁸When the girls returned to their father Reuel, he asked them, "Why have you come back so early today?"

¹⁹They said, "An Egyptian protected us from the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the sheep."

²⁰The man said, "Where is he? Why did you leave him there? Call him and offer him a meal."

²¹Moses agreed to stay with the man and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. ²²She had a child and Moses named him Gershom, to recall that he had been a guest in a strange land.

God remembers Israel

○ ²³It happened during that long period of time that the king of Egypt died. The sons of Israel groaned under their slavery; they cried to God for help and from their bondage their cry ascended to God. ²⁴God heard their sigh and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

11. Heb 11, 24

14. Acts 7, 35

15. Gen 25, 2

16. Gen 24, 11

18. 3, 1

23. Jdg 2, 13; 1 S 7, 2

e.g. through the export of capital and brain rain). Moses did not deliberately close his eyes, like those who deny their humble beginnings or reject solidarity with their companions in order to be admitted to higher circles and be respected by those who are socially superior.

Immediately, Moses sides with his brothers, but on the following day, he discovers another aspect of evil: his brothers are not innocent victims. The oppression they suffer has something to do with the violence, the evil and the responsibility which exists among them. They are not respected by the Egyptians, but neither are they concerned about meriting this respect. At this time Moses does not know what to do and prefers to flee.

Moses has taken the first step on the way that will lead to the liberation of his people. Likewise, one who is able to share the lot of the privileged, prefers to put himself at the service of the needy, without knowing it, a follower of Christ, as Heb 11:25 says: "By faith, Moses refused to be called son of a daughter of Pharaoh. He preferred to share in the bad treatment of the people of God, rather than to know the passing pleasure of sin; hence he considered the humiliation of Christ more precious than the

treasures of Egypt."

Thus we see that the Bible values efforts made in favour of human dignity, and the efforts of youth, workers and all people in their struggle for development and for a more active participation in the building of their future.

But we must also understand that the liberation God will bring about is, at the same time, a liberation from structures of oppression and the awakening of man regarding his own sin.

◆ As a shepherd in the desert, Moses learns the raw life, poor and free, like that of Abraham. He lives among the Midianites, who are more or less descendants of the father of the believers (Gen 25:2). Thus, then, Moses receives from his father-in-law, Reuel, also called Jethro (3:1), the traditions about Abraham and his faith in the one and only God.

○ They cried out to God and God heard their cry. At times, people do not even have the spirit to hope in God, but even if they may have forgotten the promises, God does not forget them. God looks on his sons and daughters, and his love remains alive.

The Bible tells us that there is such a thing as

²⁵ God looked upon the sons of Israel and revealed himself to them.

The burning bush

+ 3 ¹ Moses pastured the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law, priest of Midian. One day he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the Mountain of God.

² The Angel of Yahweh appeared to him by means of a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that although the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ Moses thought, "I will go and see this amazing sight, why is the bush not burning up?"

⁴ Yahweh saw that Moses was drawing near to look, and God called to him from the middle of the bush,

"Moses! Moses!" He replied, "Here I am." ⁵ Yahweh said to him, "Do not come near; take off your sandals because the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And God continued, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face lest his eyes look on God. ⁷ Yahweh said, "I have seen the humiliation of my people in Egypt and I hear their cry when they are cruelly treated by their taskmasters. I know their suffering. ⁸ I have come down to free them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a beautiful spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

24. Gen 15, 16	6, 2	1. 4, 27; 24, 13; 1 K 19, 8	2. Acts 7, 30; Gen 18, 11; Dt 33, 16
5. Gen 28; 16; Jos 5, 5; Lev 17, 1; Ex 19, 12		6. Mk 12, 26; Gen 28, 17; 32, 31	
		Is 6, 5; Mk 4, 41; Lk 4, 36	

God's time, and that we cannot pretend to achieve things according to human schedules. In spite of the fact that we can hasten the hour of God with our prayers and the generosity of our submission, *time and the moments* belong to him (Heb 1:7).

God's delay: 2 Mac 6:12; Hab 1:2; Sir 35:19; Ps 44; Mk 4:26; Lk 18:1; Rev 6:11.

+ God waits several years and then calls Moses when he is already a mature man. He calls him at a time when Moses has chosen the paths of father of a family and shepherd of sheep. He does this in the desert where Moses has apparently isolated himself from the misfortunes of his brothers and, day after day, wastes the opportunity of helping his people. Thus, many times God waits on a person in this or that desert of his life. During those times, apparently so empty, God prepares his servant while heart and generosity remain intact.

The Angel of Yahweh appeared to him by means of a fire. The Angel of Yahweh (we know this is one way of saying Yahweh God himself: see *Apparitions and Angels*, Gen 16:1), presents himself as a fire that catches the eye but burns him who tries to come too close. On seeing it, Moses does what anyone would do when entering a sacred place: *take off your sandals*, in order not to bring before God the dust of ordinary existence. Thus we are reminded that man cannot approach God without divesting himself of his concerns and earthly desires.

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He who calls Moses is the

one whom his ancestors worshipped, calling him different names – but all of them had been invited to share in the same plan of salvation.

I will be with you. This is the comforting word that is read in the Bible every time God calls someone to a mission. Jos 1:5; Jdg 6:12; Mt 28:20; Lk 1:28.

Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Moses is no longer the enthusiastic young man who assaulted the Egyptian foreman: as a mature man he understands that this mission exceeds his strength and he is afraid to put himself totally in God's hands. But the divine call is not a voice that sounds and passes by: God has made himself the master of Moses' heart.

I am sending you to Pharaoh. Thus begins Moses' mission, which, until the end of his life, will demand of him total submission. Knowing with all certainty that God sends him, Moses will be able to persevere in the midst of the worst difficulties. After delivering Israel from Egypt, God will, almost by force, impose their destiny upon them, which is to be the chosen people of God.

God speaks of bringing Israel to the *land flowing with milk and honey*, the land promised to Abraham. He does not fix the time nor give details but, at least, he foretells an event that will prove the authenticity of the mission: someday, Israel, poor but free, will arrive with Moses at Mount Horeb (or Mount Sinai) to meet God and receive his life-giving words.

♦ THE DIVINE NAME

Among other peoples who have their own

to the territory of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the sons of Israel has reached me and I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

¹⁰Go now! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."

¹¹Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

¹²God replied, "I will be with you and this will be the sign that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

¹³Moses answered God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them: 'The

God of your fathers has sent me to you,' they will ask me: 'What is his name?' What shall I answer them?"

◆ ¹⁴God said to Moses, "I AM WHO AM. This is what you will say to the sons of Israel: 'I AM sent me to you.'

¹⁵You will also say: 'YAHWEH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me.' That will be my name forever, and by this name they shall call upon me for all generations to come.

Moses is given his mission

¹⁶Go! Call together the elders of Israel and say to them, 'Yahweh, the

8. Dt 7, 1	11. Jer 1, 5	12. Rom 6, 18; Gal 5, 13; 1 P 2, 16	14. Is 42, 8; 43, 10; 52, 6; Rev 1, 4
		15. Jn 8, 28; 8, 24	Hos 1, 9

ideas about God and who search for the meaning of their destiny in darkness, Israel is to be the people who know God according to the truth, and who, because of this, know wherein lies the true greatness of man. Moses, who will become the prophet and educator of Israel, is first to receive the knowledge of the One, Holy and Just God, who desires to be served by free persons.

By this name they shall call upon me (v. 15), it is evident that every name depends on the particular language in which it has its own meaning. God reveals to the Hebrews a name: Yahweh, which in their language is interpreted as: *He is*. If he had spoken to another people, God would have given another name which would have had meaning for them.

Yahweh means at the same time: *He is* and *He causes to exist*. Let us understand that God's acts and causes to exist that which he knows. This name is directly related to the saying by God in 14: *I am who am* and *I am*.

I am. This is the God who *Lives and Sees* (Gen 16: 13). When he wants to manifest something of his own mystery, he lets blazing fire (Ezk 1: 4; Hab 3: 4), windstorm and thunder (Ex 19: 6; 1K 19: 11; Ps 18, 9-17), and the waves of the sea go before him. All these are nothing more than images that protect, like a cloud (2 K 8: 10), God's mystery which is infinitely more profound. This mystery transcends and reaches beyond not only human sight but the mind of any human or angelic creature.

Every creature receives existence from God, but God exists in himself and depends on no one and nothing whatsoever. God is One, and none of those who receive existence from him can add anything to God. Thus, then, God is and he causes to exist the one who knows him. This

revelation is critical for understanding the whole Bible and it should be remembered when believers say rather simply, "God is Love; God is Goodness," and forget that this alone would be false if it were not first affirmed that: God is Who Is. If God were only the Almighty, we would think only of prostrating ourselves before him. If he were only Goodness, we would not understand why he lets us suffer. But no, he said: *I Am Who Am*. God is a wholly active and perfectly free Person; and he calls us to be persons who exist in truth. Hence, God created a world in which we could act responsibly. God does not impose good. He prefers that, through our experiences and our errors, we come to discover where the true good is.

To worship God does not mean, as some believe, to lie prostrate before him, but rather to approach him face to face. God wants to be served by persons who, in turn, free others.

In presenting himself as a Person, the one true God has said the most essential thing. In these beginnings he could not speak more precisely and reveal the mystery of the Divine Persons in the same God: this would be the task of Jesus (Mt 28: 9; Jn 1: 18-19). Hence, for centuries, the Israelites retained the figure of a Sovereign God who guided them with authority.

Yahweh or Jehovah? In the last centuries before Jesus' coming, the Israelites, out of respect, would not pronounce the name of Yahweh. Hence, Yahweh was changed to Yehowah in the Bible, a term which had no meaning nor was it pronounced, but on seeing it, the reader would know that he should not say Yahweh, but *Eäonah*, or Lord. (They had put into the sacred consonants *YHWH* of Yahweh the three vowels *e, o, a* of Edonah).

God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob appeared to me and said: I have seen and taken account of how the Egyptians have treated you, ¹⁷and I mean to bring you out of all this oppression in Egypt and take you to the land of the Canaanites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'

¹⁸The elders of Israel will listen to you and, with them, you shall go to the palace of the king of Egypt and say to him: 'The God of the Hebrews, Yahweh, has met with us. Now let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Yahweh our God.'

¹⁹I well know that the king of the Egyptians will not allow you to go unless he is forced to do so. ²⁰I will therefore stretch out my hand and strike Egypt in extraordinary ways, after which he will let you go. ²¹And I will make the Egyptians treat my people well when you leave; you will not go empty-handed. ²²Each woman will ask her neighbour, and any Egypt-

tian woman staying in her house, to lend her ornaments of silver and gold, and clothing. With these you will clothe your sons and daughters, and in this way you will plunder the Egyptians."

Moses granted miraculous powers

■ 4 ¹Moses replied to Yahweh. "What if they will not believe me or listen to me? Maybe they will say: 'That's not true. Yahweh did not appear to you.'"

²Yahweh then asked him, "What is that in your right hand?" "A staff," he replied. ³God said, "Throw it to the ground." He threw it and it became a serpent; and Moses drew back from it. ⁴Yahweh said, "Take it by the tail." Moses took it and it was again a staff in his hand. ⁵Then Yahweh said, "With such signs they may believe that Yahweh, the God of your fathers, appeared to you."

⁶Again Yahweh said to him, "Put your hand on your chest." He put his

15. Jl 3, 5; Acts 4, 14; Phil 2, 11

22. 11, 2; 12, 35

1. Mr 13, 57

Yahweh has met with us. Invoking religious motives (to offer sacrifices) could not hide the fact that the only objective of the Hebrew slaves was to liberate themselves from the oppression that they suffered. All this happened at a time when there was no social or political problem that was not expressed in religious terms (Ex 17:16; Num 25:16).

But today, some ask: "Does the Bible speak to us of liberation in the sense of human and political, or does it rather propose a spiritual liberation?" In truth, this opposition is artificial. Experience teaches us that in order to save one's neighbour, neither material help nor political change nor prayer is sufficient. What is important is that persons rise to new life. To do this, they themselves must confront and solve the real problems of their common life – material, educational or political – starting with a more lucid vision of reality as God sees it, and with a more authentic love which is spiritual.

I mean to bring you out of this oppression. God, who exists, is concerned with those who still do not exist in truth. We say that God saves human persons; and so we suppose that these are real persons and not undeveloped persons without liberty, or responsibility or recognized

dignity. Salvation is not the washing of souls but the restoration of the human person in all his dimensions – individual, family and social. When speaking of liberation, the Bible always refers to a total liberation of the human person. Persons are saved and liberated by liberating and saving others. We could study Exodus as a Life of Moses, and see that he was saved – or that he grew as a person and as a believer – to the extent that he was taking charge of his material and spiritual tasks, at once as leader liberator of his brothers.

■ *They will not believe me.* It is always difficult for the marginalized to unite and put their confidence in the one who can uplift them. But it will cost Israel even more to follow a path to liberation that is slow and so opposed to human wisdom. Moses usually does not care what people think, but acts with the authority of God. This is why he receives power to perform miracles which prove his authority.

All this is adapted to the world in which Moses lived. We find here the type of portents that were attributed to Egyptian sorcerers.

♦ *Your brother Aaron will speak for you.* Perhaps Moses wants to flee from the call of God; perhaps he feels inferior because he does

hand on his chest and when he took it away his hand was covered with leprosy, white as snow. ⁷And God said, "Put your hand back on your chest." So he put it back, and when he took it away again, his hand was healthy like the rest of his body.

⁸Yahweh added, "If they don't believe you and are not convinced by the first sign, they will believe you when they see the second. ⁹But if these two signs are not enough to make them believe you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground; and the water from the river will turn into blood."

Aaron, interpreter of Moses

◆ ¹⁰Moses said to Yahweh, "But, my Lord, never have I been a fluent speaker either before or after you have spoken to me. I cannot find words to express what I want to say." ¹¹Yahweh said to him, "Who gave man a mouth? Who makes him dumb or deaf, with sight or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? ¹²Go now. I will be on your lips and will inspire what you say."

¹³But Moses insisted, "My Lord, I pray you, why not send someone else?" ¹⁴At this Yahweh became angry with Moses and said, "Haven't you Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know he speaks well. Look! he is coming to meet you, ¹⁵and he will be glad when he sees you. You will speak to him and tell him what I have told you to say. And when you tell

him, or when he speaks, I will be with you and teach you what you have to say. ¹⁶Aaron will speak for you as a prophet speaks for his god. ¹⁷And with this staff in your hand you will work miraculous signs."

Moses returns to Egypt

○ ¹⁸Then Moses went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, "I am going back to my brothers in Egypt to see if they are still alive." Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace!"

¹⁹Yahweh said to Moses in the land of Midian, "Go back to Egypt for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead."

²⁰Moses took with him his wife and his sons. He put them on a donkey and set off for Egypt, holding in his hand the staff of God.

²¹Yahweh said to Moses, "You are returning to Egypt and you will perform all the miraculous signs that I have empowered you to do, in the presence of Pharaoh. I will, however, make him stubborn so that he will not let the people go. ²²You shall then say to Pharaoh: 'This is Yahweh's message: Israel is my firstborn son, ²³and I said to you: Let my son go that he may worship me. But you have refused to let him go and, because of this, I will take the life of your firstborn son."

²⁴At a lodging place on the way, the Angel of Yahweh approached Moses and tried to kill him. ²⁵But

7. Num 12, 10; 2 K 5, 27

10. Jer 1, 6

14. Dr 18, 13; Mt 10, 19; Is 6, 8

19. Mt 2, 20

not have the human qualities that seem essential in a leader, but God will send him the assistance he needs since he himself has given him the mission.

To better understand the role played by Aaron in these events, let us recall that in former times the Jewish priests, "descendants of Aaron," were those who preserved and taught the religion of Moses. In making Aaron Moses' brother and spokesman, these priests

claimed for themselves the authority of Moses (Mt 23:2, Mk 1:44).

○ Moses appears to be gravely sick: his wife thinks it is because he has not been circumcised. Therefore, according to the thinking of that time, she circumcises his son instead of him.

+ The word of God is not as easily heard in the offices of the capital as in the desert. Pharaoh's responses and decisions seem to be the model which many contemporary directors and admin-

Zipporah took a flint stone and cut her son's foreskin and, with it, she touched the feet of Moses, saying, "You are now my husband by blood!"²⁶ And the Angel left him. Zipporah said 'husband by blood' because of the circumcision.

Moses meets Aaron

²⁷Yahweh said to Aaron, "Go into the desert and meet your brother, Moses." So Aaron went and met him at the Mountain of God and kissed him.²⁸ Moses related to Aaron all that Yahweh had said to him and all the signs he had commanded him to perform.²⁹ Moses and Aaron assembled all the elders of the Israelites³⁰ and Aaron told them everything that Yahweh had said to Moses. He also performed all the signs before the people and they believed him.³¹ When they heard that Yahweh had visited the people of Israel and had seen their suffering, they bowed to the ground and worshipped him.

Moses speaks with Pharaoh

+ 5 ¹After this Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel says: 'Let my people go that they may hold a feast for me in the desert.'" ²Pharaoh replied, "Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh and I will not let Israel go." ³They then said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Allow us to make a three days' journey to the

desert. There we shall offer sacrifices to Yahweh, our God, lest he punish us with the plague or the sword." ⁴The king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take people away from their work? Get back to your tasks. ⁵The people are now numerous and you are asking them to interrupt their work."

⁶That same day Pharaoh gave the following order to the taskmasters of the people and to the Israelite foremen, ⁷"You will no longer supply the people with straw for making bricks. Let them go and find it themselves; ⁸but you will exact from them the same number of bricks as before, not one less. They are lazy and that is why they are crying out to go and sacrifice to their God. ⁹Make the work harder for the people that they may disregard all these lies."

First difficulties

¹⁰The slave drivers and their Israelite foremen went out and said to the people, "Pharaoh will not give you any more straw. ¹¹Go and get it yourselves wherever you can find it, but the amount of work done must be the same as before."

¹²The people scattered throughout Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. ¹³The taskmasters kept pressing them, saying, "Complete the work required of you each day, as you did when you had straw." ¹⁴The taskmasters beat the Israelite foremen they had placed over the people saying, "Why haven't your people completed

23. Dt 1, 31; 14, 1; 32, 6; Hos 11, 1	24. Gen 32, 25; Num 22, 22	25. Jos 5, 2
26. 12, 13	27. 3, 1	30. Jn 2, 11
		1. Ex 23, 14; Lk 2, 41

istrators imitate. Moses and Aaron receive a negative response and later face the mistrust of their companions.

Throughout the story, we find the same opposition from those who did not want to take any initiative to liberate themselves, and did not trust in its success. They paid no attention to the leaders working for their good. Martin Luther King, shortly before his death, said with sadness that he was shocked by the indifference of the Blacks; he felt alone in struggling for the cause of his own people. In the sixteenth century, Fray Bartolome de las Casas, for his protest on behalf of Latin American Indians, met with criticism from other religious.

God did not lack the means to advance his

the same amount of work as before?"

¹⁵The Israelite foremen complained to Pharaoh saying, "Why do you treat us like this? ¹⁶We are given to straw and yet we are told to make bricks. We are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people." ¹⁷Pharaoh replied, "Lazy! You are lazy, and that is why you ask to go and sacrifice to Yahweh. ¹⁸Go back to work. You will not be given straw but you will produce the same number of bricks."

¹⁹The Israelite foremen felt they were in great trouble. ²⁰They met Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them ²¹and said to them, "May Yahweh look upon you and judge you, because you have made us hateful to Pharaoh and his ministers, and placed in his hand a sword to kill us."

²²Moses then turned to Yahweh and said, "O Lord! Why have you treated your people so badly? Why did you send me? ²³From the time I spoke to Pharaoh in your name, he has brought trouble on this people and you have done nothing to rescue them!"

6 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, "Now you will see that I will overcome him and oblige him to let you go, even force him to drive you out of his land."

Another narrative of the call of Moses

■ ²God spoke to Moses saying, "I am Yahweh! ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty, but I did not make myself known to them by the name of Yahweh. ⁴I established my covenant with them promis-

ing to give them the land of Canaan, in which they lived as strangers. ⁵and now I remember my covenant as I hear the groaning of the Israelites enslaved by the Egyptians.

⁶Therefore say this to them: 'I am Yahweh. I will take you away from the burden of Egypt and free you from its bondage; I will redeem you with wonderful deeds and with the blows of my powerful hand.' ⁷I will take you for my people and I will be your God who delivered you from the slavery of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you to the land I swore I would give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and I will give it to you as your own possession. I am Yahweh."

⁹This is how Moses spoke to the people of Israel but they did not listen, so discouraged were they by their cruel slavery.

¹⁰Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ¹¹"Go and speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt and tell him to let the people of Israel leave the country." ¹²But Moses said, "If the sons of Israel paid no attention to me, how then will Pharaoh listen to me, a man who has difficulty in expressing himself?" ¹³But Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron and ordered them, and Pharaoh as well, to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt.

The forefathers of Moses and Aaron

¹⁴These were the heads of the tribes:

Sons of Reuben, Israel's firstborn: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben.

¹⁵Sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon.

¹⁶These are the sons of Levi with their descendants: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. ¹⁷Sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei and their descendants.

¹⁸Sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath lived for a hundred and thirty-three years.

¹⁹Sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the descendants of Levi with their families.

²⁰Amram married Jochebed, his aunt, who gave him two sons, Aaron and Moses. Amram lived a hundred and thirty-seven years.

2. 3. 1

4. Gen 17. 1

8. Gen 15

berating work, provided that Moses would have faith and would persevere.

Notice the embarrassment of those trusted Israelites who supervised the people on behalf of the Egyptian authorities.

■ We said in the beginning of this book that different accounts of the same events were put

together. Here begins a later and more summarized story of Moses' call. It gives a list of his ancestors. The Jewish priests attribute to Moses a life of 120 years, that is, of three generations – a symbolic and perfect number:

- 40 years old upon leaving Egypt
- 80 years old when he met God
- 120 years old at his death.



²¹The sons of Izhar were: Korah, Nepheg and Zichri.

²²The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri.

²³Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

²⁴The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites.

²⁵Eleazar, son of Aaron, married one of Putiel's daughters and Phinehas was their son.

These are the heads of the families of the Levites according to their clans.

²⁶It was to Aaron and Moses that Yahweh said, "Bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt in divisions."

²⁷It was they who spoke with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, about bringing the sons of Israel out of Egypt. Yes, it was Moses and Aaron.

²⁸When Yahweh spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹he said, "I am Yahweh. Say to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I tell you." ³⁰But Moses replied, "I am a poor speaker and why would Pharaoh listen to me?"

Announcement of the plagues

7 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, "See, I have made you like a god in Pharaoh's eyes; and Aaron, your brother, will be your prophet. ²You will tell Aaron all that I command you, and he will tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel leave the country. ³But I will make him stubborn and although I multiply my signs and miracles, ⁴he will not listen to you. Then I will use my power and lead my armies, my people, the sons of Israel out of Egypt by means of great punishments. ⁵Then will the Egyptians know that I am Yahweh when they see with what power I bring the people of Israel out of their country."

⁶Moses and Aaron did exactly what Yahweh had commanded. ⁷Moses was eighty and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

⁸Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, ⁹"When Pharaoh speaks to you and tells you to perform a miracle to prove the truth of what you say, you will say to Aaron: 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.'"

¹⁰Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did what Yahweh had commanded. Aaron threw his staff before Pharaoh and his ministers, and it became a snake. ¹¹Pharaoh then summoned wise men and magicians, and they, too, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by means of their secret arts. ¹²Each one threw his staff down and the staffs became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed the staffs of the magicians. ¹³However, Pharaoh was obstinate and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had said.

The plagues of Egypt

◆ ¹⁴Yahweh said to Moses, "Pharaoh is stubborn; he has refused to let the people leave. ¹⁵So you will go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes to the water. Wait for him on the bank of the river and hold in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. ¹⁶You will say to him, 'Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to say to you: 'Let my people go to worship me in the desert; but so far you have not listened.' ¹⁷By this you shall learn that I am Yahweh: Look, I will strike the waters of the Nile with the staff I have in my hand, and they will turn into blood! ¹⁸The fish in the river will die and the Nile will become foul, and the Egyptians will no longer be able to drink its water."

¹⁹Yahweh said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, rivers, canals, ponds and pools of water; and they will turn into blood. There will be blood throughout Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.' ²⁰Moses and Aaron did as Yahweh had commanded.

Aaron raised his staff and struck the waters of the Nile, in the presence of Pharaoh and his ministers, and all

1. 4, 16	3. Ps 135, 9	11. 2 Tim 3, 8	14. Ps 78, 44; Wis 11, 1; Is 15, 9
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◆ Here we have the plagues of Egypt. The paragraphs which come from the most ancient story narrate 7 plagues. The other story, the Eloist's, gives 9. The third story adds the plague of ulcers.

The biblical writers knew that the power of evil also performs miracles to obscure the interventions of God. Note these details: 7:11-12; 8:3; 8:14; 9:10.

Chapter 10 describes the reactions of peo-

ple who recognize the signs of God without arriving at true conversion.

Referring to the plagues or misfortunes of Egypt, the modern reader will ask three things:

- Did these stupendous miracles to bring harm upon the Egyptians really happen?
- If these plagues were merely natural phenomena, should we consider any misfortune as a punishment of God?



the water in the Nile turned to blood. "The fish in the river died and the Nile was contaminated so that the Egyptians could no longer drink the water of the Nile.

There was blood all over the country of Egypt. "The Egyptian magicians, however, could do the same with their secret crafts, and Pharaoh remained unmoved; and, as Yahweh had foretold, he would not listen to Moses and Aaron.

²³ Pharaoh returned to his house as if nothing of importance had happened. ²⁴ And yet all the Egyptians were digging near the Nile for water to drink because they could not drink from the river.

The second plague: the frogs

²⁵ Seven days passed after Yahweh had struck the Nile. ²⁶ Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and tell him that Yahweh says, 'Let my people go to worship me!'" ²⁷ If you refuse to let them leave, I will punish the country with a plague of frogs. ²⁸ The Nile will teem with frogs. They will invade your house, your bedroom and your bed, your servants' and your people's houses, your ovens and your kneadingbowls. ²⁹ Over you and your people the frogs will climb."

8 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Say to Aaron: 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, canals and ponds of Egypt' and cause frogs to cover all the country of Egypt." ³ The magicians of Egypt did the same by means of their secret formulas, and they brought frogs over the land of Egypt!

⁴ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Ask Yahweh to remove the frogs from me and my people and I will send your people to sacrifice to Yahweh." ⁵ But Moses replied, "Let me know, please, when I am to make the petition for you, your officials and your people that you may be rid of frogs

except in the Nile." ⁶ Pharaoh answered, "Tomorrow"; and Moses said, "Right, and that you may know that there is no one like Yahweh, our God," the frogs will disappear from you and your house, your servants and your people; only in the Nile will they remain." ⁸ With this Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh.

Then Moses called on Yahweh concerning the frogs that he had inflicted on Pharaoh. ⁹ Yahweh did as Moses had promised Pharaoh and the frogs died in the houses, the farms and the fields. ¹⁰ The people piled them in heaps and the land was filled with a foul smell. ¹¹ Now that relief had come, Pharaoh became even more stubborn and would not listen, just as Yahweh had foretold.

The third plague: the mosquitoes

¹² Yahweh said to Moses, "Tell Aaron to strike the dust of the earth with his staff and turn it into mosquitoes throughout the land." ¹³ Aaron did this; he struck the dust of the earth which turned into mosquitoes that tormented men and animals. All the dust of the earth all over Egypt turned into mosquitoes. ¹⁴ But when the magicians tried, by means of their secret formulas, to drive away the mosquitoes, they were not able to do so, and the mosquitoes kept tormenting men and animals. ¹⁵ The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God"; but Pharaoh was unmoved and did not listen, as Yahweh had foretold.

The fourth plague: the horseflies

¹⁶ Yahweh said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and go to Pharaoh, when he is on his way to the river. Say to him: This is Yahweh's message: Let my people go and worship me. ¹⁷ If you refuse to let them go, I will send horseflies on you, on your officials and on your people and your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be filled with horseflies and even the ground on which they are built. ¹⁸ But on that day I will spare the land of Goshen

17. Rev 8, 8; 16, 3
15. 1k 11, 20

26. Rev 16, 13
18. Gen 47, 1

1. Ps 78, 45; 105, 45; Rev 16, 13

5. Is 45, 5

– Was the Egyptian peasant or citizen responsible for the politics of Pharaoh and did he deserve to be punished?

With regard to the first question, we know that for centuries, these stories were narrated and amplified by the Israelites. They were meant to show that through these natural misfortunes common in Egypt: the locusts, the Red Nile, frogs – God manifested his will to Pharaoh.

With regard to the second, see the commentary on Luke 13:1. God warns us through signs. National leaders, if they would open their eyes to

the evils that afflict their country, would realize that injustices will be paid for dearly.

With regard to the third question, let us not forget that the sacred authors shared the culture of their times. They were not concerned about whether it was the Egyptians or Pharaoh himself who had sinned in opposing Moses. They only saw that they opposed God's design and must therefore be vanquished; that is what they expressed with the word "punished." They were not concerned about the fate of the Egyptian peasant. For them, Egypt represented the unjust Power, and Pharaoh, the Enemy of God.



where my people are. No horseflies will be there and by this you may know that I, Yahweh, am in the land. ¹⁹ I will make a distinction between my people and your people. By tomorrow this will have happened."

²⁰ Yahweh did this and dense swarms of horseflies invaded Pharaoh's house and the houses of all his people and devastated the whole country.

²¹ Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go and sacrifice to your God in this country." ²² But Moses replied, "That would not be right. We offer to our God animals which are sacred for the Egyptians. If we were to offer in their presence a sacrifice which offends the Egyptians, wouldn't they stone us?"

²³ We must make a three days' journey into the desert and there we will sacrifice to Yahweh, our God, as he commands."

²⁴ Pharaoh replied, "I will let you go and sacrifice to your God in the desert, but on condition that you do not go far. And pray to God for me!"

²⁵ Moses said, "I am leaving you and I will pray to Yahweh for you, and tomorrow the horseflies will leave you, your officials and your people, but do not continue to deceive us by refusing to let the people go to the desert."

²⁶ Moses left Pharaoh's house and prayed to Yahweh ²⁷ who did as Moses had asked, and delivered Pharaoh, his officers and people from the horseflies. Not one horsefly was left.

²⁸ But Pharaoh was relentless and refused to let the people go.

The fifth plague: death of Egyptian livestock

9 ¹ Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is the message of Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go and offer sacrifices to me. ² If you refuse to let them go and hold them back any longer, ³ the hand of Yahweh will bring a terrible plague on your horses, your donkeys and your camels, on your cattle and your sheep. ⁴ But Yahweh will make a distinction

between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt. Nothing belonging to the people of Israel will die."

⁵ Yahweh then fixed a time and said, "It will be done tomorrow." ⁶ Yahweh did this the following day; all the livestock belonging to the Egyptians died, but not one owned by the Israelites died. ⁷ Pharaoh made enquiries and in fact found that none of the cattle belonging to the Israelites had died. But Pharaoh remained adamant and did not let the people go.

The sixth plague: the boils

⁸ Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "Take two handfuls of ashes from the brick oven and let Moses throw it up in the air in front of Pharaoh's eyes. ⁹ It will become fine dust all over Egypt and bring festering boils on men and animals." ¹⁰ So they took ashes from the oven and, in the presence of Pharaoh, Moses threw it up in the air and it brought festering boils on men and animals. ¹¹ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because they had boils like all the other Egyptians.

¹² But Yahweh made Pharaoh stubborn and he did not listen to Moses and Aaron as Yahweh had foretold.

The seventh plague: the hail

¹³ Yahweh said to Moses, "Rise early: present yourself to Pharaoh and say to him: This is the message of Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews: Send my people away to worship me! ¹⁴ because this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you, your ministers and your people, that you may know there is no one like me in the whole world. ¹⁵ For had I wished, I could have raised my hand against you and your people, and with a similar pestilence wiped you from the face of the earth. ¹⁶ But this is why I have let you live: that you may witness my power and that my name may be celebrated throughout the earth. ¹⁷ Are you still set against my people leaving the country? ¹⁸ Tomorrow at this time I will send very heavy hail such as has never been in Egypt from the day of its foundation. ¹⁹ So now let all your livestock and all that you have in the fields take shelter, because when the hail falls on all that remains in the fields, whether men or animals, they will die." ²⁰ Those among Pharaoh's officials who believed Yahweh's word hurried to bring their slaves and cattle inside; ²¹ but those who paid no attention to Yahweh's warning left their slaves and their cattle in the fields.

²² Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand towards heaven and let hail fall throughout Egypt on men and animals, and all that grows in the field." ²³ Moses stretched out his staff towards heaven and Yahweh sent thunder and hail; lightning struck the earth ²⁴ and Yahweh rained hail on the land of Egypt: lightning flashed in the midst of the hail. It was very heavy hail such as had never been known in all Egypt from the time it had first become a nation.

²⁵ Throughout Egypt the hail struck everything in the fields, both men and animals. It beat down everything growing in the fields



and felled every tree. ²⁶ But where the Israelites lived there was no hail.

²⁷ Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Now it is clear I have sinned. Yahweh is in the right; I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸ Pray Yahweh to stop the thunder and hail! I will let you go, and no longer will you stay here."

²⁹ Moses said to him, "As soon as I leave the town I will lift my hands towards Yahweh; the thunder will cease and there will be no more hail, and you will know that the earth is Yahweh's. ³⁰ But as for you and your officials, I know that you don't yet fear Yahweh, our God." ³¹ The flax and the barley were ruined, as the barley was almost ripe and the flax was in flower. ³² but the wheat and the spelt which are late crops were not destroyed.

³³ Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city and raised his hands towards Yahweh. The thunder and hail ceased and it stopped raining. ³⁴ Pharaoh, seeing that there was no rain and that the thunder and hail had ceased, sinned yet again. ³⁵ He and his ministers remained unyielding and would not let the Israelites go, just as Yahweh had foretold through Moses.

The eighth plague: the locusts

10 ¹ Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh for I have made him stubborn and his ministers as well, in order to show my signs among them, ² and that you may tell your grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and about the signs I worked among them, and that you may know that I am Yahweh."

³ Moses went with Aaron and said to Pharaoh, "This is the word of Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews: How much longer will you refuse to submit to me? Let my people go and worship me. ⁴ If you refuse to let my people go, I will bring locusts into your country ⁵ and they will completely cover the surface of the land. They will devour what was left after the hail as well as every tree in the fields. ⁶ They will fill your house and the houses of your ministers and all the houses in Egypt, something your fathers and their fathers before them have never seen from ancient times to this day." Having said this, Moses turned away and left Pharaoh's presence.

⁷ Pharaoh's ministers said to him, "For how long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go and worship Yahweh, their God. Don't you realize that Egypt is ruined?"

⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said, "Go! Worship Yahweh, your God. But exactly who are to go?"

⁹ Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old, with our sons and daughters, with our sheep and our cattle, for it is the great feast of Yahweh that we are to celebrate." ¹⁰ Pharaoh said, "May Yahweh help you if ever I let you go with your little ones! Oh no! It's clear you are bent on evil. ¹¹ No! Only the men will offer sacrifice to Yahweh, if that is what you want!" And they were driven away from Pharaoh's presence.

¹² Yahweh said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and bring locusts to the land of Egypt. Let them eat every plant in the land, everything that was left after the hail." ¹³ So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt. All that day and night Yahweh brought an east wind over the land and in the morning the east wind brought the locusts. ¹⁴ They came and settled on the land in such quantities as had never been seen before and will never be seen again. ¹⁵ They covered the surface of the earth and darkened the light of the sun. They devoured all the vegetation in the land and all the fruit of the trees left after the hail. Nothing green remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, in all the land of Egypt.

¹⁶ Because of all this Pharaoh hastened to summon Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I have sinned against Yahweh, your God, and against you. ¹⁷ Forgive my sin, I pray you, at least for once and ask Yahweh, your God, for a final favour: to rid me of this deadly plague."

¹⁸ Moses left Pharaoh and interceded with Yahweh ¹⁹ who brought a very strong wind from the west that carried off the locusts and swept them into the Red Sea. Not one locust was left within the boundaries of Egypt.

²⁰ But Yahweh let Pharaoh be stubborn and he would not allow the Israelites to leave.

The ninth plague: the darkness

²¹ Yahweh said to Moses, "Stretch your hand towards heaven and let darkness descend on the land of Egypt, a darkness so dense that

o *I have made him stubborn.* The Bible does not deny that man is responsible for his acts: Pharaoh is the one who hardens his heart. However, the Bible stresses that nothing happens except what God allows and that he allows what

serves his own plans. That is what the writer means with this expression: *I have made him stubborn* or, better, *I have let him be stubborn.* Let us understand, "My plans are better realized with opposition from Pharaoh."

11. Za 9, 9; Rev 7, 14

16. 2 S 20, 18

22. Dt 33, 13

27. Jdg 20, 21

31. 23, 9



it can be felt." ²² Moses stretched out his hand towards heaven and instantly black darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days.

²³ They could not see each other and they could not move about for three days, but where the sons of Israel lived, there was light. ²⁴ Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go and worship Yahweh, you and your children with you; leave only your flocks and herds behind!"

²⁵ Moses said, "Are you going to give us animals for our sacrifices and burnt offerings?"

²⁶ No! Our cattle to the last hoof must also go with us, for it is from our livestock that we will choose the victims we will offer to Yahweh. Moreover we shall not know which ones we must sacrifice until we arrive at that place."

²⁷ But Yahweh let Pharaoh be stubborn and Pharaoh would not let them go.

²⁸ Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Take care! Never come before me again, for the day you do, you will die!" ²⁹ Moses said, "It is as you say, I shall never come before you again."

The tenth plague: the death of the firstborn

+ 11 'Yahweh said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and Egypt. After that he will send you away and even drive you away completely. ² Speak to the people and tell them that both men and women are to ask their neighbours for articles of silver and gold."

³ Yahweh disposed the Egyptians favourably towards the people. Moses, moreover, was regarded as a person of importance in Egypt both by Pharaoh's ministers and by the people.

⁴ Moses said, "This is Yahweh's message: 'About midnight, I shall go through Egypt ⁵ and all the firstborn in Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who is heir to the throne, to the firstborn of the servant behind the

mill and the firstborn of the animals.

⁶ There will be great wailing throughout all Egypt, such as has never been before and never will be again. ⁷ But among the Israelites not a dog will howl for the death of either man or beast. This is that you may understand that Yahweh makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

⁸ All these ministers of yours will come down to me and bow before me saying, 'Go, you and all who follow you!' After that I will leave." And turning in anger he left Pharaoh.

⁹ Yahweh said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, and so the wonders that I do in Egypt will be multiplied."

¹⁰ Moses and Aaron had worked all these marvels in the presence of Pharaoh, but Yahweh had made Pharaoh obstinate and he would not let the people of Israel leave his country.

The Passover

o 12 'Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt and said, ² "This month is to be the beginning of all months, the first month of your year. ³ Speak to the community of Israel and say to them:

On the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb, a lamb for each house. ⁴ If the family is too small for a lamb, they must join with a neighbour, the nearest to the house, according to the number of persons and to what each one can eat.

⁵ You will select a perfect lamb without blemish, a male born during the present year, taken from the sheep

21. Wis 17, 1; Rev 16, 10

10. Is 6, 10; Jn 12, 37

5, 1; 10, 24

3. Lev 23, 5; Num 9, 1; 28, 16;

Dr 16, 1

+ All the firstborn shall die. The tenth plague nears: the "Angel of Yahweh" will make the sons of the Egyptians die. Very possibly, as in 2 Kings 19:25, this was some epidemic or plague. At this very time the meal of the paschal lamb will be celebrated.

o Each man is to take a lamb. The ancestors of the Hebrews, when wandering with their flocks before they stayed in Egypt, celebrated each year the Pasch of the Lamb, the traditional feast of the shepherds. They sacrificed it on the first moon of spring (12:2) a critical period for



or goats. ⁶Then you will keep it until the fourteenth day of the month.

On that evening all the people will slaughter their lambs ⁷and take some of the blood to put on the doorposts and on top of the doorframes of the houses where you eat.

⁸That night you will eat the flesh roasted at the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

⁹Do not eat the meat lightly cooked or boiled in water but roasted entirely over the fire – the head, the legs and the inner parts. ¹⁰Do not leave any of it until the morning. If any is left to the morning, burn it in the fire.

¹¹And this is how you will eat: with a belt round your waist, sandals on your feet and a staff in your hand. You shall eat hastily for it is a passover in honour of Yahweh. ¹²On that night I shall go through Egypt and strike every firstborn in Egypt, men and animals; and I will even bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt, I, 'ahweh! ¹³The blood on your houses will be the sign that you are there. I will see the blood and pass over you;

and you will escape the mortal plague when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴This is a day you are to remember and celebrate in honour of Yahweh. It is to be kept as a festival day all generations forever.

The feast of the unleavened bread

+ ¹⁵For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread. From the first day you are to remove all leaven from your houses, for if anyone eats leavened bread from the first to the seventh day he shall be cut off from Israel.

¹⁶On the first day there will be a sacred reunion and another on the seventh. No work is to be done on these days except what is necessary in the preparation of food.

¹⁷Celebrate the feast of unleavened bread, because on that day I brought your armies out of Egypt. Celebrate it in future generations as an everlasting ordinance. ¹⁸In the first month, from the fourteenth day in the evening to the twenty-first, you are to eat unleavened bread.

¹⁹For seven days there will be no leaven in your houses. Anyone who eats what is leavened will be cut off from the community of Israel whether foreigner or native born.

²⁰Nothing leavened is to be eaten; only unleavened bread is to be eaten."

◆ ²¹Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Select and

5. Lev 22, 19 11. 1 P 1, 13; Lk 22, 15; 1 Cor 5, 7
34, 18; 1 Cor 5, 7

14. Jos 5, 10; 2 K 23, 21; Est 4, 25, 21 15. 23, 15;

he ewes which had just given birth. The lamb set aside for the feast was kept for several days in the same places where the people were (12:6) so that it could be better identified with the family and carry the sins of all its members. Later, the ramping tents were sprinkled with its blood to drive away the "deadly" spirits that threatened people and animals.

I will see the blood, and pass over. The Israelites, like the rest of the people of their time, had a terrible image of God and believed they could not placate this violent God except through sacrifices and blood (Heb 9:22). Only with time did they discover that these sacrifices were a very imperfect form of worship (Is 1:11; Psalms 40:7 and 51:18).

Henceforth, the Israelite families would consider their firstborn as belonging and consecrated to Yahweh (Ex 13:1), for they had been saved from the plague. According to this law, Jesus, the firstborn of Mary and of God, would be presented in the Temple (Lk 2:22).

It is the Passover for Yahweh. (12:27). This feast of pagan origin will acquire a new mean-

ing: the blood of the lamb seals Yahweh's covenant with the people whom he chose from among the other peoples. Henceforth, the Passover will be the feast of Israel's independence, and God will allow that Jesus to die and rise again in the days of the Passover. The death of Jesus seals God's New Covenant with humanity (Lk 22:20).

Each Mass recalls the death and resurrection of Christ, the Lamb of God. Would that these Masses bring together believers who are aware of having been liberated and are committed to the task of liberating the whole of humanity.

+ When, centuries later, Israel was no longer an agricultural people, it was traditional to celebrate yearly, in the spring, a week-long feast during which they ate unleavened bread. This feast was of pagan origin but the Jewish priests, instead of fighting against this practice, preferred to combine it with the feast of the Passover and give it a new meaning by relating it to the Liberation from Egypt. This unleavened bread would call to mind the hurried flight when the Israelites lacked time to leaven their bread.



take one animal for each family and slaughter the Passover lamb. ²² Take a twig of hyssop dipped in its blood and sprinkle the blood on the doorposts and the top of the doorframe: since then on no one will go out of the door of the house before morning. ²³ Because Yahweh will pass through to strike Egypt and when he sees the blood on the lintel and the doorposts, he will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to enter your houses and kill.

²⁴ You and your descendants shall observe these instructions as an everlasting ordinance; ²⁵ you will carry out this ceremony when you enter the land that Yahweh will give you, as he promised. ²⁶ And when your children ask you: 'What does this ceremony mean?' ²⁷ you will tell them: 'It is the sacrifice of the Passover for Yahweh who passed over the houses of the Israelites when he struck Egypt and spared our houses.'

When the people heard this they bowed down and worshiped. ²⁸ Then they went away and did what Yahweh had ordered Moses and Aaron.

Death of the firstborn

²⁹ It happened that in the middle of the night Yahweh struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, heir to the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner in the dungeon and the firstborn of all the animals. ³⁰ Pharaoh, his officials and all the Egyptians got up in the night and there was loud wailing in Egypt for there was no house without a death.

³¹ Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron

in the night and said, "Get up and go from among my people, you and the people of Israel. Go and worship Yahweh as he told you! ³² Take your sheep and your cattle, as you told me, and go! provided that the blessing be for me as well." ³³ The Egyptians too, pressed the people to leave the country in all haste. For they said, "If they don't go, we are all going to die."

³⁴ So the Israelites carried away on their shoulders the dough which had not yet risen, and their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks. ³⁵ They did as Moses had instructed them and borrowed from the Egyptians articles of gold and silver and clothes. ³⁶ Yahweh made the Egyptians agree the petitions of his people and give them what they asked for. In this way they plundered the Egyptians.

Israel departs

■ ³⁷ *The Israelites left Rameses for Succoth, about six hundred thousand of them on the march, counting the men only, and not the children.*

³⁸ *A great number of other people of all descriptions went with them, as well as sheep and cattle in droves.*

³⁹ *With the dough they had brought with them from Egypt, they made cakes of unleavened bread. It had not risen for when they were driven from Egypt they could not delay and had not even provided themselves with food.*

⁴⁰ *The Israelites had been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹ It was at the end of these four hundred and thirty years to the very day that the armies of Yahweh left Egypt.*

⁴² *This is the night when Yahweh*

22. 1 K 4, 33; Ps 51, 9; Heb 9, 19
29. Ps 78, 51; 136, 10; Wis 18, 5

23. Gen 19, 13; 2 Sam 24, 16
37. Num 1, 46; 33, 3

27. 13, 8; Dt 6, 20; Jos 4, 6
38. Num 11, 4 40. Gen 15, 13; Gal 3, 17

◆ Here we find other more ancient instructions on how to celebrate the Passover.

■ *People of all descriptions* (38). The wan-

dering Israelites did not have the appearance of a holy people. There were those who, for diverse reasons, had decided to leave with

kept watch to bring Israel out of Egypt. This night is for Yahweh, and the sons of Israel are to keep vigil on this night, year after year, for all time.

Ordinances for the passover

⁴³ *Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the precepts for the celebration of the Passover. No foreigner is to eat it, ⁴⁴ except the slave who has been circumcised after having been bought. ⁴⁵ He may eat it. But not so the temporary resident or the hired worker. ⁴⁶ The lamb must be eaten inside the house and nothing of it shall be taken outside. Do not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ All the community of Israel will observe this rite.*

⁴⁸ *If a guest is staying with you and wants to celebrate the Passover of Yahweh, he must have all the males in his household circumcised. Then he may take part like one born in the land, but no uncircumcised man may participate. ⁴⁹ The law is the same for the native and the stranger living with you."*

⁵⁰ *All the people of Israel did as Yahweh had commanded Moses and Aaron, ⁵¹ and that same day Yahweh brought out the sons of Israel and their armies from the land of Egypt.*

Offering of the firstborn

13 ¹ *Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ² "Consecrate to me every firstborn: he first to leave the womb among the sons of Israel, whether of man or beast, is mine."*

³ *Moses said to the people, "Remember the day you came out of Egypt from the house of slavery, for it was by his power that Yahweh brought you out; because of this you will not eat leavened bread.*

o ⁴ *The day you left was in the month of Abib. ⁵ When Yahweh brings you to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Jivites and the Jebusites — a land flowing with milk and honey which he swore to your fathers to give you — you will carry out this ceremony.*

⁶ *For seven days you will eat unleavened bread and on the seventh day you will hold a feast in honour of Yahweh. ⁷ You will eat unleavened bread for seven days and no leavened bread is to be seen among you or anywhere throughout all your territory. ⁸ On that day you will tell your son: 'I do this because of what Yahweh did for me when I came out of Egypt.'*

⁹ *This ceremony will be for you as a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead, so that Yahweh's law may be ever on your lips, for it was with great power that Yahweh brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰ Because of this you will observe this ordinance at the appointed time from year to year.*

¹¹ *When Yahweh brings you to the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he swore to you and your fathers, ¹² you are to give over to Yahweh all that first opens the womb, and every firstborn of your cattle as well. These firstborn males are for Yahweh.*

¹³ *Every firstborn donkey will be redeemed by a lamb, and if you do not redeem it, you are to break its neck. Every firstborn among your sons you are to redeem. ¹⁴ When in the future your son questions you as to what it means you will say: 'Yahweh, by his power brought us out of Egypt from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ As Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, Yahweh slew every firstborn in Egypt, of man and beast. That is why I sacrifice to Yahweh all the males of my cattle that first open the womb, but the firstborn of my sons, I redeem.'*

¹⁶ *It will be as a sign on your hand and a charm between your eyes, reminding you that the power of Yahweh brought us out of Egypt.*

The departure

¹⁷ *It happened that when Pharaoh sent the people away, God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer, for God thought that the people might lose heart if they were faced with the prospect of a battle and would return to Egypt. ¹⁸ God therefore led the people by the way of the*

46. Num 9, 12; Jn 19, 36

8. 12, 26

12. 22, 26; 34, 19
Lk 2, 23; Gen 22

13. Num 3, 11; 18, 15; Dt 15, 19

Moses' men. The Saviour catches all in his net and only with time, through the trials of the desert, the good and the bad will be separated.

Six hundred thousand. This fabulous number is only intended to express the religious importance of this departure. In reality, those who left with Moses could not have been more than some two hundred persons, including wives and sons. Let us not forget that these were shepherds who could not survive with less than

ten animals per person. A group of two hundred persons required some two thousand sheep and oxen. The wells of Sinai and their oases did not permit the transit of more numerous flocks.

o As a sign on your hand (verses 9 and 16). The other peoples used tattoos and religious objects to affirm their religious identity. The Israelites, instead, would be recognized by the celebration of the day on which God, their liberator, saved them.



wilderness towards the Red Sea. So the Israelites left Egypt in an orderly manner.

¹⁹ Moses took with him the bones of Joseph for he had made the sons of Israel swear saying, "God will surely remember you and then you will carry my bones with you away from here."

²⁰ They moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham bordering the wilderness.

²¹ By day Yahweh went before them in a pillar of cloud to guide them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, enabling them to travel day and night. ²² Neither the cloud by day nor the fire by night, disappeared from the sight of the people.

The Egyptians pursue the Israelites

14 ¹ Then Yahweh said to Moses, ² "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, facing Baalzephon. You will encamp opposite this place and near the sea." ³ So Pharaoh will think that the people of Israel have lost their way, and the wilderness has closed in on them. ⁴ Then I will make Pharaoh's heart stubborn so that he will pursue you. And I will draw glory for myself at the cost of Pharaoh and his army, and the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh!"

And the Israelites did as they had been instructed.

Crossing of the Red Sea

◆ ⁵ The king of Egypt was told that the people had fled; then Pharaoh and his ministers changed their minds with regard to the people. "What have we done," they said, "in allowing Israel to go and be free of our service?" ⁶ Pharaoh prepared his chariot and took his army with him. ⁷ There were six hundred of his best chariots; indeed he took all the Egyptian chariots, each one with his warriors.

"Yahweh had hardened the mind of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who set out in pursuit of the Israelites as they marched forth triumphantly." The Egyptians—all the chariots and horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army—gave chase and caught up with them when they had encamped by the sea near Pihahiroth, facing Baalzephon.

¹⁰ The Israelites saw the Egyptians marching after them: Pharaoh was drawing near. They were terrified and cried out to Yahweh. ¹¹ Then they said to Moses, "Were there no tombs in Egypt? Why have you brought us to

17. Num 14, 14

19. Gen 50, 25; Jos 24, 32

21. Dt 1, 33; Is 4, 4; 52, 12; 60, 19

22. Ps 78, 14; Wis 10, 17; 18, 3; Jn 8, 12

4, 10, 2

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The liberation of Israel remains as a model for all those who, after Moses, have struggled to uplift their brothers and make of them free men in a more just world. In the history of Christianity, we find other victories, great and small, that have made possible the progress of God's Kingdom and Justice. In these cases, too, there were groups committed to a liberating task, who, without arms, faced Pharaoh and his chariots, his officers, politicians and bureaucrats.

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¹⁵*Yahweh said to Moses, "Why do you cry me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. You will raise your staff and stretch your and over the sea and divide it to let the raelites go dryfoot through the sea."* ¹⁷*I will so arden the minds of the Egyptians that they ill follow you.* ¹⁸*And I will have glory at the pense of Pharaoh, his army, his chariots and rsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am ahweh when I gain glory for myself at the cost f Pharaoh and his army!"*

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At daybreak the sea returned to its place. As the Egyptians tried to flee, Yahweh swept them into the middle of the sea.

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11. 15, 24; 16, 3; 17, 3; Num 14, 1; Ps 78, 40

20. Is 43, 16; 44, 27; 50, 2; Ps 66, 6; Ps 77, 14; 78, 13; 106, 9; 114

21. Wis 10, 18; 1 Cos 10, 1

22. Heb 11, 29; Rev 21, 1

14. Is 30, 15

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28. Dt 11, 4

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Crossing of the sea . Baptism and liberation. See Heb 11:23-40; 1 Pet 1:13-15; Rev 7:13-17; 12:10-12.



wilderness towards the Red Sea. So the Israelites left Egypt in an orderly manner.

¹⁹ Moses took with him the bones of Joseph for he had made the sons of Israel swear saying, "God will surely remember you and then you will carry my bones with you away from here."

²⁰ They moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham bordering the wilderness.

²¹ By day Yahweh went before them in a pillar of cloud to guide them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, enabling them to travel day and night. ²² Neither the cloud by day nor the fire by night, disappeared from the sight of the people.

The Egyptians pursue the Israelites

14 ¹ Then Yahweh said to Moses, ² "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, facing Baalzephon. You will encamp opposite this place and near the sea. ³ So Pharaoh will think that the people of Israel have lost their way, and the wilderness has closed in on them. ⁴ Then I will make Pharaoh's heart stubborn so that he will pursue you. And I will draw glory for myself at the cost of Pharaoh and his army, and the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh!"

And the Israelites did as they had been instructed.

Crossing of the Red Sea

◆ ⁵ The king of Egypt was told that the people had fled; then Pharaoh and his ministers changed their minds with regard to the people. "What have we done," they said, "in allowing Israel to go and be free of our service?" ⁶ Pharaoh prepared his chariot and took his army with him. ⁷ There were six hundred of his best chariots; indeed he took all the Egyptian chariots, each one with his warriors.

"Yahweh had hardened the mind of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who set out in pursuit of the Israelites as they marched forth triumphantly. The Egyptians — all the chariots and horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army — gave chase and caught up with them when they had encamped by the sea near Pihahiroth, facing Baalzephon."

¹⁰ The Israelites saw the Egyptians marching after them: Pharaoh was drawing near. They were terrified and cried out to Yahweh. ¹¹ Then they said to Moses, "Were there no tombs in Egypt? Why have you brought us to

17. Num 14, 14

19. Gen 50, 25; Jos 24, 32

21. Dt 1, 33; Is 4, 4; 52, 12; 60, 19

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+15

¹Then Moses and the people sang this song to Yahweh:

I will sing to Yahweh, highly exalted
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

²Yahweh is my strength and my song,
and he is my salvation.

He is my God and I will praise him;
the God of my father: I will extol him.

³Yahweh is a warrior: Yahweh is his name.

⁴The chariots of Pharaoh and his army
he has hurled into the sea;

his chosen officers were drowned in the Red Sea

⁵The deep covers them;
they went down like a stone.

⁶Your hand, O Yahweh, glorious and powerful,
your right hand, O Yahweh, shatters the enemy.

⁷In your imposable majesty you crush your foes
you sent forth your fury, which devours them like stubble.

⁸At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,
the surging waters stood firm in heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹The enemy said, "I will give chase and overtake,
I will divide the spoil and make a feast of it.
I shall draw my sword and my hand will destroy them."

¹⁰A breath of yours and the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

¹¹Who among the gods is like you, Yahweh?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in power, doing wonders?

¹²You stretched out your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

¹³In unfailing love you guide the people you redeemed,
in strength you led them to your holy house.

¹⁴Hearing this, the nations tremble;

1. Is 43, 16; Ps 106, 12; Rev 15, 3

2. Is 12, 2

4. Jer 51, 63; Rev 18, 21

7. Is 5, 24; Na 1, 10

11. Dt 3, 24; Ps 86, 8

+ The first canticle of Moses is a shout of joyful thanksgiving. It is at the same time a profession of faith. The psalmist says: "Happy are the people who know how to praise."

The liberated people have no reason to glory in themselves at this victory which belonged to God and to Moses, the man of faith. It is proper for them only to give thanks to God.

Revelation will recall this canticle (Rev 15:31) in the canticle of the elect and martyrs of Christ, saved from their weakness and crowned with glory.

The ancient religions (and also modern people) celebrate feasts in accordance with the rhythm of nature: feasts of the moon, of summer, of rain, of birth. On the other hand, the feasts in the Bible celebrate the marvels which God did to save them. If it is good to praise God for the wonders of nature, even more should we recognize him in the events of history. Let us give thanks to God, before anything else, for the great and small events that show his Reign coming among us.

anguish grips the people of Philistia.
¹⁵The chieftains of Edom are dismayed;
 the leaders of Moab are seized with trembling;
 the people of Canaan melt away.

¹⁶Terror and dread fall upon them,
 your powerful arm leaves them still as stone
 until your people pass by, O Yahweh!
 till the people you have purchased pass by.

¹⁷You will bring them in and plant them
 on the mountain of your inheritance,
 the place you chose to dwell in, O Yahweh,
 the sanctuary prepared by your hands.

¹⁸Yahweh will reign forever!

¹⁹When Pharaoh's chariots, horses
 and horsemen went into the sea,
 Yahweh brought back the waters over
 them, while the people of Israel
 walked on dry ground through the
 sea.

²⁰Then Miriam, the prophetess,
 sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in
 her hand and all the women followed
 her dancing and playing tambourines.
 "Miriam sang to them, "Sing to
 Yahweh for he has covered himself
 with glory; horse and rider he has
 thrown into the sea."

Through the desert

■ ²²Moses then led Israel from the
 Red Sea towards the wilderness of

Shur. They walked in the desert for
 three days without finding water.

²³They reached Marah but could
 not drink the water then as it was
 bitter. That is why the place is called
 Marah.

²⁴The people grumbled against
 Moses and said, "What shall we
 drink?" ²⁵Moses then cried out to
 Yahweh who showed him a piece of
 wood, and when he threw it in the
 water it became sweet.

There Yahweh gave the people
 statutes and laws. There he tested
 them ²⁶and said, "If you listen care-
 fully to the voice of Yahweh, your
 God, and if you do what is right in his
 eyes, if you obey his commands and

14. Num 20, 21

16. Eph 1, 14

17. Ps 74, 2

20. Jdg 11, 34; 1 S 18, 6; 2 S 6, 5

23. Rt 1, 20; Num 33, 8

24. 14, 11; 16, 2; 17, 3

25. Num 14, 1; 21, 5; 1 Cor 10, 10; Heb 3, 7

■ The Israelites definitely left behind the most brilliant and impressive civilization of their times, with its products, irrigation camps and prestigious culture. Had they not left, they would have disappeared as a people. But now Moses makes them take the way towards freedom. Like any nation or social class that achieves its independence, they have to become responsible for their own destiny. Moses knows that freedom is not a continual joy: this is but the beginning of a difficult way involving sacrifice. On this way, however, God manifests his Providence which allows us to walk with self-confidence. Unexpected wonders may happen but God is not concerned with multiplying his miracles in order to better the welfare of his own.

The fugitives who dare to penetrate the desert territories of Sinai, have reasons to be worried: they are threatened by hunger, thirst, and the inhabitants of the desert. In the following pages, the author graphically describes these dangers and recalls certain interventions by Providence. But he relates the story with much liberty, adapting these teachings to his contemporaries who were continually tempted by the easy life, were avaricious and attracted by the promises of foreign countries in which they would have lost their own identity and mission.

I am Yahweh, the one who heals you. Infirmities are a manifestation of the disintegration worked in us through sin, but it would be an error



statutes, I will not inflict on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am Yahweh, the One who heals you."

²⁷ Then they came to Elim where there are twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and there they pitched their camp beside the water.

The manna

◆16 *¹ The Israelites left Elim and the entire community reached the desert of Sin, between Elim and Sinai on the fourteenth day of the second month after leaving Egypt.*

² In the desert the whole community of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron³ and said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of Yahweh in Egypt when we sat down to cauldrons of meat and ate all the bread we wanted, whereas you have brought us to this desert to let the whole assembly die of starvation!"

⁴ Yahweh then said to Moses, "Now I am going to rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to gather what is needed for that day. In this way I will test them to see if they will follow my Teaching or not."⁵ On the sixth day when they prepare what they have

brought in, they will find that there is twice as much as they gather each day."

⁶ Then Moses and Aaron said to the people of Israel, "In the evening you will know that it was Yahweh who brought you out of Egypt,⁷ and in the morning you will see the Glory of Yahweh. For he has heard your grumbling against him, because: who are we that you should grumble against us?"

⁸ In the evening Yahweh will give you meat to eat and in the morning bread to satisfy your hunger, because Yahweh heard your grumbling. You are not grumbling against us but against Yahweh, for who are we?"

⁹ Then Moses directed Aaron to say to the whole community of Israel, "Draw near to Yahweh for he has heard your complaints."

¹⁰ It happened that as Aaron was speaking to the full assembly of Israel, they turned towards the desert and saw the Glory of Yahweh in the midst of the cloud.

¹¹ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, "I have heard the complaints of Israel. Speak to them and say: Between the two evenings you will eat meat, and in the morning you will have bread to your heart's content; then you

26. Jos 24, 25; 1 S 10, 25; 30, 25	Is 19, 22; 57, 18; Jer 33, 6; Hos 6, 1	Num 11	1. Num 33, 10
3. Ps 78, 32; Wis 16, 2; 19, 11; Jn 6, 26-52	4. Dt 8, 2	7. Ps 81, 11	8. 1 K 17, 6; Lk 10, 16

to consider that the infirmities of each one are due to his own sins. Likewise, natural plagues cannot be attributed directly to our sins, but God knows how to protect us from them when it suits him.

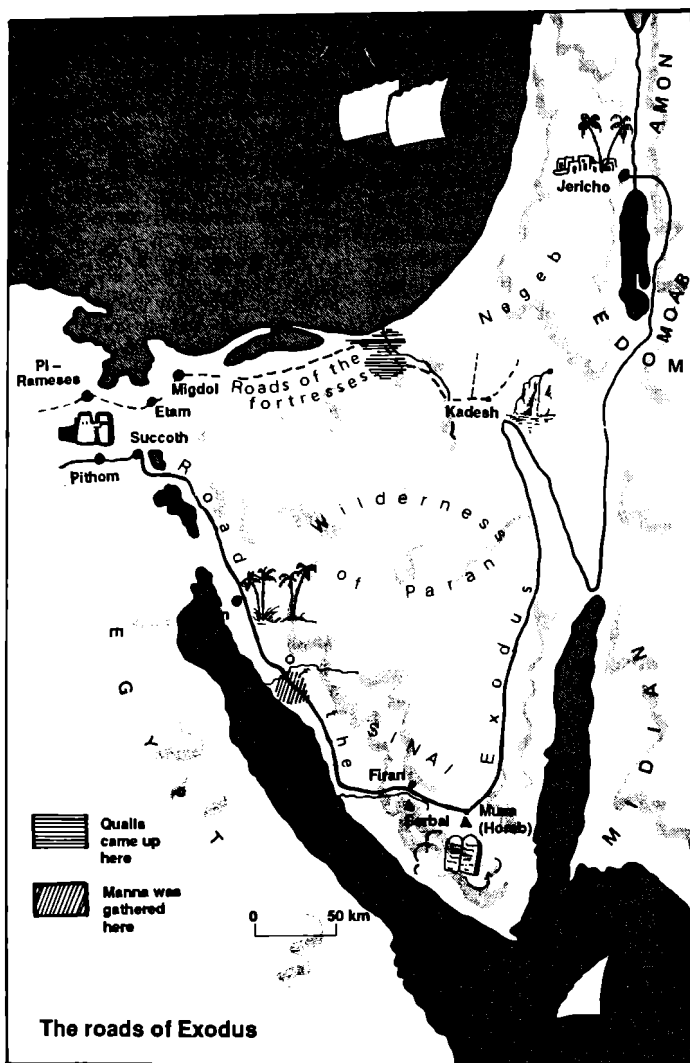
◆ *The whole community grumbled at Moses and Aaron – an irresponsible attitude of people unable to face their destiny; they constantly criticize those who take the initiative for the good of everyone.*

Yahweh will give you meat ... God provided food for his people just when they lacked everything. Numerous flocks of birds, tired from a long flight, fell at the side of the encampment. Another unexpected food, the manna, was also found. This manna was probably the resin that at times comes out abundantly from the bram-

bles of the desert. In a most desperate moment, this help was, for Israel, the proof that God had not abandoned them. This event is also related in Num 11:4.

By this, we understand that the daily bread is a gift of God. When he invites us to take a difficult path, he is committed to helping us and to giving us first the bread we need. This is why he helps those who, through their own initiative and courage, create and distribute to all people the goods they need.

With time, the narration of this event was amplified. Some biblical texts seem to mean that God sent the manna daily during 40 years: Ex 16:35; Jos 5:12; Psalms 78:24; Wisdom 16:20. These exaggerations are a way of praising God but they have no historical value.



The Bible is simplifying reality when it presents to us a beautiful picture of the Exodus of an entire nation. Historians have proven that several nomadic groups went in and out of Egypt during those years, and the people liberated with Moses was one of them. Biblical narratives, however, seem to mix-up two different groups.

The first group was apparently expelled from Egypt because of a pestilence (the tenth plague) around 1400 BC. This group might have gone out through the road of the fortresses going across that coast land where "quails came up and covered the camp" (Ex 16:13; Num 11:31). Then they came to the oasis of Kadesh, where they remained for a long time until the other group arrived. People from the tribes of Ruben, Simeon, Levi and Judah were in this caravan and they entered Palestine through the south road.

The second group left with Moses, fleeing by night, in the year 1260 BC. They took the road of the fugitive slaves around the south of Sinai. They witnessed the crossing of the Red Sea. Then they arrived at Horeb passing through the region where tamarisk trees grew. These trees produced the manna (Ex 16:14; Num 11:7). After staying in Kadesh this group, joined by the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, could have entered Palestine through the east, crossing the Jordan with Joshua (Jos 3).

shall know that I am Yahweh, your God!"

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp. And in the morning, dew had fallen around the camp. ¹⁴When the dew lifted there was on the surface of the desert a thin crust like hoarfrost. ¹⁵The people of Israel on seeing it said to one another, "What is it?" for they didn't know what it was. Moses told them, "It is the bread that Yahweh has given you to eat."

¹⁶"This is what Yahweh commanded: Gather it according to the amount each one eats, about four liters a piece, and according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent."

¹⁷This the people of Israel did. They gathered it, some more, others less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, he that had gathered more didn't have too much while the man who had gathered less didn't have too little. Each one had as much as he needed.

Give us our daily bread

¹⁹And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it till the morning."

²⁰But they did not listen to Moses and some of them left it till morning. It bred worms and became foul, and Moses was angry with them.

²¹Every morning each one gathered as much as he could eat, and when the sun grew hot it melted.

²²On the sixth day they gathered the double amount of bread, two omers each, and the leader of the people came to tell Moses.

²³He said to them, "This is what Yahweh commanded: Tomorrow you shall rest, for that day is a Rest — or sabbath — sacred to Yahweh. ²⁴Bake today what you have to bake

and boil what you have to boil, and you shall put aside what is left over to be kept till the next day."

So they put it aside until morning as Moses had ordered and its smell was not foul and it was free of maggots. ²⁵And Moses said, "Eat it today, for this is a day of Rest — or sabbath — in honour of Yahweh. Today you will not find it in the fields. ²⁶For six days you will gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none."

²⁷Some of the people went out on the seventh day but found none. ²⁸Then Yahweh said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to obey my commands and my laws? ²⁹Yahweh has given you this Restingday! That is why on the sixth day he gave you bread for two days. Let everyone stay where he is, and no one go out of his place on the seventh day." ³⁰And so the people rested on the seventh day.

³¹The people of Israel called this food manna. It was white like coriander seed and it tasted like wafers made with honey.

³²And Moses said, "This is what Yahweh commanded: Take a measure of manna and keep it for future generations to let them see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt." ³³Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and fill it with a measure of manna and place it before Yahweh for your descendants." ³⁴Accordingly Aaron put a full measure of manna in the jar as Yahweh had commanded Moses and placed it before the slabs of divine statement to be kept there.

³⁵The people of Israel ate the manna until they came to an inhabited land. They ate it for forty years up to the time they reached the border of Canaan.

Water from the rock

o17 ¹The whole community of the people of Israel moved on from the desert of Sin going from place to place as Yahweh com-

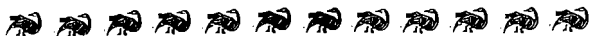
14. Num 11, 7 17. 1 Cor 10, 3; 2 Cor 8, 15
35. Num 21, 5; Jos 5, 12; Num 20, 1

22. Lev 23, 3 31. Num 11, 7 33. Heb 9, 4

This gift of the bread which came from heaven is mentioned in two different commentaries in later pages of the Bible. In Dt 8:3: "I gave you manna to eat, to show you that man does not live on bread alone but that every word that comes from the mouth of God is life for man." See Commentary on Mark 6:34. Later, in the Gospel, the manna is an image of the true bread from heaven, Christ, which is given as food of life in the Eucharist: see Com on Jn 6.

o God puts Israel to the test in the desert: For how long will these common people be willing to follow an uncommon destiny? How far will their faith go? Israel also tempts God, that is, they ask him for signs because they do not have total confidence in him. They demand miracles: "If you are with us, show it, here and now."

The Bible recalls this confrontation in the event of the water coming out of the rock.



manded, and encamped at Rephidim. But there was no water to drink.

²The people complained to Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." But Moses replied, "Why do you find fault with me? Why do you put Yahweh to the test?"

³But the people thirsted for water there and grumbled against Moses, "Why did you make us leave Egypt to have us die of thirst with our children and our cattle?"

⁴So Moses cried to Yahweh, "What shall I do with the people? They are almost ready to stone me!"

⁵Yahweh said to Moses, "Go ahead of the people and take with you the elders of Israel. Bring with you the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will stand there before you on the rock at Horeb. You will strike the rock and water will flow from it and the people will drink." Moses did this in the presence of the elders of Israel.

⁷The place was called Massah and Meribah because of the complaints of the Israelites, who tested Yahweh saying, "Is Yahweh with us or not?"

Victory over Amalek

■ "When the Israelites were at Rephidim, the Amalekites came and attacked them. ⁹So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites in the

morning. As for me, I will stand with God's staff in my hand at the top of the hill."

¹⁰Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had directed, while Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹It happened that when Moses raised his hands, the Israelites would win but when he lowered them, the Amalekites would have the advantage.

¹²As Moses' arms grew weary they placed a stone for him to sit on while Aaron and Hur on either side held up his arms which remained steadily raised until sunset. ¹³For his part Joshua mowed down with the sword Amalek and his people.

¹⁴Yahweh then instructed Moses, "Write this in a book as something to be remembered, and make it known in the hearing of Joshua that I will wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."

¹⁵After that Moses built an altar and called it 'Yahweh is my banner', ¹⁶for he said, "hands were lifted up to the throne of Yahweh. Yahweh will be at war with the Amalekites from generation to generation."

Meeting with Jethro

18 ¹Jethro, the priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moses, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people when Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt.

²After Moses had sent away Zipporah, his wife, Jethro, his father-in-law, received her ³and her two sons. The first Moses had called Gershom, to remember that he had been a

2. Dt 6, 16; Is 7, 12; Mt 4, 7 5. 4, 17; 14, 16; Num 14, 10 6. Is 55, 1; Jn 7, 38; 19, 34; 1 Cor 10, 4
7. Num 20, 24; Dt 6, 16; 32, 51; Ps 78, 15; 95, 8 9. Jos 8, 18 12. 24, 14 14. Num 21, 14
15. Dt 25, 17; 1 S 15, 3; 28, 18; Mt 5, 43 2. 2, 22

Moses, too, was put to the test in this place; see the same act related in Num 20.

In later times, the Jewish tradition saw in this rock a figure of God, the fountain of life, who was present among his people; the miraculous rock which accompanied them in their wanderings (see 1 Cor 10:40). God is the impenetrable Rock that retains its secret until it allows itself to be wounded and from its own wound life pours forth. Let us understand that man, sinner as he is, has lost real knowledge of God and for this reason cannot find him. But God becomes weak in the person of Jesus who, on dying, reveals the

secret of God's love and compassion for us. The Gospel emphasizes that from the heart of Jesus, wounded by the lance, flowed forth blood and water, an image of the Holy Spirit, (Jn 7:37 and 19:34).

■ The victory over Amalek completes these experiences of the Divine Providence. Joshua directs the battle, but Moses with his rod lifted, works wonders. From God comes the victory.

In this story, the Christian tradition has always recognized an image of prayer that obtains victories from God.

The prophets' mission is not just to speak, but

guest in a foreign land, ⁴and the other Eliezer, for he said, "The God of my father came to my help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."

⁵So Jethro came with Moses' wife and sons in the desert where the people had encamped at the mountain of God.

⁶Moses was told, "Your father-in-law Jethro is here. He has come with your wife and her two sons."⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowing low before him, he kissed him, and when each had enquired about the other's health, they entered the tent. ⁸Moses then told his father-in-law all that Yahweh had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for the sake of Israel and all the difficulties they had met with on the way and how Yahweh had saved them.

⁹Jethro rejoiced at all Yahweh's goodness to Israel in freeing them from the power of Egypt and he said, ¹⁰"Blessed be Yahweh who has delivered you from the power of Egypt and Pharaoh, and has rescued the people from the grip of Egypt. ¹¹I know now that Yahweh is greater than all the gods, for he delivered his people when they were being oppressed."

¹²Then Jethro brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to share this meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

Appointment of judges

◆ ¹³The next day Moses took his seat to administer justice for the people who stood around him from morning till night.

¹⁴His father-in-law, seeing all the work of Moses for the people, said to him, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit and judge while all the people stand around you from morning till night?"¹⁵ Moses answered, "It is the people who come to me to know

God's will. ¹⁶When there is a dispute they bring it to me to decide between the two parties, and I teach them God's decrees and laws."

¹⁷Jethro replied, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You and your people will wear yourselves out, for the work is too heavy and you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹Now listen to the advice I am going to give you and God be with you. You will be the people's representative before God and bring their cases to him. ²⁰You will teach them the statutes and laws and the way they must live and what they must do. ²¹But choose among the people, capable, God-fearing men, men of truth who hate a bribe, and appoint them as leaders for groups of a thousand, a hundred, fifty and ten.

²²They will administer justice at all times, bringing to your attention only those case of major importance, while they deal with all those of lesser importance. That will ease your burden since they will be sharing it with you. ²³If you do this, God will guide you and you will be able to cope with this duty; and all these people will go away happy."

²⁴Moses followed his father-in-law's advice and did as he said. ²⁵He chose capable men from among the Israelites and placed them as leaders for groups of a thousand, a hundred, fifty and ten. ²⁶They administered justice at all times, bringing difficult cases to Moses but judging all other cases themselves.

13. Dt 1, 9 18. Num 11, 14 21. Num 11, 16 27. Num 10, 29

also to be an intercessor before God: 1 Sam 7:7; Jer 7:16; Ex 22:30.

◆ The Hebrews and the other fugitives who left Egypt with Moses had to organize themselves. God did not dictate to them what they should do. Partly, they created the institutions they needed. Partly, they adapted those of other peoples. In the present case, they followed the example of the Midianites (Moses' father-in-law was a Midianite priest).

Moses, like other unquestioned leaders, needs time to realize that everything will work out better if he shares his responsibilities with others. Fortunately, he has become accustomed to listening to God, so that he also knows how to listen to his relatives.

The people go to Moses as their prophet and judge. He solves the conflicts and allows people to consult him about what they ought to do or not do, so that their projects will be blessed by

²⁷ Then Moses let his father-in-law return to his own country.

Preparing for the Covenant

o 19 *¹Exactly two months after the Israelites had left Egypt, they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai. ²They arrived there coming from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.*

³The Israelites camped there in front of the mountain, but Moses went up to God and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying, "This is what you are to say and to explain to the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you listen to me and keep my covenant, you shall be my very own possession among all the nations. For all the earth is mine, ⁶but you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

And he added, "This is what you are to say to the people of Israel."

⁷So Moses went and summoned all the elders of the people and related to them all that Yahweh had com-

manded him to say. ⁸All the people responded with one voice, "All that Yahweh has said, we will do." Moses then brought back to Yahweh the people's response.

⁹Yahweh spoke to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud so that the people may hear me speaking with you and have trust in you always." Then Moses related to Yahweh what the people had said.

¹⁰Again Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Go to the people and purify them today and tomorrow; let them wash their garments ¹¹and be ready for the third day. For on the third day Yahweh will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²You will fix a limit for the people round about, saying: 'Take care not to go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain will die. ¹³No hand shall touch him but he will be shot down by arrows; be it man or beast he shall not live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds may some of them go up to the mountain."

¹⁴Moses came down from the mountain to the people and purified them, and they washed their gar-

1. Num 33, 15

8. Jos 24, 16

5. Dt 7, 6; 26, 18; Mal 3, 17

9. 13, 21; Mt 17, 5; Jn 14, 1

6. Dt 10, 14; Tit 2, 14; 1 P 2, 9; Rev 1, 6

10. Gen 35, 2

12. 34, 3; Heb 12, 20

God and be successful. The judges whom he chooses are priests and "elders," that is, leaders who will govern the people of Israel.

o The Israelites had come to know God, both in the circumstances of their liberation and in the trials of the desert. In this way they had been prepared for the encounter intended by Yahweh when he called Moses in the desert at Horeb or Sinai (Ex 3, 12). The time had come to accept freely God's design to make of them his people forever.

All the earth is mine. God is the God of every person and the saviour of all, be they Christians or not. Nevertheless, he has decided to direct history and make it mature from within, through a people whom he has chosen to pass through critical experiences.

A holy nation, this means, *consecrated to me.* Israel will be the kingdom whose only king is Yahweh. So the efforts of Israel's rulers should be directed towards justice. The Israelites are

free men who belong only to God; hence, they should not allow themselves to be contaminated by idols, impure customs and the false values of other peoples.

You will be for me a kingdom of priests. In any religion, the priest is one who approaches God and receives communications. Israel, as a whole, has this privilege of knowing God and approaching him in a way that other peoples cannot. Israel receives God's promises for all men; God sends prophets to Israel so that the people may see with greater clarity than anyone else the requirements of justice and fraternity.

This covenant is concretized at the foot of Mt. Sinai, in one of the most impressive places that can be imagined. Moses and the elders, that is, the representatives of the people, climb the mountain in the middle of a tremendous electrical storm, while the thunder roars amidst the ravines. The cleanliness of their robes, the prohibition against coming too close, their abstinence has prepared their spirits to feel the

ments. ¹⁵He then said to the people, "Be ready in three days and abstain from sexual relations."

¹⁶On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning and a dense cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast was heard. All the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷Moses then made the people leave the camp to meet God and stand at the foot of the mountain.

¹⁸Mount Sinai was completely covered in smoke because Yahweh had come down in fire, and the smoke rose as from a furnace. The whole mountain shook violently,¹⁹ while the blast of the trumpet became louder and louder. Moses spoke and God replied in thunder.

²⁰ When Yahweh had come down to the summit of Mount Sinai, God called Moses who went to the summit ²¹ where Yahweh said to him, "Go down and give this warning to the people, lest they rush to see Yahweh and many of them perish. ²² Even the

priests who come near Yahweh must purify themselves lest Yahweh break out against them."

²³Moses answered Yahweh, "The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai because you, yourself, ordered us to put limits around the mountain, and set it apart as holy." ²⁴Yahweh replied, "Go down and bring up Aaron with you, but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to Yahweh or he will break out against them."

²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and said to them...

The Decalogue

+20 ¹God spoke all these words. ²He said, "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

– ³Do not have other gods before me.

– ⁴Do not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in

15. 1 S 21, 5 16. Dt 4, 9; Ps 50, 3; Rev 4, 5; 8, 5 19. Ps 81, 10 21. 1 S 6, 19; 2 S 6, 6
1. 34, 14; Dt 5, 6; Jer 7, 9 2. Hos 4, 2 3. Mk 10, 19; Rom 13, 9; Gal 5, 22

Power of God: no one can come close to God.

All this helps us understand what Jesus wanted to say during the last Supper with his apostles, when he spoke of the *new covenant*, (Mk 14:24). In the prayer that followed, he asked that the believers might be the new People consecrated to God, priests of God in the midst of the world: Jn 17, 1 Pt 2:3; Rev 1: 6 and 5: 10.

In the Bible, the word "the Law" is used to designate all the laws that related to the Covenant made at Mount Sinai.

The Law indicates, by itself, something weighty. The Hebrews had thrown off the yoke of slavery, but they could not progress without a Law. The educators of any child impose a discipline to form his will, to tame his whims, to train his generosity. Likewise, the people of Israel needed to submit to a Law for a long time before they would become mature enough to receive the Spirit. Submissive to the Law, they would discover how often they offend God.

Don't forget that here we speak of the preparation for the Covenant. The Covenant account is concluded in Chapter 24, after the laws given in chapters 20-23 that interrupt the account.

+ Moses went to the summit of Mount Sinai to receive the laus from God ... and the text presents to us two bodies of laws. The first, the shorter, contains the ten commandments. The second or the longer one was written after the time of Moses and comes from the time when the Israelites were established in Canaan; it is called the Code of the Covenant. (Chapters 20:20 - 23:33).

I am Yahweh, your God. Important as the Ten Commandments or Decalogue are, what is still more important is the manner of presenting them. These two precepts: do not kill, do not steal, are taught in any civilized society. But here, Yahweh, the living and only God, speaks with authority of one who has liberated Israel from its slavery and now wants to put it at his own service. And because he wants to make them free citizens of a free country, he imposes fundamental laws without which they will revert to slavery.

To begin with, God must be recognized as One, Holy, and Jealous: v. 3-11.

Do not have other gods before me. Yahweh is a jealous God, different from the gods of other people who allow rival divinities to set up shops side by side with them and answer petitions

heaven, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth; ⁵you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God; for the sin of the fathers, when they rebel against me, I punish the sons, the grandsons and the great-grandsons; ⁶but I show steadfast love until the thousandth generation for those who love me and keep my commandments.

– ⁷Do not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain for Yahweh

will not leave unpunished anyone who takes his name in vain.

– ⁸Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you will labour and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath for Yahweh your God. Do no work that day, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals, nor the stranger who is staying with you. ¹¹For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth and the sea and

4. Ps 81, 8

5. Lev 19, 4; 26, 1; Dt 4, 15; 27, 15

6. 34, 7; Num 14, 18; Dt 7, 9; Eek 18

7. Lev 19, 12

10. 23, 12; 31, 12; 34, 21; Num 15, 32; Lk 13, 14

Dt 5, 12

which they themselves cannot oblige. As people say, "If God does not listen to me in such a church, I will go to ask in another." Then we have one god for war, another for rain, another for mothers with child. All these are gods for people who see in religion the means of obtaining healings and benefits. In this we see a kind of faith which hopes to obtain the maximum from God. Yahweh, however, is not "at the service of Israel," and not at our service; rather, it is we who are to serve God.

We cannot serve unconditionally anyone or anything; neither can we follow an ideology that contradicts his words, nor a love that does not respect his commandments.

I punish sons, grandchildren... It would be an error to think that "the God of the Old Testament holds grudges." He only tells irresponsible people that although they quickly forget the evil they have committed, he will not leave them in peace until they have made reparation (Hos 6:1-6).

I punish children, grandchildren... is like saying: I will purify you by means of the suffering of everything that sin has corrupted in you and your community.

Do not make an image of what is on the earth. Here are prohibited any images of creatures which might become gods and compete with the only One – and which require a worship (expressed in deeds and lifestyle) which was prohibited by God's Law. In that time the Canaan gods were honoured with sacred prostitution: idols and immorality went together. The prohibition of images is linked to the former: do not have another god before me.

Notwithstanding the prohibition against images, the Bible arranges that the Ark of God will rest among images: two cherubim or angels that covered it with their wings (1 K 6:23-28). How do you explain this contradiction? The answer is very simple: The cherubim were not considered gods and did not demand a separate worship; they were spirit servants of God. In the

same manner, the Church today approves statues of Mary and of the saints, who are not gods but servants of the One God. We do not ask them for something that God does not want to give. Only He is Good (Lk 18:19) and from him proceeds all good (James 1:17). To give an example, we do not serve Mary by another way of living that would not be in imitation of Christ. We do not expect from her anything but what the Father himself decides to give us through her mediation.

But it is also prohibited to make representations of Yahweh. That is because God surpasses everything we can imagine or think about him. In that sense, the Bible prohibits us also from forming God to our own way of thinking. We are inclined to imagine God according to our own concepts, and so the faith of many wears away when God does not direct events in the way they thought he should.

Why, then, do we paint pictures of Jesus? Simply because centuries after these first teachings of God to Moses, God came to us in the person of his son. In his person, we have seen God-made-man and if we keep the picture of our dear ones, why not remember Jesus as his apostles saw him? Moses was not able to foresee this and therefore could not speak of it.

IDOLS & IDOLATRY: see com on 1K 17; Is 30:22; Ezk 23:5.

The Hebrews called *Sabbath*, that is, *Rest*, the last day of the week. They sanctified it mainly by the suspension of all activities.

On the seventh day Yahweh rested. In Dt 5:15 a somewhat different reason is given. See also Gen 2:2-3 and the commentary.

We know that Jesus was raised on the day following the sabbath. That is why the apostles, conscious that his Resurrection initiated new times, established this Day of the Lord (on Sunday) as the Christian holy day, or rest, or sabbath. See Acts 20:1; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10. The sabbatists who nowadays want to observe the Jewish day, forget that Jesus and the apostles

all that is in them, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why Yahweh has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

– ¹²Honour your father and your mother that you may have a long life in the land that Yahweh has given you.

– ¹³Do not kill.

– ¹⁴Do not commit adultery.

– ¹⁵Do not steal.

– ¹⁶Do not give false witness against your neighbour.

¹⁷Do not covet your neighbour's house. Do not covet your neighbour's wife, or his servant, man or woman, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his."

¹⁸In the meantime, all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning and heard the blast of the trumpet and saw the mountain smoking. They trembled with fear and kept at a distance.

¹⁹Then they said to Moses, "You, yourself, speak to us and we shall listen. But do not have God speak to us, lest we die." ²⁰Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that the fear of God may be with you, and that you may not sin again." ²¹So the people kept at a distance while Moses went forward to the cloud where God was.

The Code of the Covenant

■ ²²Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from the heavens. ²³Do not make any gods of silver or gold to stand beside me.

²⁴For me you are to make an altar of earth, and on it you will sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and your cattle. In every place where you come to remember my name, I will come to you and bless you. ²⁵If you build an altar of stone, do not make it of cut stones, for you will defile it by using tools on it. ²⁶And you will not ascend my altar on steps lest you expose your nakedness on it.

11. Gen 2, 2	12. Mal 1, 6; Sir 3, 1; Mt 15, 4; Eph 6, 2	14. Mr 5, 21; James 2, 11
15. Lev 19, 11	17. Is 5, 8; Mt 2, 2; Mr 5, 27	20. Dc 8, 2
		21. 19, 9; Ps 18, 10

had authority to interpret and to reform the laws of Moses. They came from God, of course, but not directly (see Acts 7:38; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). See also Mt 5:27-28 and 31-32. So the sabbatists deserve the warnings of the Bible itself in Gal 5:4; Col 2:16.

In modern times, the workers had to fight so that Sunday would be recognized as a holiday. Perhaps those who easily work even on Sundays do not see the importance of rest for human and Christian life. In spite of the fact that Jesus, in the Gospel, reacted against the too rigorous observance of the sabbath (Mt 12, Jn 5), the weekly rest corresponds to the will of God.

Do not take the name of Yahweh in vain. There are four ways of invoking the name of Yahweh in vain:

- Using it, as was done before, for magic formulas, like wishing to take the power of God by force. There are still people who use the Bible and Christian prayers as a means to work miracles.
- Swearing by his name and not fulfilling the oath (Sir 23:9 and Mt 5:33).
- Blaspheming, that is, insulting the name of Yahweh, which incurred condemnation to death (Lev 25:10).
- Pronouncing or invoking the name of God without an important reason.

Honour your father. See Sir 3:2.

Do not steal. So that there may be trust and unity within a community, it is necessary that everyone show the greatest respect for the rights of his neighbour, that he pay his debts and refrain from taking what he finds at hand. However, this commandment should not be invoked to justify any type of private ownership. The Bible teaches that the earth belongs to God and whoever occupies it is only its administrator. The goods of the earth are to be shared with all and if someone has to sell his inheritance, the buyer is to return it to him at the end of 49 years. The Bible does not agree that some group may take possession of the national wealth and leave the masses in poverty (see Lev 25:13).

The Ten Commandments are commented on in the New Testament: Mt 5:22; 5:33; 5:27; Mk 7:10; Lk 18:20; Rom 7:7; 13:9; James 2:11.

■ The decalogue (that is, the Ten Commandments) needs to be applied to concrete reality to direct people's lives. When the Israelites were installed in Palestine and passed from the wandering life of shepherds to the settled life of farmers, they made a body of laws which we find in chapter 20:22 to 23:19. It is called "The Code of the Covenant." Very possibly, it was solemnly adopted by the twelve tribes when they were

slave, the owner of the slave shall be paid thirty pieces of silver and the ox will be stoned.

³³ When a man leaves a pit uncovered or when he digs a pit and leaves it open and an ox or a donkey falls into it, ³⁴ the owner of the pit will make compensation to the owner of the animal by paying him money, but he may keep the dead animal.

³⁵ When a man's ox injures the ox of his neighbour and it dies, they will sell the live ox and share both the money and the meat of the dead animal. ³⁶ Or if it is known that the ox has been in the habit of goring and its owner has not kept it in, he must make good the loss by giving his neighbor a live ox but the dead ox will be his.

³⁷ If a man steals an ox or a sheep and either slaughters or sells it, he must pay five oxen for the ox, four sheep for the sheep.

22 ¹ If a thief is caught breaking into a house and receives a mortal blow, the man who struck him will not be guilty of his death, ² but if it happened after dawn he will be guilty of murder. The thief must make full restitution. If he cannot do this he must be sold for what he has stolen. ³ If what has been stolen is found alive in his possession, be it ox, donkey or sheep, he must pay double.

⁴ If a man puts his animals to graze and lets them stray and feed in another man's field or vineyard, he must make good the loss with the best of his own crop and the best of his vineyard.

⁵ When a fire breaks out and spreads through the thorn bushes and burns the grain that is either stacked or growing there, the one who started the fire must pay for the damage.

⁶ If a man gives money or goods to another to keep for him, and they are stolen, the thief, if he is found, shall pay back double. ⁷ Should the thief not be found, the man who owns the house must swear before the judges that he has not stolen the other man's property.

⁸ Whenever there is a failure of trust whether it concerns an ox, donkey, sheep, clothing or any other lost object, the case shall come before the judges. The person the judges find guilty shall pay double to the other.

⁹ If a man entrusts to his neighbour his donkey, cow, sheep or other animal, and the animal dies or is injured, or is carried off without being seen, ¹⁰ an oath before Yahweh shall prove that the man has not stolen the other's property. The owner of the animal shall accept the oath and the other shall not make restitution. ¹¹ But if the animal has been stolen

from him, restitution shall be made. ¹² If the animal was killed by wild beasts, the man must bring the remains as evidence but shall not pay anything.

¹³ When a man borrows an animal from his neighbour and the animal is injured or dies when the owner is not present, the man who borrowed must pay for it. ¹⁴ But if the owner is present the borrower need not repay.

¹⁵ If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall pay the "bride price" and marry her. ¹⁶ If her father refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to that for a virgin given in marriage.

¹⁷ You shall not allow a sorceress to live. ¹⁸ Whoever has sexual relations with a beast shall die.

¹⁹ Whoever sacrifices to any god other than Yahweh shall die.

²⁰ You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

²¹ You shall not harm the widow or the orphan. ²² If you do harm them and they cry out to me, I will hear them and ²³ my anger will blaze and I will kill you with the sword, and your own wives will be widows and your own children orphans.

²⁴ If you lend money to any of my people who are poor, do not act like a moneylender and do not charge him interest.

²⁵ If ever you take a person's cloak as a pledge, you must give it back to him by sunset, ²⁶ for it is all the covering he has for his body. In what else will he sleep? And when he cries to me I will hear him, for I am full of pity.

²⁷ Do not revile God or curse a ruler of your people.

²⁸ Do not delay in giving me my share of your wheat and your wine.

You shall give to me the firstborn of your sons. ²⁹ It shall be the same for your cattle and sheep. The firstborn shall stay with its mother for seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

³⁰ You are to be men consecrated to my service. Do not eat flesh that has been torn by wild animals; let it be given to the dogs.

23 ¹ Do not make false statements. And do not join hands with the wicked by being a malicious witness.

² Do not follow the majority when they do evil, or when they pervert justice in a lawsuit. ³ Do not be partial not even to the poor.

⁴ If you see your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, take it back to him.

⁵ When you see the donkey of a man who hates you falling under its load, do not let it pass by but go and help him lift it up.

⁶ Do not deny justice to any poor man of yours in his lawsuit.

⁷ Keep away from lies.

Do not slay the innocent or the just, for I will not forgive the wicked.

⁸ And do not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the clear-sighted and perverts the sentence of the just.

⁹ Do not oppress a stranger; you know what it is to be a stranger, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt.

¹⁰ For six years you will sow your fields and reap their produce. ¹¹ but in the seventh you will let the land rest and lie fallow. The poor may eat what it produces and what they leave the wild animals will eat. It will be the same for your vineyard and your olive grove.

¹² For six days you shall work but on the seventh you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may also rest and the son of your slave girl and the stranger as well may have a breathing space.

¹³ Pay attention to all that I tell you and do

not call upon other gods; don't let their names be heard on your lips.

¹⁴ Three times each year you shall celebrate a feast in my honour. ¹⁵ You shall keep the feast of Unleavened Bread, as I commanded you, and eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for it was then that you left Egypt. And do not come to me empty-handed.

¹⁶ You shall keep the feast of the Harvest, with the feast of the first harvest of what you sowed in your fields.

Then the feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labour in the fields.

¹⁷ Three times during the year all your men shall present themselves before Yahweh.

¹⁸ Do not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread or let the fat of my feast remain until morning.

¹⁹ The first of the first fruits of your soil you will bring to the house of Yahweh, your God. Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

■ ²⁰ See, I am sending an Angel before you to keep you safe on the way and bring you to the place I have made ready.

²¹ Be on your guard in his presence and listen to him; do not resist him for he will not pardon your wrong-doing, for my name is in him.

²² If you listen to him and do what I say, I will be enemy to your enemies and the opponent of your opponents.

²³ My Angel will go before you and bring you to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; all these I will destroy.

²⁴ You shall not bow down before their gods or serve them, or act according to their ways; rather you will destroy them utterly and smash their sacred stones.

²⁵ If you serve Yahweh, your God, he will bless your bread and your

27. Acts 23, 5	28. 13, 1	30. Lev 19, 2; Dt 14, 21; Eek 4, 14	2. Lev 19, 15	4. Dt 22, 1
8. Dt 27, 25; 1 S 8, 3; Ps 15, 5	11. Lev 25, 1; Dt 24, 19	12. 20, 8	14. 34, 18	
15. Dt 16; Lev 23	19. Dt 26, 1	20. 14, 19; 33, 2; Mt 3, 1; Is 63, 9		

■ See I send my angel before you. It is very difficult to speak adequately of God's Providence for us. Am I to say every moment: "This is the work of God?" Here the Bible speaks of the "angel" that God sent before Israel. It is a way

of saying that God protected and guided his own people, availing himself of countless, visible and invisible intermediaries.

Smash their sacred stones. Any community liberated from false gods, that is from fears and



water — and I will keep sickness away from you. ²⁶ No woman among you will miscarry or be barren. I will fulfill the number of your days.

²⁷ Now I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion all the people you encounter; I will make all your enemies turn and flee before you.

²⁸ I will send hornets ahead of you to drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites and the Hittites.

²⁹ I will not drive them out in a single year lest the land become a desert and the wild beasts increase and molest you. ³⁰ I will drive them out before you little by little until your number increase and you are able to take possession of the land.

³¹ I will fix your boundaries from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines and from the Wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will deliver into your power the inhabitants of the land and I will drive them out before you.

³² You shall make no treaty with them or with their gods. ³³ They shall not live in your country lest they lead you to sin against me and to serve their gods. That would surely be a snare for you."

24 ¹ Then he said to Moses, "Go up to Yahweh, you, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu with seventy of the elders of Israel, and let them worship from a distance. ² Moses alone shall go forward to Yahweh but not the others, nor shall the people go up with him."

28. Dt 7, 20; Jos 24, 12; Wis 12, 8	30. Jdg 2, 20	31. 1 K 5, 1; Ps 72, 8	1. 19, 20
4. Jos 4, 3; 1 K 18, 31	6. Jos 24; 2 K 23, 1	8. Ps 50, 6; Mt 26, 28; 1 Cor 11, 25; Heb 11, 19; 10, 29	

false values imposed by custom and propaganda, will see the blessings of God on their interests and concerns.

◆ The most important events of the Bible are at times the most briefly related. At the foot of Mt. Sinai the Covenant which would govern the life of Israel was signed.

Two scenes depict the celebration of the Covenant. First, Moses and the elders of Israel witness the Glory of Yahweh over Mount Sinai. Later, on Moses' return, the people seal the Covenant by means of a solemn sacrifice.

Moses went up with the seventy elders. The Covenant was something of such supremacy, that it was not fitting that the commitment of the people be guaranteed only by the spiritual experiences of Moses. Seventy witnesses would be able to relate what they had seen. They climb up the mountain, impressive in its aloneness, the blue transparency of the sky, the brilliance of the sun — all these prepared them to see the Glory of God. Yahweh became present and they saw him

Conclusion of the Covenant

◆ ³ Moses came and told the people all the words of Yahweh and all his laws. The people replied with one voice: "Everything that Yahweh has said, we shall do."

⁴ Moses wrote down all the words of Yahweh, then rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve raised stones for the twelve tribes of Israel.

⁵ He then sent young men from among the sons of Israel to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice bullocks as peace offerings to Yahweh.

⁶ And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins; and with the other half of the blood he sprinkled the altar.

⁷ He then took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. They said, "All that Yahweh said we shall do and obey."

⁸ Moses then took the blood and sprinkled it on the people saying, "Here is the blood of the covenant that Yahweh made with you in accordance with all these words."

⁹ Then Moses went up with Aaron,

in some way, in a mysterious experience, in so far as men can meet the living God. "Whom no one has ever seen." (Jn 1:18).

Here is the blood of the Covenant ... According to the custom of the time, both parties to the contract were sprinkled with the blood of the victims. Since the altar represented Yahweh, it received this sprinkled blood on his behalf. These details would have to be remembered when Jesus later declares at the Last Supper, "This is the blood of the Covenant which will be shed for the multitude" (Mk 14:24).

With the *slabs of stone*, the people will guard the memory of the meeting at Sinai. Together with other remembrances of the time in the desert, these would be kept in a vessel of precious wood called the Ark of the Covenant.

With the passage of time, the people of Israel would forget the commitment from which the Slabs of the Law originated. They would consider the Ark as a miraculous object providing



Nadab, Abihou and the seventy elders of Israel. ¹⁰ They saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was what seemed like a pavement of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ And he let not his hand overpower these chosen men from among the sons of Israel; they looked on God and ate and drank.

Moses is given the Law

¹² Yahweh said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay there. I will give you the slabs of stone, the Law and the commandments which I have written for their instruction."

¹³ So Moses arose with his servant,

Joshua, and before going up the mountain of God, ¹⁴ Moses said to the elders, "Remain here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you; let whoever has a dispute to settle, go to them."

¹⁵ When Moses went up the mountain a cloud covered it. ¹⁶ The Glory of Yahweh rested on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day Yahweh called to Moses from within the cloud.

¹⁷ The Glory of Yahweh appeared like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain: so it was as it appeared to the Israelites.

¹⁸ And Moses entered the cloud and went up the mountain.

o Moses stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

THE HOLY TENT (1st PART)

◆ **25** ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ² Tell the sons of Israel to set aside a contribution for me: you shall accept this contribution from every man who gives from the heart.

³ The things you shall accept from them are these: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴ purple cloth of violet shade and red, crimson cloth, fine linen, goats' hair; ⁵ rams' skins dyed red, fine leather, acacia wood; ⁶ oil for the lamps,

9. Ex 1, 26; Rev 4, 2

11. 18, 12; Gen 26, 26

12. 34, 28; 24, 4; 31, 18; Dt 4, 13; 9, 9

8. Ek 40, 4

16. 24, 12

17. Lev 16, 12

them with God's protection (1 Sam 4:4). Therefore the Ark would lose its original significance and God would permit it to disappear in the midst of the national catastrophe. Likewise, our miraculous statues will disappear and our famous temples will remain empty when we no longer remember the demanding presence of Christ in our midst.

According to the oldest account, Moses wrote on the Slabs of Stone while God dictated (Ex 34:28). Later stories amplified the event, as usual, and said: the writing was God's (31:19; 32:16).

o The continuation of this reading is found in chapters 30-32. Chapters 32-34 were artificially put in the place they now occupy in the Bible for the purpose of separating chapters 25-31, wherein Yahweh orders the construction of the Sanctuary, from chapters 35-40, wherein Moses constructs the Sanctuary.

◆ From now on Israel's mission is to serve Yahweh. Religious worship is not everything, since Yahweh asks that they serve him by fulfilling all their human duties according to

justice; however, it is an indispensable part of the service of God. Every people and every age have rites, signs and language to celebrate religious worship. The rites of the Old Testament no longer interest us. Chapters 25-40 of the Exodus which refer to the Sanctuary of the Desert, have little interest for us. However, on reading them, we will discover something of the mentality and faith of Israel.

Centuries after Moses' time, the traditions of the Hebrew people recalled how, in the desert, the Ark of God was kept in a tent. The Ark was a box of precious wood that contained the Tablets of Stone on which the Law had been engraved, together with a little manna and other remembrances of the wonders God performed in the desert.

When the priests of Israel wrote these present chapters, the people of God had a wonderful Temple in Jerusalem where the Ark was kept. It pleased them to think that the Tent of the desert had some similarity with the Temple; deliberately, they gave it dimensions half the size of the Temple of Jerusalem and they thought that Moses had fabricated that tent, following in detail instructions from God.



spices for the chrism and for the fragrant incense; precious stones and gems to be set in priestly vestments.

⁷⁻⁸ For they must build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them, ⁹ and you shall make the tabernacle and its furnishings following exactly the pattern I shall show you.

¹⁰ You are to make me an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, one and a half cubits high. ¹¹ You are to cover it with pure gold inside and out, and decorate it all around with a gold molding. ¹² You will cast four gold rings for the ark and fix them to its four supports: two rings on one side and two rings on the other. ¹³ You will also make poles of acacia wood covered with gold ¹⁴ and pass the poles through the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark by these. ¹⁵ The poles must remain in the rings of the ark and not be withdrawn. ¹⁶ Inside the ark you will place the Statement that I shall give you.

¹⁷ Further, you are to make the mercy Seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide. ¹⁸ For the two ends of the mercy Seat you are to make two golden cherubim of hammered gold. ¹⁹ Make the first cherub for one end and the second for the other, and fasten them to the two ends of the cover so that they may make one piece with it. ²⁰ The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward so that they overshadow the mercy Seat. They must face one another, their faces towards the mercy Seat. ²¹ You must place the mercy seat on the top of the ark. Inside the ark you must place the stone tablets that I shall give you. ²² There I shall come to meet you; there, from above the mercy Seat from between the two cherubim on it, I shall give you all my commands for the people of Israel.

The table and the lampstands

²³ You are to make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and one and a half cubits high. ²⁴ You are to cover it with pure gold and decorate it all around with a gold edge. ²⁵ You are to surround it with a frame three inches wide, and decorate these with a golden edge. ²⁶ You are to make for it four gold rings and fix these at the four corners where the four legs are. ²⁷ The rings must be close to the frame to hold the poles for carrying the table. ²⁸ You are to make the poles of acacia wood and cover them with gold. The table is to be carried by these. ²⁹ You are to make dishes, cups, jars and bowls to be used for the wine offerings; you are to make these of pure gold.

³⁰ On the table, before me, you must place the bread of continual offering.

³¹ You are to make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand must be of hammered gold, both its base and stem. Its decorative flowers, including buds and petals, must be of one piece with it. ³² Six branches must extend from its sides, three from one side, three from the other. ³³ Each of the six branches of the lampstand is to have three decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals. ³⁴ The lampstand itself is to have four decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals, thus: ³⁵ one bud under the first two branches extending from the lampstand, one under the next pair, one under the last pair: corresponding to the six branches extending from the lampstand. ³⁶ The buds and the branches must be of one piece with the lampstand, and the whole made from a single piece of pure hammered gold. ³⁷ Then you are to make lamps for it, seven of them, and set them so that they throw their light toward the front of it. ³⁸ Tongs for extinguishing the burning lamps and trays must be of pure gold. ³⁹ You are to use seventy-five pounds of pure gold for making the lampstand and all its accessories. ⁴⁰ See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

The Holy Tent

26 ¹ The Holy Tent itself you are to make with ten sheets of fine twined linen, of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool; you are to have these sheets finely embroidered with angels. ² The length of a single sheet is to be twenty-eight cubits, its width four cubits, all the sheets to be of the same size. ³ Five of the sheets must be sewed together, and the other five, also. ⁴ You must attach loops of violet wool to the border of the last sheet in one set, and do the same for the border of the last sheet in the other set. ⁵ You are to put fifty loops on the first sheet and, matching them one by one, fifty loops on the border of the last sheet in the second set. ⁶ And you are to make fifty gold clasps to draw the sheets together. In this way the Holy Tent will be a unified whole.

⁷ You are to make sheets of goats' hair to form a cover over the Holy Tent. There will be eleven sheets. ⁸ The length of a single sheet is to be thirty cubits, its width four cubits, the eleven sheets to be all of the same size. ⁹ You must sew five of these sheets together into one sheet, the remaining six into another; the sixth



you will fold double over the front of the cover.

¹⁰ You must attach fifty loops to the border of the last sheet in one set, and do the same for the border of the last sheet in the second set.

¹¹ You must make fifty bronze clasps and put them into one of the loops, so as to draw the two sets together to form one tent over the Holy Tent.

¹² One sheet will be left over, half of which is to hang over the back of the Holy Tent.

¹³ This extra cubit is to hang over the sides of the Holy Tent as a covering for it.

¹⁴ For the Holy Tent you will make further coverings, one of rams' skins dyed red, and to spread over this, another covering of fine leather.

¹⁵ You are to make frames of acacia wood for the Holy Tent which will stand upright.

¹⁶ Each board is to be ten cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. ¹⁷ Each board shall have two arms that shall serve to fasten the boards in line; for all the frames of the Holy Tent you must do this. ¹⁸ There will be twenty boards for the southern side of the Holy Tent. ¹⁹ You are to make forty silver bases for putting under the twenty boards thus: two bases under the first board to receive its two matching arms, and so on for the other boards. ²⁰ The other side of the tabernacle, on the north, is to have also twenty boards ²¹ supported by forty silver bases, two bases under each board. ²² For the back of the Holy Tent on the west, you must make six boards, ²³ and also two boards for the corners at the back of the Holy Tent. ²⁴ These boards must be joined at the bottom and also at the top, up to the level of the first ring; and the same for the two boards that are to form the two corners.

²⁵ So there will be eight boards with their sixteen silver bases: two bases under the first board and so on.

²⁶ You are to make five crossbars of acacia wood to hold together the boards for one side of the tabernacle, ²⁷ and five to hold the boards that form the other side of the Holy Tent. ²⁸ They will run halfway up the boards, from one end to the other. ²⁹ The boards are to be covered with gold, and with gold rings on them to take the crossbars which you are to cover with gold. ³⁰ This is how you are to set up the Holy Tent according to the model shown to you on the mountain.

³¹ You are to make a veil of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool, and of fine twined linen; you are to have it finely embroidered with Cherubim. ³² You are to hang it on four posts of acacia wood covered with gold and furnished with gold hooks and set in four

silver bases. ³³ You must hang the veil from the clasps and there behind the veil you must place the ark of the Statement and the veil will serve to separate the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. ³⁴ The mercy Seat you must place on top of the ark inside the Holy of Holies. ³⁵ Outside the veil, you shall set the table and the lampstand on the south side of the Holy Tent, opposite the table, for the table will be on the north side. ³⁶ Finally, for the entrance to the Tent you are to make a curtain of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson stuffs and fine twined linen, the work of a skilled embroiderer. ³⁷ And you shall have for this curtain five posts of acacia wood covered with gold, with gold hooks; for these you are to cast five bronze bases.

The altar of the holocaust

27 ¹ You are to make an altar out of acacia wood, a square five cubits long and five cubits wide, its height to be three cubits. ² At its four corners you are to put horns, the horns to be of one piece with it, covering it with bronze. ³ For the service of the altar you are to make pans for the ashes for burning the fat, as well as shovels, sprinkling basins, fire pans; you must make all the vessels for the altar out of bronze. ⁴ You are also to make a grating for it of bronze network, and on the four corners of this put four bronze rings. ⁵ You shall set it under the altar's ledge, below, so that it reaches halfway up the altar. ⁶ And for the carrying of the altar you are to make poles of acacia wood and cover them with bronze. ⁷ These are to be passed through the rings, so that they are on either side of the altar when it is carried. ⁸ You are to make the altar hollow, of boards; in the same way that was shown to you on the mountain.

⁹ You are to make also the court of the Holy Tent. The hangings of the court on the side facing south are to be of fine twined linen, one hundred cubits long for one side. ¹⁰ Their twenty bronze posts are to be set in the twenty bronze bases and to have hooks and rods of silver. ¹¹ So too for the northern side there are to be hangings one hundred cubits long, and twenty posts set in twenty bases, with their hooks and rods of silver. ¹² Across the width of the court, on the western side, there are to be fifty cubits of hangings, carried on ten posts set in ten bases. ¹³ The width of the court on the eastern side facing the sunrise is to be fifty cubits. ¹⁴ On one side of the gateway there are to be fifteen cubits of hangings, carried on three posts set in three bases. ¹⁵ On the other



side of the gateway there are also to be fifteen cubits of hangings, carried on three posts set in three bases. ¹⁶ The gateway to the court is to consist of a curtain twenty cubits wide made of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool and fine twined linen, the work of a skilled embroiderer, carried on four posts set in their four bases. ¹⁷ All the posts enclosing the court are to be connected by silver rods: their hooks are to be of silver, their bases of bronze. ¹⁸ The length of the court is to be one hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, its height five cubits. All the hangings are to be made of fine twined linen, and their bases of bronze. ¹⁹ All the furnishings for whatever use in the tabernacle, all the pegs of it and of the court, must be of bronze.

²⁰ You are to command the people of Israel to bring you pure olive oil for the light, and to keep a flame burning there perpetually. ²¹ Aaron and his sons are to set this flame in the Tent of Meeting, outside the veil that is before the Statement. It must burn there before Yahweh from evening to morning perpetually. This command is to be kept forever by the people of Israel.

The priestly vestments

28 ¹ Set apart of the sons of Israel your brother Aaron and his sons, and summon them to be priests in my service: Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ² For Aaron your brother you are to make sacred vestments to give him dignity and magnificence. ³ You are to instruct all the ablest craftsmen, to make Aaron's vestments for his consecration to my priesthood. ⁴ These are the vestments they must make: Breastpiece, Ephod, robe, embroidered tunic, turban and belt. Your brother Aaron and his sons shall wear these sacred vestments when they serve me as priests. ⁵ For these vestments you shall use gold, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen.

⁶ They are to make the Ephod of gold, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool and fine twined linen, the work of a skilled embroiderer. ⁷ It must have two shoulder straps fitted to it to join its two ends together. ⁸ The woven band on it to hold it on is to be of similar workmanship and to form one piece with it: this must be of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ⁹ You will then take two precious stones and engrave them with the names of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ six of their names on one stone, the remaining six on

the other, in the order of their birth. ¹¹ With the art of a jeweler, of an engraver of seals, you are to engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel, and mount them in settings of gold mesh. ¹² You are to fasten the two stones commemorating the sons of Israel to the shoulder straps of the Ephod. In this way Aaron will bear their names on his shoulders in the presence of Yahweh, that he may remember them. ¹³ You must also make golden rosettes, ¹⁴ and two chains of pure gold twisted like cord: you are to attach these cordlike chains to the rosettes.

¹⁵ You are to make the Breastpiece of judgement, finely embroidered, of the same workmanship as the apron. You are to make it of gold, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ¹⁶ It is to be square and doubled over nine inches wide. ¹⁷ In this you are to set four rows of stones: sard, topaz, carbuncle, for the first row; ¹⁸ emerald, sapphire, diamond for the second row; ¹⁹ for the third row hyacinth, ruby, amethyst; ²⁰ and for the fourth row, beryl, onyx, jasper. These are to be mounted in gold settings. ²¹ There are to be twelve according to the number of the sons of Israel whose names are engraved on them. They are to be engraved like seals, each with the name of one of the twelve tribes.

²² For the Breastpiece you will make chains of pure gold twisted like cords, ²³ and also two gold rings and fix them to its two upper corners. ²⁴ You must fasten the two gold cords to the two rings fixed on the corners of the Breastpiece. ²⁵ The other two ends of the cords you must fasten to the two rosettes, so that they will be attached to the shoulder straps of the Ephod, on the front. ²⁶ You are to make two gold rings and fix them to the two lower corners of the Breastpiece, on the inner hem, next to the Ephod, on the front. ²⁷ You are to make two more gold rings and fix them low down on the front of the two shoulder pieces of the Ephod, close to the seam, above the woven band of the Ephod. ²⁸ You must secure the Breastpiece by passing a ribbon of violet-purple through its rings and those of the Ephod, so that the Breastpiece will sit above the woven band and not come apart from the Ephod.

²⁹ So when Aaron enters the sanctuary wearing the Breastpiece of judgement, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel on his breast to call them to mind continually in the presence of Yahweh. ³⁰ In the Breastpiece of judgement you will put the Urim and the Thummim by means of which he takes the decisions for the Israelites. Aaron shall have



them on his breast when he goes into Yahweh's presence.

³¹ You are to make the robe of the Ephod entirely of violet-purple. ³² In the center it must have an opening for the head, the opening to have around it a border woven like the neck of a shirt to keep the robe from being torn. ³³ You shall decorate the lower hem with pomegranates of purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ³⁴ and you shall fit gold bells between: gold bells and pomegranates will be alternately all around the lower hem of the robe. ³⁵ Aaron is to wear this robe when he serves before God, so that the tinkling of the bells will be heard whenever he enters the sanctuary and goes into Yahweh's presence, or leaves it: if he does not, he will die.

³⁶ You are to make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it 'Consecrated to the Lord.' ³⁷ You will tie this to the front of the headpiece with a ribbon of violet-purple. ³⁸ Aaron is to wear it on his forehead, and so take on himself any sins which the sons of Israel may have committed in any of their sacred offerings. Aaron must always wear this plate on his forehead, to draw down on the Israelites the goodwill of Yahweh.

³⁹ You shall also weave the shirt of fine linen, and make a headpiece of fine linen, and a belt, the work of a skilled embroiderer.

⁴⁰ You are to make shirt and belt and head-dress for the sons of Aaron to make them dignified and beautiful.

⁴¹ You will put all these ornaments on your brother Aaron and his sons. You will then anoint and invest and consecrate them to serve me in the priesthood. ⁴² You are to make them linen shorts to cover their nakedness from waist to thigh. ⁴³ Aaron and his sons must wear these when they go into the Tent of Meeting and when they approach the altar to serve the sanctuary, as a precaution against being guilty of some fault that would mean death. This is a permanent rule for Aaron and for his descendants after him.

The consecration of the priests

29 ¹ This is the ceremony you must use when you consecrate them to serve me in the priesthood. Take one young bull and two rams without any defects, ² unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, made from fine wheat flour. ³ You must put these things into a basket and present them in the basket, at the same time as the young bull and the two rams.

⁴ Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting after they have been bathed. ⁵ Take the vestments and dress Aaron in the shirt, the robe over the Ephod, the Ephod and the Breastpiece, and embroidered belt. ⁶ Put the headdress on his head and tie on it the sacred plate. ⁷ Then take the chrism oil and pour it on his head, and so anoint him.

⁸ Next, bring his sons and clothe them with shirts. ⁹ Pass the belts around their waists and put the headaddresses on their heads. And the priesthood will be theirs forever. This is how you are to ordain Aaron and his sons.

¹⁰ You are to bring the bull in front of the Tent of Meeting. Aaron and his sons are to lay their hands on its head. ¹¹ Kill the bull there before Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ¹² Then take some of its blood and with your finger put it on the horns of the altar. Next, pour out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. ¹³ And then take all the fat that covers the inner organs, the fatty mass which is over the liver, the two kidneys with their covering fat, and burn them on the altar. ¹⁴ As for the bull's flesh, its skin and its intestines, you must burn them outside the camp, for it is an offering to take away the sins of the priests.

¹⁵ Next you are to take one of the rams. Aaron and his sons are to lay their hands on its head. ¹⁶ You are to kill the ram, take up its blood and pour it out on the sides of the altar. ¹⁷ Next, divide the ram in pieces and wash the inner organs and legs and put them on top of the head and the other pieces. ¹⁸ Then burn the whole ram on the altar. This will be a sweet-smelling offering to please Yahweh.

¹⁹ Next you are to take the other ram. Aaron and his sons are to lay their hands on its head. ²⁰ You are to kill the ram, take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the lobes of his sons' right ears, the thumbs of their right hands, and the big toes of their right feet, and pour out the rest of the blood on the sides of the altar. ²¹ Then take some of the blood that remains on the altar, together with the chrism oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and on his sons and their vestments, so that he and his vestments will be consecrated and his sons, too, and his vestments.

²² You are to take the fatty parts of the ram: the tail, the fat that covers the inner organs, the fatty mass which is over the liver, the two kidneys with their covering fat and also the right thigh, for this is a ram for the clothing ceremony. ²³ You are to take a loaf of bread, a cake of bread made with oil, and a wafer, from



the basket of unleavened bread placed before Yahweh,²⁴ and put it all into Aaron's hands and those of his sons and make the gesture of offering before Yahweh.²⁵ Then you are to take them back and burn them on the altar, on top of the burnt offering, as a sweet-smelling offering which pleases Yahweh.

²⁶ You are to take the breast of the ram and make the gesture of offering before Yahweh; this is to be your own portion.²⁷ You are to consecrate the breast that has been thus offered, as also the thigh that is set aside — the breast, that is, which has been offered and the thigh that has been set aside from the ram.

²⁸ This, by perpetual law, will be the portion that Aaron and his sons are to receive from the sons of Israel, since it is the portion set aside, a portion the sons of Israel are to set aside from their communion sacrifices, the portion they owe to Yahweh.

²⁹ Aaron's sacred vestments are to pass to his sons after him, and they will wear them for their anointing and clothing ceremony.³⁰ The son of Aaron who comes after him in the priesthood and enters the Tent of Meeting to serve in the sanctuary must wear them for seven days.

³¹ You are to take the ram used for the ordination and cook its meat in a holy place.

³² Aaron and his sons will eat the meat of the ram, and also the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.³³ They are to eat what was used in the ceremony of forgiveness during their ordination. No layman may eat these; they are holy things.³⁴ If any of the meat from the ordination sacrifice, or the bread, should be left till morning, you must put what is left in the fire. It is not to be eaten; it is a holy thing.³⁵ For Aaron and his sons you are to do exactly as I have commanded you: you are to spend seven days in ordaining them.

³⁶ On each day of this week you are also to offer a bull as a sacrifice for sin, in atonement; by offering an atonement sacrifice for sin, you will take away sin from the altar; then you must anoint it, and so consecrate it.³⁷ For seven days you are to repeat the atonement sacrifice for the altar and consecrate it. So it will be extremely holy, and whatever touches it will become holy.

³⁸ This is what you are to offer on the altar: two yearling lambs day by day continually.³⁹ The first lamb you must offer in the morning, the second in the evening twilight.⁴⁰ With the first lamb you must offer two pounds of fine flour mixed with one quart of purest oil, and pour out one quart of wine as an offering.

⁴¹ The second lamb you must offer in the eve-

ning twilight; do this with the same amounts of flour, olive oil and wine as in the morning. This is a sweet-smelling offering which pleases Yahweh.⁴² This is to be a continual offering from generation to generation, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting in the presence of Yahweh.

That is where I shall meet you and speak to you.⁴³ There I will teach the people of Israel, and this place will be consecrated by the presence of my glory.⁴⁴ In this way I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and Aaron too, and his sons, to be priests in my service.⁴⁵ For I will remain with the people of Israel, and I will be their God.⁴⁶ And so they will know that it is I, their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt to live among them: I, their God.

The incense, the water and the anointing oil

30 ¹ You must make an altar on which to burn incense; you are to make it out of acacia wood.² It is to be one cubit long, and one cubit wide — that is to say, square — and to stand two cubits high; its horns are to be one piece with it.³ The top of the altar, its surrounding sides, and its horns, are to be covered with pure gold, and decorated with a gold edge all around.⁴ You are to put two gold rings on it, below the edge on its two opposite sides; these are to hold the poles used for carrying it.⁵ These poles you must make of acacia wood and cover with gold.⁶ You are to set up the altar before the veil that protects the ark of the Statement opposite the ark and the mercy Seat from where I speak to you.

⁷ On this altar Aaron must burn fragrant incense each morning when he prepares the lamps,⁸ and in the evening twilight when Aaron puts the lamps back, he must burn it again. You must make these offerings of incense before Yahweh unfaithfully from generation to generation.⁹ You must not offer unholy incense on this altar or animal or grain offering, or pour out any wine offering on it.¹⁰ Once a year Aaron is to perform the ceremony of atonement; he shall do this atonement with the blood of offering to take away sins. And you shall do the same once a year in the generations to come. This ceremony will be extremely holy in the eyes of Yahweh.

¹¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said,¹² "When you take a census and make a register of the people of Israel, each is to pay Yahweh a ransom for his life, so that no disaster comes on them when the census is being made."

¹³ Everyone subject to the census must pay the required amount of money, weighed according to the official standard, and this shall be set aside for Yahweh. ¹⁴ Everyone subject to the census, that is to say of twenty years and over, must pay the sum set aside for Yahweh. ¹⁵ The rich man is not to give more, nor the poor man less, when they pay this amount for their lives. ¹⁶ You will use this ransom money given to you by the people of Israel for the upkeep of the Tent of Meeting. It will remind Yahweh of the people of Israel and will be the ransom for your lives."

¹⁷ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁸ "You must also make a bronze basin on a stand, for washing. You must place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it. ¹⁹ In this, Aaron and his sons must wash their hands and feet. ²⁰ When they are about to enter the Tent of Meeting they must wash in water lest they die, and when they have to approach the altar for their service, to burn the offering burned in honor of Yahweh, ²¹ they must wash their hands and feet lest they die. This is a lasting rule for them, for Aaron and for his descendants from generation to generation."

²² Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²³ "Take the choicest spices: twelve pounds of liquid myrrh, six pounds of sweet-smelling cinnamon, six pounds of scented cane and twelve pounds ²⁴ of cassia (all weighed according to the official standard) and one gallon of olive oil. ²⁵ These you are to make into a holy oil for anointing, such a blend as the perfumer might make. ²⁶ With it you are to anoint the Tent of Meeting and the ark of the Statement, ²⁷ the table and all its furnishings, the lampstand and all its accessories, ²⁸ the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its furnishings, and the basin with its stand. ²⁹ In this way you shall consecrate ³⁰ them and they will remain extremely holy; and whatever touches them will become holy. You must anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them, so that they may be priests in my service. ³¹ Then you are to say to the people of Israel: You must hold this anointing oil holy from generation to generation. ³² It is not to be poured on the bodies of common men, nor are you to make any other oil of the same mixture. It is a holy thing and you must consider it holy. ³³ Whoever makes any like it or uses it on a layman shall be outlawed from his people."

³⁴ Yahweh said to Moses, "Take sweet spices: storax, onycha, galbanum, sweet spices and pure frankincense in equal parts, ³⁵ and make an incense, such as the perfumer

might make, salted, pure, and holy. ³⁶ Crush a part of it into a fine powder, and put some of this in front of the ark of the Statement in the Tent of Meeting, the place appointed for my meetings with you. You must regard it as most holy. ³⁷ You are not to make any incense like it for your own use. You must hold it to be a holy thing, reserved for Yahweh. ³⁸ Whoever copies it for use as perfume shall be outlawed from his people."

The craftsmen for the sanctuary

31 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ² "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³ I have filled him with the spirit of God and given him understanding, skill, and ability for every kind of craft: ⁴ for the art of designing and working in gold and silver and bronze; ⁵ for cutting stones to be set, for carving in wood, for every kind of craft. ⁶ Here and now I give him a partner, Oholiab son of Ahisamach, one of the tribe of Dan; and to all the men that have skill I have given more, for them to carry out all that I have commanded you: ⁷ the Tent of Meeting; the ark of Statement and the mercy Seat that is on top of the ark, ⁸ and all the furniture of the Holy Tent; the table and its furnishings; the pure lampstand and all its accessories; the altar of incense; ⁹ the altar of burnt offering with all its furnishings; the basin with its stand; ¹⁰ the beautiful priestly vestments, that is, the sacred vestment of Aaron the priest and the vestments of his sons, for the priestly functions; ¹¹ the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the sanctuary. In this they are to do exactly as I have directed you."

The sabbath rest

¹² Yahweh said to Moses, ¹³ "Speak to the people of Israel and say: 'You shall keep my sabbaths carefully, because the sabbath is a sign between myself and you from generation to generation to show that it is I, Yahweh, who have made you my own people. ¹⁴ You must keep the sabbath, then; it is to be held sacred by you. Whoever does not keep it, but works on that day, must be put to death. ¹⁵ Work is to be done for six days, but the seventh day must be a day of complete rest, consecrated to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on the sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶ The people of Israel are to keep the sabbath, observing it from generation to generation: this is a lasting covenant. ¹⁷ Between myself and the people of Israel the sabbath is a sign forever, since in six days Yahweh made the heavens and earth, but on the seventh day he rested and drew breath."

THE MOLTEN CALF

¹⁸ When Yahweh had finished speaking to Moses about all these things, he gave him the two slabs of the Statement, slabs of stone written with the finger of God.

+ 32 ¹ When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain they assembled around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us gods to walk ahead of us; as for this Moses who brought us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

² And Aaron said to them, "Take the gold earrings from your wives, your sons and daughters and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they gave him and with a graving tool made it into a molten calf.

They then said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt."

⁵ Now, when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before the molten calf and cried out, "Tomorrow will be a feastday for Yahweh."

⁶ So next day they rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. They then sat down to eat and drink and got up to make merry.

⁷ Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ⁸ They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them and have made for themselves a molten calf; they have bowed down before it and sacrificed to it and said: 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt.'"

⁹ And Yahweh said to Moses, "I see that these people are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now just leave me that my anger may blaze against them. I will destroy them, but of you I will make a great nation."

¹¹ But Moses calmed the anger of Yahweh, his God, and said, "Why, O Yahweh should your anger burst against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with

18. 34, 28; Dt 9, 9; Mt 4, 2; 1 K 19, 8	2. 1 K 12, 26; Hos 8, 6; 10, 5	6. 1 Cor 10, 7
7. Jer 31, 32	10. Gen 12, 2; Num 14, 12	11. Jer 14; Am 7, 2; Eek 9, 8

+ Just as Adam disobeys from the beginning, so too does Israel. After receiving the Law. The difficult relationship between Israel and its God now begins. He threatens, punishes and, after that, pardons.

Moses is frightened this first time: he thinks that by using drastic measures, he will make Israel return to the right path and the people will be made more responsible. But the years pass and the people continue to sin. Therefore, later prophets will become convinced that a Law does not suffice for mortal man, he needs a new heart: See the new covenant in Jer 31:31.

Make us gods. The Israelites have not really accepted Yahweh, the demanding and challenging God who commands them to conquer the promised land. They wish to return to their old religion which merely requires feasts and rites. The golden calf they invent out of wood covered with gold (which Moses will burn), is the traditional figure of the Canaanite god El, a habitually good-natured god who puts at ease

the minds of the fearful believers.

Their sin, then, is not only in making an image of God, but, even more, in making a god which suits them. It is the same sin that many believers commit today when they become indignant because the Church asks them to fight for peace and justice.

I will destroy them, but of you I will make a great nation. When the people's fidelity fails, Yahweh asks Moses for an exceptional proof of his own fidelity. He suggests that his own descendants could very well form a new people of God to replace these irresponsible ones. But: Moses has understood that this cannot be and should not be: God will never withdraw his promises to Israel. So Moses must sacrifice himself to the end to save these sinners. He will seek neither salvation nor spiritual gifts for his own descendants at the expense of the people who received the Covenant.

Moses succeeds and obtains pardon for Israel. God permits him to *stand before Yahweh* to



such great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Let not the Egyptians say: 'Yahweh brought them out with evil intent, for he wanted to kill them in the mountains and wipe them from the face of the earth.' Turn away from the heat of your anger; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he promise you swore to them: I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land I spoke about I will give to them as an everlasting inheritance."

¹⁴Yahweh then changed his mind and would not yet harm his people.

¹⁵Moses then returned and came down from the mountain carrying in his hand the two slabs of the Statute, slabs written on both sides, back and front. ¹⁶These slabs were the work of God and the writing graven on the slabs was the writing of God.

¹⁷When Joshua heard the noise of the people who were shouting he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." ¹⁸But Moses answered, "It is not a victory song, nor the cry of defeat that I hear, but the sound of singing."

¹⁹When he drew near to the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his

anger burst forth and he threw the slabs from his hands and shattered them against the base of the mountain. ²⁰Then he seized the calf they had made and burned it in the fire, grinding it into a powder that he scattered over the surface of the water, and this he made the Israelites drink.

²¹Moses said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you to let you bring such a great sin on them?"

²²And Aaron said, "Don't let your anger be roused. You know this people and how evil they are. ²³They said to me: 'Make us gods to go before us: as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' ²⁴I then said to them that whoever had gold was to give it over to me. I threw it in the fire and out came this calf!"

²⁵Moses saw that the people were out of control, for Aaron had let them run wild, to a point that would make them an easy prey for their opponents.

²⁶Then Moses stood at the gate of the camp and said, "All those for Yahweh, come to me." And all the sons of Levi rallied round him.

²⁷Then he said to them, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel commands: Let each one carry a sword at

13. Gen 12, 7; 22, 16 15. 24, 12 16. 31, 18; 34, 28 25. Dt 28, 37 28. Dt 33, 9

to appease his anger (Psalm 106:23). In various parts of the Bible, Moses will be presented as an intercessor who had authority to ask in the name of his people, and who was, thus, the anticipated figure of Jesus, the only Mediator and intercessor.

On going down, Moses hears the irresponsible answer of Aaron who lays the blame on the people. Aaron has acted like an opportunist, not anxious to please the people, but quickly forgetting the mission he has received from God, not from the people. Let us recall that Aaron was the patron and model of the Jewish priests. The priests who wrote these pages kept the teaching of Moses and claimed his authority at they were humble enough to present Aaron, their ancestor, as a common and sinful man, whose acts were not equal to his high status.

The unfaithful people will not easily pay for their sin. The different accounts mixed in this chapter do not agree regarding what happened. Verse 35 makes us think of a punishment like the pest. Verses 25-29 indicate that not all participated in the rebellion. The men of the tribe of Levi were more faithful and helped Moses to re-establish his authority: they started killing the guilty ones. *Because of this Yahweh gives you the blessing this day: because their zeal for God made them despise any feeling of fellowship "according to the flesh."*

Many details in this story came from those who wrote these pages centuries later. They were influenced by what happened in the sanctuaries of Bethel and of Dan, where King Jeroboam had yearling calves placed to represent Yahweh (1 K 12:26).

his side. Go back and forth from door to door and don't hesitate to kill even your brothers, your companions and your relatives."

²⁸ The Levites did what Moses had ordered and that day about three thousand men fell.

²⁹ Moses then said, "From now on your hands are consecrated to Yahweh for each of you has been against his son and his brother. Because of this, Yahweh gives you today his blessing."

Moses intercedes for the people

³⁰ The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a very grave sin, but now I am going up to Yahweh; perhaps I will obtain pardon for your sin."

³¹ So Moses went towards Yahweh and said, "Ah! This people has committed a very great sin; they made a god out of gold. ³² And now please forgive their sin ... if not, blot me out of the book you have written."

³³ Yahweh said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, him I will blot out from my book. ³⁴ Go now! Lead the people where I told you. My Angel will walk before you and on the day of punishment I will punish them for their sin." ³⁵ And so Yahweh punished the people with a plague because of the calf Aaron had made for them.

The mercy of Yahweh for the people

33 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, "Go now! Leave this place, you and the people you brought out from the land of Egypt and go to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said: 'I will give it to your descendants.' ²I will send an Angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. ³But I will not go with you to this land flowing with milk and

honey, for you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

⁴ When the people heard these distressing words they were very sad and none of them put on any ornaments.

⁵ Yahweh then said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel: 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you, even for a moment, I would destroy you! Now, take off your ornaments that I may know what I shall do to you.'

⁶ And so the Israelites gave up their ornaments before leaving Mount Horeb.

The Tent of Meeting

⁷ Moses then took the Tent and pitched it for himself outside the camp, at a distance from it, and called it the *Tent of Meeting*. Whoever sought Yahweh would go out to the Tent of Meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And when Moses went to the tent all the people would stand, each one at the entrance to his tent and keep looking towards Moses until he entered the tent.

⁹ Now, as soon as Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and remain at the entrance to the tent, while Yahweh spoke with Moses.

¹⁰ When all the people saw the pillar of cloud at the entrance to the tent, they would arise and worship, each one at the entrance to his own tent.

◆ ¹¹ Then Yahweh would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his neighbour, and then Moses would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua, son of Nun, would not leave the tent.

32. Rom 9, 3

34. Is 4, 3; Ps 69, 29; Dn 12, 1; Rev 3, 5

1. Num 10, 11

7. Num 12, 4

11. Num 12, 8; Dt 34, 10; Jn 15, 15

• The tent called "The Tent of Meeting" was the first temple of God in the midst of his people. Note that it is placed outside the encampment, at some distance, and only after the people have sinned is it spoken of. God no longer deals directly with Israel, but through the intermediary of his Angel (32:34 and 33:32) and he isolates himself in some way in this temple, because their hearts cannot receive him.

If God stays at a distance and does not clearly

manifest his presence, he does so not so much to punish us as to adapt himself to our lack of readiness: it would be a terrible thing to feel God's presence before having entirely surrendered to him.

◆ God has come down from Sinai to speak to his people. However, he does not communicate in a personal way with those sinful men who are still beginning the first stage of their life of

¹² Then Moses said to Yahweh, "You say to me: 'Lead this people up', but you haven't told me who you will send with me and yet you have said that you know me by name and that I have found favour in your sight. ¹³ And now if I have found favour in your sight, let me know your ways, that I may know you and so find favour in your sight. Look, too, on this people which is your own people."

¹⁴ Yahweh said, "My Face will go with you and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ And Moses said, "If your Face does not come with us, do not take us from here. ¹⁶ And how will anyone here know that you look kindly on me and my people? Will it not be because you go with us? In that way, myself and your people will be distinguished from every other nation on the face of the earth."

¹⁷ Yahweh then said to Moses, "What you have said I will do, for I look kindly on you and I have known you by name."

Yahweh passes before Moses

+ ¹⁸ Moses said, "Then let me see your Glory." ¹⁹ And He said "I will make all my goodness pass before you and proclaim the name of Yahweh before you. For I am gracious to whom I want to be gracious and I am

merciful to whom I want to be merciful."

²⁰ Then Yahweh said, "You cannot see my face because man cannot see me and live." ²¹ And he added, "See this place near me; you shall stand on the rock ²² and when my Glory passes I will put you in a hollow of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

34 ¹ Yahweh said to Moses, "Cut two slabs of stone like the first, and I will write on the slabs the words that were on the former slabs that you broke.

² Be ready in the morning and come up to Mount Sinai and wait for me on the top of the mountain. ³ No one will go up with you and no one is to be seen anywhere on the mountain. Even the sheep and the cattle are not to graze near the mountain."

⁴ So Moses cut two slabs of stone like the first. Then he rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai as Yahweh had commanded, taking in his hands the two slabs of stone.

16. Dt 2, 7	18. Jn 1, 14	19. 3, 14; Rom 9, 15	20. Gen 32, 31; Dt 5, 24; Jdg 6, 22
21. Is 6, 5	22. 1 K 19, 13	3. 19, 12	

faith, in which obedience to the Law is primary. God communicates instead with Moses, *face to face* (33:1), that is spirit to spirit. This is different from inferior communications like dreams, visions and apparitions: Num 12:6.

The people agree to being accompanied by the *Angel of Yahweh*, that is, to count on his help and providence. Moses, however, thirsts for another kind of presence, since his role as chief and prophet has set him apart from his brothers and has placed him in great solitude. He desires the Face of God to be with him, that is, a personal presence by means of which God makes known his intentions.

Later Moses insists: *may your face accompany us*. That is: may God make himself known to his people also, so that they may be not only a people protected by God, but a holy people who know God. The answer is positive, yet only with the passing of time will God make himself known with greater generosity. Jesus will ask for this knowledge for all those who compose his Church (Jn 17).

+ This paragraph is one of the most profound in the entire Bible. It speaks to us in a figurative way of how God agrees to make himself known in a personal and direct way.

Let me see your glory. In reality God does not let himself be seen, but he himself will pronounce his Name, that is, he will let his Power and Glory be impressed on the one who wants to see him.

You will stand on the rock. That is, you will wait for me here in solitude, detached, alert and available for the moment I wish, since I give my favours to whomever I wish.

I will cover you with my hand. When God wants to favour someone with mystical union, he becomes master of his mind for a more or less long time. Then he removes from him every word, every idea and every remembrance, and keeps him by force in an emptiness, in which he clings solely to the presence of God, as if dead to everything outside: *I will put you in the hollow of the rock.* And thus he will remain until *the Lord has passed by. Then I will take away my hand.* Then you will realize that you have been within God.

Yahweh, then, pronounces his Name, leaving it engraved in the depths of the spirit, and this Name is none other than the knowledge and experience of his infinite mercy. Upon ending this time of total union with the Lord, Moses no longer has any ambition or personal desire: it



⁵ And Yahweh came down in a cloud and stood there with him, and Moses called on the name of Yahweh.

⁶ Then Yahweh passed in front of him and cried out, "Yahweh, Yahweh is a God full of pity and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in truth and loving-kindness. ⁷He shows loving-kindness to the thousandth generation and forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin; yet he does not leave the guilt without punishment, even punishing the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and the fourth generation."

⁸ Moses hastened to bow down to the ground and worship. ⁹He then said, "If you really look kindly on me, my Lord, please come and walk in our midst and even though we are a stiff-necked people, pardon our wickedness and our sin and make us yours."

The law of the Covenant

¹⁰ Yahweh said, "I am making a covenant with you; in the presence of all the people I will do marvels never yet done in any land or nation so that all the people among whom you live may see how awesome is the work of Yahweh that I will do for you.

¹¹ Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. ¹² Take care to make no treaty with the inhabitants of the country you enter, lest it be a snare for you. ¹³ Rather shall you knock down their altars and smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles.

¹⁴ Do not worship another god, for Yahweh whose name is jealous, is a jealous God! ¹⁵ So make no treaty with those who live in the land, for they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them. If not, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. ¹⁶ Then you take their daughters for your sons and as those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

¹⁷ Make no molten gods for yourself.

¹⁸ Keep the feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days in the month of Abib you are to eat unleavened bread for that was the month you went out of Egypt.

¹⁹ All that first opens the womb is mine and every firstborn male of your livestock, sheep and cattle. ²⁰ You shall redeem the firstborn of a donkey with a lamb. If you do not redeem it you must break its neck. Every firstborn of your sons you shall redeem; and no one shall appear before me empty-handed.

²¹ You shall work for six days and rest on the seventh day; even at the time of ploughing and harvesting you shall rest.

²² Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest and the Feast of Ingathering at the turning of the year. ²³ Three times each year all your men shall appear before Yahweh, God of Israel. ²⁴ I will drive out nations before you and extend your boundaries. No one shall covet your country when you go up three times each year to appear before Yahweh, your God.

²⁵ Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me together with leavened bread and do not let anything from the Passover Feast remain until morning.

²⁶ Bring the very best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of Yahweh, your God.

Do not boil a kid in the milk of its mother."

²⁷ Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Write down these words, for these are the requirements of the covenant that I have made with you and with Israel."

7. Num 14, 18; Dt 4, 31; J1 2, 13; Jon 4, 2; Na 1, 3; Ps 103, 6
19. 13, 11 25. 12, 15

10. Ex 20, 1

18. 23, 14

only matters that God's plan to entrust to men the *divine inheritance* be realized.

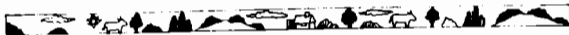
^o There is another very old text, considered by Israel as one of those which better expressed the demands of God in celebrating the Covenant.

In the first generations after Moses, there was not "one" decalogue, but several groups of commandments put down at varied times and in various places. Each of them was meant to express the requirements of the Covenant and the rules of Moses. The most well known is in chapter 20 but here is found another and more ancient one.

While the first, "our" decalogue, gives priority to justice, these Ten Commandments of chapter 34, about rites and feasts, helped the Israelites keep their religious identity among pagan and foreign people.

In the ancient times at least two accounts of Moses' ascent up Mount Sinai were kept.

This possibly explains why in the actual text of the Bible, Moses goes up a second time after having broken the slabs of stones. This literary fiction was a way of keeping the two accounts of the ascent of Moses as well as the two most important decalogues.



²⁸ Moses remained there with Yahweh forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking water. He wrote on the slabs the words of the Covenant — the Ten Commandments.

Moses comes down from the mountain

+ ²⁹When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two slabs of the testament in his hands, he was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant after speaking with Yahweh.

³⁰Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw that Moses' face was radiant and they were afraid to go near him. ³¹But Moses called them, and Aaron with

all the leaders of the community drew near, and Moses spoke to them. ³²Afterwards all the Israelites came near and he told them all that Yahweh had commanded him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

o ³⁴Whenever Moses went before Yahweh to speak with him, he took off the veil until he came out again. And when he came out and told them what he had been commanded, ³⁵the Israelites saw that his face was radiant. Moses would then replace the veil over his face until he went again to speak with Yahweh.

THE HOLY TENT (2nd PART)

35 ¹Moses assembled the whole community of the people of Israel and said to them, "This is what Yahweh has ordered to be done: ²Work is to be done for six days, but the seventh is to be a holy day for you, a day of complete rest, consecrated to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on that day shall be put to death. ³You must not light a fire on the sabbath day in any of your homes."

The materials are collected

⁴Moses spoke to the whole community of the people of Israel. "This is what Yahweh has commanded: ⁵Set aside a contribution for Yahweh out of your possessions. Let all give willingly and bring this contribution for Yahweh: gold, silver, and bronze; ⁶purple wool, of violet shade and red, crimson wool, fine linen, goats' hair, ⁷rams' skins dyed red and fine leather, acacia wood, ⁸oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; ⁹precious stones and gems to be set in Ephod and Breastpiece. ¹⁰Let all the most skilled craftsmen among you come and make all that Yahweh has commanded: ¹¹the Holy

Tent, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its crossbars, its posts, and its bases; ¹²the ark with its poles, the mercy Seat on the ark and the veil that screens it; ¹³the table with its poles and all the furnishings for it, and the loaves of offering; ¹⁴the lampstand for the light, with its accessories, its lamps, and the oil for the light; ¹⁵the altar of incense with its poles, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance to the Holy Tent; ¹⁶the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, and all the furnishings for it, the basin and its stand; ¹⁷the hangings of the court, its posts, its bases, and the screen for the gateway to the court; ¹⁸the pegs of the Holy Tent and of the court, together with their cords; ¹⁹the beautiful priestly vestments for service in the sanctuary, that is, the sacred vestments for Aaron the priest and the vestments of his sons for the priestly functions."

²⁰Then the whole community of Israel withdrew from Moses' presence. ²¹And all those who wanted to give came, bringing their contribution for Yahweh for making the Tent of Meeting, for all its functions and for the

29. 2 Cor 3, 7; 4, 6

+ The skin of his face was radiant for having spoken with Yahweh. This exterior sign announces the profound transformation worked by God in those who openly present themselves before him. This mystery will be clarified in Mk

9:2 and 2 Cor 3:12-18.

o The continuation of remembrances about the Israelites' life in the desert is in chapters 11-16 and 20-24 of the Book of Numbers.

sacred vestments.²² They came, men and women, all giving willingly, bringing brooches, rings, bracelets, necklaces, gold things of every kind, all those who had vowed to Yahweh some article of gold.²³ All those who happened to own purple wool, of violet shade or red, crimson wool, fine linen, goats' hair, rams' skins dyed red, or fine leather, brought them.²⁴ All who could contribute to the collection of silver and bronze brought their contribution for Yahweh. And all who happened to own acacia wood, suitable for any of the work to be done, brought it.²⁵ All the skilled women set their hands to spinning, and brought purple wool, of violet shade and red, crimson wool and fine linen, from what they had spun.²⁶ All the women willingly used their special skill and spun the goats' hair.²⁷ The leaders brought precious stones and gems to be set in Ephod and Breastpiece,²⁸ and the spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense.²⁹ All the men and women of Israel who wanted to contribute to all the work that Yahweh had ordered through Moses to be done brought their free offering to Yahweh.

The craftsmen for the sanctuary

³⁰ Moses said to the people of Israel, "See, Yahweh has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.³¹ He has filled him with the spirit of God and given him understanding, skill, and ability for every kind of craft:³² for the art of designing and working in gold and silver and bronze;³³ for cutting stones to be set, for carving in wood, for every kind of craft.³⁴ And to him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, he has given the gift of teaching.³⁵ He has filled them with skill to carry out all the crafts of engraver, weaver of fine linen, embroiderer in purple wool, of violet shade and red, in crimson wool and fine linen, as well as of the common weaver; they are able to do work of all kinds, and are skillful designers."

36 ¹ Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled craftsmen to whom Yahweh had given skill and understanding to carry out all that was required for the building of the sanctuary, did their work exactly as Yahweh had directed.

² Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled craftsmen to whom Yahweh had given ability and who offered to do the work.³ They received from Moses all that the people of Israel had brought as contributions for the work of building the sanctuary.⁴ In the meantime the people continued each morning to bring their offerings.⁵ So the skilled crafts-

men, busy with the various works on the sanctuary, all left their work and went to tell Moses, "The people are bringing more than what is needed for the work which Yahweh has told us to do."⁶ Moses then sent this command throughout the camp: "Let no one, man or woman, do anything more toward the collection for the sanctuary." So the people were stopped from bringing any more;⁷ the material they had was enough, and more than enough, to complete all the work.

⁸ All the most skilled craftsmen among the workers made the Holy Tent. They made it with ten sheets of fine twined linen, of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool, finely embroidered with angels.⁹ The length of a single sheet was twenty-eight cubits, its width four cubits, all the sheets being of the same size.¹⁰ They sewed five of the sheets together, and the other five also.¹¹ They attached loops of violet wool to the border of the last sheet in one set, and did the same for the border of the last sheet in the other set.¹² They put fifty loops on the first sheet and, matching them one by one, fifty loops on the border of the last sheet in the second set.¹³ They made fifty gold clasps and with them joined the two sets into one piece.

¹⁴ Next they made sheets of goats' hair to form a tent over the Holy Tent; they made eleven of these.¹⁵ The length of a single sheet was thirty cubits, its width four cubits; the eleven sheets were all of the same size.¹⁶ They joined five of these sheets together into one set, the remaining six into another.¹⁷ They attached fifty loops to the border of the last sheet in the first set, and fifty loops to the border of the last sheet in the second set.¹⁸ And they made fifty bronze clasps, to join the two sets so as to form one cover.¹⁹ They made another covering of rams' skins dyed red to be put over the Holy Tent and a covering of fine leather to spread over that.

²⁰ The Holy Tent was made with boards of acacia wood, which stood upright.²¹ Each board was ten cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.²² Each board was fitted with two matching arms; this they did for all the boards of the Holy Tent.²³ They made twenty boards for the southern side,²⁴ with forty silver bases to put under the twenty boards: two bases under the first board to receive its two matching arms, and so on for the other boards.²⁵ For the other side on the north, they made twenty boards²⁶ and forty silver bases, two bases under each board.²⁷ For the back on the west, they made six boards.²⁸ And they made two boards for the corners at the back of the Holy Tent.²⁹ These boards were joined at the bot-



bottom and also at the top, up to the level of the first ring; this they did with the two boards that were to form the two corners.³⁰ In this way there were eight boards with their sixteen silver bases; two bases under each board.³¹ They made crossbars of acacia wood: five to hold the boards together that were to form one side of the Holy Tent,³² five on the other side to hold the boards that were to form the northern side.³³ They made the middle bar, fixed halfway up, to run from one end to the other.³⁴ They covered the boards with gold, and put gold rings on them to take the crossbars which they covered with gold.

³⁵ They made the veil of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool, and of fine twined linen, skillfully embroidered with Cherubim.³⁶ For hanging this veil they made four posts of acacia wood and covered them with gold, with gold hooks, and they cast four silver bases for them.³⁷ For the entrance to the Tent they made a curtain of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool and fine twined linen, the work of a skilled embroiderer.³⁸ For the hanging of this they made five posts with hooks; their tops and rods they plated with gold; their five bases were of bronze.

37 Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, one and a half cubits high.² He covered it, inside and out, with pure gold, and decorated it all around with a gold edge.³ He cast four gold rings for the ark, attaching them to its four feet: two rings on one side and two rings on the other.⁴ He also made poles of acacia wood covering them with gold;⁵ and he passed the poles through the rings on the sides of the ark, for carrying it.⁶ Also he made of pure gold the mercy Seat, two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide.⁷ For the two ends of the mercy Seat he made two golden Cherubim of hammered gold,⁸ the first Cherub for one end and the second for the other, and fastened them to the two ends of the mercy Seat so that they made one piece with it.⁹ The Cherubim had their wings spread upward so that they overshadowed the mercy Seat. They faced one another.

¹⁰ He made the table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a half cubit high.¹¹ He covered it with pure gold, and decorated it all around with a gold edge.¹² He surrounded it with a frame three inches wide, and decorated this with a gold edge.¹³ He cast four gold rings for it and fixed these at the four corners where the four legs were.¹⁴ The rings lay close to the frame to hold the poles for carrying the table.¹⁵ He made the poles of acacia

wood and covered them with gold; these were for carrying the table.¹⁶ He made furnishings of pure gold for the table: dishes, cups, jars and bowls to be used for the wine offerings.

¹⁷ He made the lampstand of pure gold, and made the lampstand, base and stem, of hammered gold. Its decorative flowers including buds and petals were of one piece with it.¹⁸ Six branches extended from the sides of it, three from one side, three from the other.¹⁹ The first branch carried three decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals; the second branch, too, carried three decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals, and similarly all six branches extending from the lampstand.

²⁰ The lampstand itself carried four decorative flowers shaped like almond blossoms, each with its bud and petals:²¹ one bud under the first two branches extending from the lampstand, one under the next pair, one under the last pair: for there were six branches extending from the lampstand.²² The buds and the branches were of one piece with the lampstand, and the whole was made from a single piece of pure hammered gold.²³ Then he made the lamps for it, seven of them, with tongs and trays of pure gold.²⁴ He used seventy-five pounds of pure gold for making the lampstand and all its accessories.

²⁵ He made the altar of incense out of acacia wood. It was one cubit long, and one cubit wide that is to say, square — and two cubits high; its horns were one piece with it.²⁶ The top of it, its surrounding sides, and its horns, he covered with pure gold, and decorated it all around with a gold edge.²⁷ He fixed two gold rings to it below the edge on its two opposite sides, to hold the poles used for carrying it.²⁸ These poles he made of acacia wood and covered them with gold.²⁹ He also made the sacred anointing oil and the pure, fragrant incense, blending it as perfumers do.

38 He made the altar of burnt offering out of acacia wood, a square five cubits long and five cubits wide, and three cubits high.² At its four corners he put horns, the horns being of one piece with it, and covered it with bronze.³ He made all the altar vessels: pans for the ashes, shovels, sprinkling basins, hooks, fire pans; he made all the vessels for the altar out of bronze.⁴ He made a grating for it of bronze network which he set under the ledge, below, so that it reached halfway up the altar.⁵ He cast four rings and fixed them on the four corners of the bronze grating to hold the poles.⁶ He made the poles of acacia wood and covered them with bronze⁷ and placed them

through the rings on the sides of the altar for carrying it. He made the altar hollow, of boards.

⁸ He also made the bronze basin and its bronze base from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

⁹ He made the court. For the southern side of the court, facing the south country, there were one hundred cubits of hangings of fine twined linen. ¹⁰ Their twenty posts with their twenty bases were of bronze, their hooks and rods of silver. ¹¹ For the northern side there were one hundred cubits of hangings. Their twenty posts with their twenty bases were of bronze, their hooks and rods of silver. ¹² For the western side, there were fifty cubits of hangings, carried on ten posts set in ten bases, with their hooks and rods of silver. ¹³ Fifty cubits, too, for the eastern side facing the sunrise. ¹⁴ On one side of the gateway there were fifteen cubits of hangings carried on three posts set in three bases. ¹⁵ On the other side there were fifteen cubits of hangings, with their three posts and their three bases. ¹⁶ All the hangings enclosing the court were of fine twined linen. ¹⁷ The bases for the posts were of bronze and their hooks of silver like the plating at the top. The posts for the court all had rods of silver. ¹⁸ The screen for the gateway of the court, the work of a skilled embroiderer, was made of purple wool, violet shade and red, of crimson wool, and fine twined linen. It was twenty cubits long and, along the width of it, five cubits high like the hangings of the court. ¹⁹ Its four posts with their four bases were of bronze. The hooks for the posts were of silver, like the plating at the top and like their rods. ²⁰ The pegs for the Holy Tent and for the court enclosure were all of bronze.

²¹ Here is the account of metals used for the Holy Tent — the Tent of Meeting — the account drawn up by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest, as Moses had ordered.

²² Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that Yahweh had commanded. ²³ His partner was Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, engraver, weaver of fine linen, embroiderer in purple wool, of violet shade and red, in crimson wool and fine linen.

²⁴ The amount of gold used in the work — the entire work for the sanctuary — (this was gold consecrated by offering) weighed 2,195 pounds, weighed according to the official standard. ²⁵ The silver collected when the census of the community was taken weighed 7,550 pounds, weighed according to the offi-

cial standard. ²⁶ Everyone of twenty years and over included in the census paid the required amount. These numbered six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty. ²⁷ The 7,500 pounds of silver were used for casting the one hundred bases for the sanctuary and the veil, 75 pounds for each base. ²⁸ With the remaining 50 pounds of silver he made the hooks for the posts, the plating for their tops, and their rods. ²⁹ The bronze consecrated by offering amounted to 5,310 pounds. ³⁰ and with this he made the bases for the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, the bronze altar with its grating of bronze and all the furnishings for it, ³¹ the bases for the enclosure of the court, those for the gateway to the court, all the pegs for the Holy Tent, and all the pegs for the court enclosure.

39 ¹ From the purple wool, violet shade and red, the crimson wool, and the fine linen they made beautiful priestly vestments for service in the sanctuary. They made the sacred vestments for service for Aaron, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

² They made the Ephod of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen. ³ They beat gold into thin plates, and cut these into fine strips to weave into the purple wool, violet shade and red, into the crimson wool and the fine linen, as does the weaver of fine linen. ⁴ For the Breastpiece they made two shoulder straps, joined to it at its two ends. ⁵ The woven band on it to hold it formed one piece with it and was of similar workmanship: this was of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen, as Yahweh had directed Moses. ⁶ They fashioned the precious stones, mounted in settings of gold mesh and engraved, as a seal is engraved, with the names of the sons of Israel. ⁷ They fastened the stones to the shoulder straps of the Breastpiece, stones commemorating the sons of Israel, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

⁸ They made the Breastpiece, finely embroidered, of the same workmanship as the Ephod, of gold thread, purple wool, violet shade and red, and fine twined linen. ⁹ It was square and folded double, nine inches long and nine inches wide. ¹⁰ In this they set four rows of stones: sard, topaz, carbuncle, for the first row; ¹¹ emerald, sapphire, diamond, for the second row; ¹² for the third row, hyacinth, ruby, amethyst; ¹³ and for the fourth row, beryl, onyx, jasper. These were mounted in settings of gold mesh ¹⁴ and bore the names of the twelve sons of Israel. They were engaged as seals are, each with the name of one of the twelve tribes. ¹⁵ For the Breastpiece they made chains of pure gold twisted like cords. ¹⁶ They

nade two gold rosettes and two gold rings,⁷ and they fastened the two gold cords to the two rings fixed on the corners of the breastpiece.¹⁸ The other two ends of the cords they fastened to the two rosettes; they were thus attached to the shoulder straps of the Ephod, on the front.¹⁹ They made two gold rings and fixed them to the lower corners of the breastpiece, on the inner hem, next to the Ephod.²⁰ And they made two more gold rings and fixed them low down on the front of the two shoulder straps of the Ephod, close to the seam, above the woven band of the apron.¹ They secured the Breastpiece by passing a ribbon of violet-purple through its rings and nose of the apron, so that the Breastpiece could sit above the woven band and not come apart from the Ephod, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

²² Then they made the robe of the Ephod woven entirely of violet-purple.²³ The opening in the center of it was like the neck of a shirt and around the opening was a border to keep the robe from tearing.²⁴ The lower hem of the robe they decorated with pomegranates of purple wool, violet shade and red, crimson wool, and fine twined linen.²⁵ They also made bells of pure gold and placed them all around the lower hem of the robe between the pomegranates,²⁶ bells and pomegranates alternately all around the lower hem of the robe, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

²⁷ Then they made the shirts of finely woven linen for Aaron and his sons,²⁸ the eaddress of fine linen, the shorts of fine twined linen,²⁹ the belts of fine twined linen, of purple wool, violet shade and red, and of crimson wool, finely embroidered, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

³⁰ They also made the plate, the holy plate of pure gold, and engraved on it "Consecrated to Yahweh," as a man engraves a seal.³¹ They tied to this a ribbon of violet-purple to secure it to the top of the turban, as Yahweh had directed Moses.

³² So all the work of the tabernacle, that is the Tent of Meeting, was completed. In carrying it out the sons of Israel had done exactly as Yahweh had directed Moses.

³³ Then they brought to Moses all these things, the Tent of Meeting, and all its furnishings: its hooks, frames, crossbars, posts, bases, the covering of rams' skins dyed red, the

covering of fine leather, and the screening veil;³⁵ the ark of the Statement with its poles and the mercy Seat;³⁶ the table with all its furnishings, and the loaves of offering;³⁷ the lampstand of pure gold with its lamps — the lamps that were to be set on it — and all its accessories; the oil, too, for the light;³⁸ the golden altar, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, the curtain for the entrance to the tent;³⁹ the bronze altar with its grating of bronze, its poles and all its furnishings; the basin and its stand;⁴⁰ hangings of the court with their posts and bases, and the curtain for the gateway to the court, its cords, its pegs, and all the furniture for the service in the Holy Tent, the Tent of Meeting;⁴¹ the beautiful priestly vestments for service in the sanctuary, that is, the sacred vestments for Aaron the priest, and the vestments for his sons for the priestly functions.⁴² The Israelites had done all the work exactly as Yahweh had directed Moses.

⁴³ Moses examined the whole work, and he could see they had done it as Yahweh had directed him. And Moses blessed them.

The sanctuary erected and consecrated

40 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ² "On the first day of the first month you are to erect the Holy Tent, the Tent of Meeting,³ and place the ark of the Statement in it, screening it with the veil.⁴ Bring in the lampstand, too, and set up its lamps.⁵ Place the golden altar of incense in front of the ark of the Statement, and set up the screen at the entrance of the Holy Tent.⁶ Place the altar for burnt offerings in front of the entrance to the Holy Tent, the Tent of Meeting.⁷ Place the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and fill it with water.⁸ Set up the enclosure of the court and hang the curtain at the gateway of the court.⁹ Then, taking the sacred oil, anoint the Holy Tent and everything in it, consecrating it with its furniture, to make it a holy place.¹⁰ Anoint the altar for burnt offerings with all its furnishings; and consecrate the altar which henceforth will be a most holy thing.¹¹ Anoint the basin with its stand, and consecrate it.¹² Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and see that they bathe.¹³ Then clothe Aaron with the priestly garments and anoint and consecrate him, to serve me in the priesthood.¹⁴ Next, bring his sons and clothe them with shirts,

^{34.} 24, 15; 1 K 8, 10; Is 6, 3; Ezk 43, 1
^{35.} Rev 15, 8
^{36.} 13, 21; Num 9, 15; Ps 78, 14

■ The cloud is a sign of God's presence. Centuries later, when the Temple is inaugurated, the cloud will also fill it (2 K 8:10). The cloud will cover Jesus in his Transfiguration and will hide

him in his Ascension.

The cloud accompanies the People in the desert. God is with them in a veiled but real way.



¹⁵ Anoint them as you have anointed their father, to serve me in the priesthood. This anointing of them is to confer the priesthood on them forever from generation to generation."

¹⁶ Moses did this; he did exactly as Yahweh had commanded him. ¹⁷ The Holy Tent was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year. ¹⁸ Moses set up the Holy Tent. He fixed the bases for it, put up its frames, put its crossbars in position, set up its posts. ¹⁹ He spread the tent over the Holy Tent and on top of this the covering for the tent, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁰ He took the State-ment and placed it inside the ark. He set the poles to the ark in place and put the mercy Seat on it. ²¹ He brought the ark into the Holy Tent and put the screening veil in place; thus he screened the ark of Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²² He placed the table in the Tent of Meeting, on the north side of the Holy Tent, outside the veil, ²³ and on it arranged the loaves before Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁴ He put the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting, opposite the table, on the southern side of the Holy Tent, ²⁵ and he set up the lamps before Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁶ He put the golden altar in the Tent of Meeting in front of the veil, ²⁷ and on it burned fragrant incense, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ²⁸ Then he

put the screen at the entrance to the Holy Tent. ²⁹ Then he put the altar for the burnt offerings at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and on it offered the burnt offering and grain offering, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ³⁰ He put the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and filled it with water. ³¹ This was for Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and feet: ³² whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar they washed, as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ³³ Moses then set up the court around the Holy Tent and the altar and placed the screen at the gateway to the court. Thus Moses completed the work.

Yahweh takes possession of the sanctuary

■ ³⁴ Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the Glory of Yahweh filled the Holy Tent. ³⁵ Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because of the cloud that rested on it and because of the Glory of Yahweh that filled the Holy Tent.

³⁶ At every stage of their journey, whenever the cloud rose from the Holy Tent the people of Israel would continue their march. ³⁷ If the cloud did not rise, they waited and would not move their camp until it did. ³⁸ For the cloud of Yahweh rested on the Holy Tent by day, and a fire shone within the cloud by night for all the House of Israel to see. And so it was for every stage of their journey.

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS

When the child Jesus was forty days old he was presented in the Temple "according to the law of Moses." They offered for him "a pair of turtledoves as it is written in the law." We could multiply examples showing that Jesus was born into a people who had a very organized religion, with religious authorities, feasts, and very precise ideas about what was pleasing to God. These laws and rituals formed a strictly codified framework which left no room for anarchy.

In Israel, as in all primitive societies, religion was closely united with the social order and culture (thus priests were qualified to diagnose leprosy). For this reason primitive societies were conservative: they thought that God had fixed the prevailing social order and that it should always be kept as it was. However, in Israel, unlike the other nations, priests and prophets were aware that history was not static. Civil and religious laws were more developed than in any other country. But, by Christ's time, conservatism had managed to prevail, leading;



Burnt offering

1 ¹Yahweh called Moses, and from the Tent of Meeting addressed him, saying,

²"Speak to the people of Israel; say to them: When anyone brings an offering of an animal to Yahweh it can be from either his cattle or sheep or goats.

³If the offering is a burnt offering of one of his cattle, he is to offer a bull without any defect. He shall offer it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, so that his offering may be accepted before Yahweh. ⁴He is to lay his hand on the bull's head, and it shall be accepted as a sacrifice to take away his sins. ⁵Then he shall kill the bull before Yahweh, and the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall offer the blood. They will pour it out on the sides of the altar which stands at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁶Then he shall skin the victim and quarter it

⁷The sons of Aaron, the priests, must put fire on the altar and arrange wood on this fire.

⁸Then the sons of Aaron, the priests, are to put the pieces, the head and the fat on the wood on the altar fire. ⁹The man shall wash the internal organs and legs in water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. This will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

¹⁰If his offering is an animal out of the flock, a lamb or a goat offered as a burnt offering, he is to offer a male without any defect.

¹¹He shall kill it on the north side of the altar before Yahweh, and the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall pour out the blood on the sides of the altar. ¹²Then he is to quarter it, and the priest is to arrange the quarters, as well as the head and the fat, on the wood on the altar fire.

¹³The man shall wash the internal organs and legs in water, and the priest shall burn all of it

1. Ex 25, 22

Jesus to denounce any religion which concentrates only on traditions and customs. Later Paul would state that this law was peculiar to the Jewish culture and that it should not be imposed on people of other races following their conversion to Christ.

These laws, however, appear in the Bible and we will benefit from reading about them:

- We will see how, for centuries, God taught his people by using their own culture. These laws were not dictated by God from heaven; they were developed by the priests in charge of the religious behavior of the people.
- These laws and practices are very old at times even old-fashioned, but to the Christian reading them with faith, they can provide new insights into what God is asking of us today.

Most of the laws of the Bible are found in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Leviticus owes its name to the fact that it contains laws which the priests of the tribe of Levi had to know, practice and teach. It has three major parts:

- Laws about sacrifices, chapters 1-8.
- Laws regarding what is ritually pure or impure, chapters 11-15.
- Law of holiness, chapters 17-26.

on the altar. This will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

¹⁴ If the man is offering a bird as a burnt offering, he is to offer a turtledove or a young pigeon. ¹⁵ The priest shall offer it at the altar and wring off its head, which he is to burn on the altar; then its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar. ¹⁶ Then he shall remove the crop and the feathers; these he is to throw on the eastern side of the altar, where the ashes from the fat are placed. ¹⁷ He is to divide it in two halves with a wing on each side, but without separating the two parts. Then the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. This will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

The grain offering

2 ¹ If anyone offers Yahweh a grain offering, his offering is to be fine flour on which he is to pour wine and put incense. ² He shall bring it to the sons of Aaron, the priests; he is to take a handful of the fine flour and oil and all the incense, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as a memorial, a burnt offering

whose sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh. ³ The remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; this is a most holy share for it comes from the burnt offerings of Yahweh.

⁴ When you are going to offer a grain offering of bread baked in the oven, the fine flour is to be prepared either in the form of unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or in the form of unleavened wafers spread with oil.

⁵ If your offering is a grain offering fried on the griddle, the fine flour mixed with oil is to have no leavening. ⁶ You must break it in pieces and pour oil over it. It is a grain offering. ⁷ If your offering is a grain offering cooked in the pan, the fine flour is to be prepared in oil. ⁸ You must bring to Yahweh the grain offering that has been thus prepared, presenting it to the priest, who is to bring it to the altar. ⁹ The priest shall take part of this offering and burn it on the altar to recall before Yahweh the person who is offering it. And it will be an offering whose sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh. ¹⁰ The remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; this is a most holy share of Yahweh's burnt offering.

17. Gen 15, 10

1. Num 15, 1

9. Mt 16, 6; 1 Cor 5, 6

o Yahweh spoke to Moses. Each law is introduced by this expression, giving the impression that Moses had dictated these laws that were introduced in fact centuries later. But, this is a literary form which means that the law embodies the spirit of what God taught Moses on Sinai, in spite of the fact that it was written at a much later time.

The Hebrews practiced the rituals and customs of their ancestors. Since they were shepherds they used to offer their animals in sacrifice. Later on, in Canaan, the Israelites found other sacrifices and customs among the pagan Canaanites and they adopted some of them. Yet, the revelation granted to Moses on Sinai provided them with criteria to judge new or old forms of worship:

- God is the only God, the Invisible One who needs nothing but asks that his followers serve him.
- Yahweh is the Holy God, totally different from every creature, and Israel, consecrated to God, must remain "holy" and apart from other nations.
- The Lord demands justice; therefore, ritual "purity" must reflect interior sanctity.

The Jewish people had only one sanctuary, the Temple of Jerusalem, and people came from everywhere to offer sacrifices there. The Temple, built by King Solomon (see 1 Kgs 6) was not a very large building (some 25 meters in length by 15 in width) and only the priests went inside. The people used to gather in the paved

patios. In the main patio was a large altar made of solid stones, the altar of holocausts, or of totally burned victims. On some occasions, part of the blood was poured on another, much smaller, altar inside the Temple.

There were various types of sacrifices and for most of them, the priests used to receive part of the victim in payment; the other part would be eaten by the donors in a communion banquet. But, in the holocaust nothing was eaten because everything was offered to God as a sign of perfect submission.

Like other ancient people, the Israelites believed that the life of every being was in the blood (see Gen 9:5). Thus, the blood belonged to God and no one could eat or drink it. By offering the blood of the sacrificed animal, the Israelites were clearly expressing that with it, they were offering their own lives to God (Lev 17:11). It is not without good reason that Jesus wanted to die by shedding his blood, for this would clearly show the total surrender of his life out of obedience to the Father and out of love for his brothers. From the Jewish sacrifices the letter to the Hebrews draws the following lesson which was fulfilled in Jesus' passion: "there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood" (Heb 9:22).

We should note the frequent use of the expression "without blemish." The prophets would scold the people who did not observe this command (Mal 18:13). We give God just anything out of our surplus, and not the best of what we have.

¹¹ None of the grain offering that you offer to Yahweh is to be prepared with yeast for you must never burn yeast or honey as a burnt offering for Yahweh. ¹² You may offer them up to Yahweh, as an offering of firstfruits, but they must not go up as a sweet-smelling odor to please Yahweh. ¹³ You must salt every grain offering that you offer, and you must never fail to put on your grain offering the salt of the Covenant with your God: to every offering you are to join an offering of salt to Yahweh your God. ¹⁴ If you offer Yahweh a grain offering of firstfruits, it may be from either roasted corn or bread made from ground corn. ¹⁵ You are to add oil to it and put incense on it; it is a grain offering ¹⁶ and the priest is to burn part of the bread and oil (together with all the incense) as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

The peace offering

3 ¹ If anyone offers a peace sacrifice, offering from his cattle, male or female, whatever he offers before Yahweh must be without any defect. ² He is to lay his hand on the victim's head and kill it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall pour out the blood on the sides of the altar. ³ Then he is to offer the following as a burnt offering for Yahweh: the fat that covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, ⁴ the two kidneys, the fat on them and on the loins, the best part which he is to remove from the liver and kidneys. ⁵ The sons of Aaron shall burn all this on the altar along with the burnt offering, on the wood on the fire. It will be a burnt offering and its sweet-smelling odor will please Yahweh.

⁶ If he offers a sheep or goat as a peace offering for Yahweh, he is to offer a male or female without any defect. ⁷ If he offers a sheep, he is to offer it before Yahweh: ⁸ he is to lay his hand on the sheep's head and kill it in front of the Tent of Meeting; then the sons of Aaron shall pour out its blood on the sides of the altar. ⁹ Of the peace offering he is to offer the following as a burnt offering for Yahweh:

14. Num 18, 9; Ezk 43, 24

15. 2 K 4, 42

1. 7, 11; 19, 5; 22, 21

5. Ex 29, 38

17. 17, 10; Gen 9, 4; Dt 12, 16

1. Num 15, 22

6. Ex 26, 31

7. Ex 30, 1

+ Next come the *sin offerings*. It is not a question of real sin, the inner sin (Mt 5:22) coming from man (Mt 7:20) but of faults against the laws regarding worship. In verses 22 and 27, we even read: *if one sins without intending to do so*. This constitutes another kind of fault, a matter of carelessness, which does not even deserve the name "sin" in the present sense of the word: what is done in ignorance and without evil intention cannot be a sin. Examples of such sins are given in 5:1-13.

the fat, all the tail taken off near the backbone, the fat that covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, ¹⁰ the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, the best part which he will remove from the liver and kidneys. ¹¹ The priest shall burn this part on the altar as food, as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

¹² If his offering is a goat, he is to offer it before Yahweh: ¹³ he is to lay his hand on the goat's head and kill it in front of the Tent of Meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall pour out its blood on the sides of the altar. ¹⁴ Then he is to offer the following as a burnt offering for Yahweh: the fat that covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, ¹⁵ the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, the best part which he will remove from the liver and kidneys. ¹⁶ The priest shall burn these pieces on the altar as food, as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

¹⁷ All the fat belongs to Yahweh. This is a law forever for all your descendants, wherever they may live: never eat either fat or blood."

Offering for an unintentional sin

4 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: ² "Speak to the people of Israel and say: Anyone may sin without intending to do so against any of the commandments of Yahweh and do one of the forbidden things; in such a case:

³ If the one who sins is the anointed priest, his sin defiles the people. Then, for the sin which he has committed, he is to offer to Yahweh a young bull, an animal from the herd without any defect, as a sacrifice for sin. ⁴ He is to bring the bull before Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and lay his hand on its head and kill it before Yahweh. ⁵ Then the anointed priest shall take a little of the blood of the bull and take it into the Tent of Meeting. ⁶ He shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it over the veil of the sanctuary seven times, before Yahweh. ⁷ Then the priest shall put a little of the blood of the bull on the corners of

But in 5:20-26 we deal with other faults which require an offering in reparation because these are real sins. The Bible does not confuse the two.

How must we understand *sinning inadvertently*? According to St. Paul (Rom 7:7; 4:15) the purpose of the law was to bring sin to light; the commandments reveal what sin is. This power of evil is active in us even when we are not aware of it. The law forces us to open our eyes and to admit that we are sinners.



the altar of incense that sends up smoke before Yahweh in the Tent of Meeting and he is to pour all the rest of the bull's blood at the foot of the altar for burnt offerings that is at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

⁸ From this bull offered as a sacrifice for sin, the priest will remove all the fat: the fat that covers the internal organs, all the fat that is on the internal organs, ⁹ the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, the best part which he will remove from the liver and kidneys, ¹⁰ exactly as was done with what was set apart in the peace offering, and the priest shall burn these on the altar for burnt offerings.

¹¹ The bull's skin, all its flesh, its head, legs, internal organs and intestines, ¹² the whole of the bull, must be carried outside the camp to a place that is clean, the place where the ashes from the fat are thrown away, and the bull must be burnt there.

¹³ If the whole community of Israel has sinned without intending to do so, and, without being aware of it, has done something that is forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh, ¹⁴ the community is to offer a young bull as sacrifice for sin, an animal of the herd without any defect, as soon as the sin of which they have been guilty is discovered. The animal must be brought before the Tent of Meeting: ¹⁵ the elders of the community shall lay their hands on the bull's head before Yahweh, and it must be killed before Yahweh.

¹⁶ Then the anointed priest is to carry a little of the blood of the bull into the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁷ He is to dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it on the veil before Yahweh seven times. ¹⁸ Then he shall put a little of the blood on the corners of the altar that stands before Yahweh inside the Tent of Meeting, and pour out all the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar for burnt offerings at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

¹⁹ Then the priest shall remove all the fat from the animal and burn it on the altar. ²⁰ He shall do the same thing with this bull as he did with the bull for the sacrifice of sin. When the priest has performed the sacrifice for the people's sin, they will be forgiven. ²¹ The priest must have the bull taken out of the camp and burn it as he burned the first one. This is the sacrifice for the sin of the community.

²² When a leader sins and without intending to do so does one of the things forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh his God, thus becoming guilty, ²³ and after that he recalls it, or anyone calls his attention to the sin thus committed, he is to bring a goat as an offering,

a male without any defect. ²⁴ He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and kill it in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed. This is a sacrifice for sin: ²⁵ the priest shall take a little of the goat's blood on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar for burnt offerings. Then he shall pour out its blood at the foot of the altar for burnt offering ²⁶ and burn all the fat on the altar, as with the fat in the peace offering. This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the sin of this leader to free him from his sin, and he will be forgiven.

²⁷ If one of the people sins without intending to do so and makes himself guilty by doing something forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh, ²⁸ and after that he recalls it or anyone calls his attention to the sin he has committed, he is to bring a goat as an offering, a female without any defect. ²⁹ He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and kill it in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed. ³⁰ The priest shall take a little of the goat's blood on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar for burnt offerings. Then he shall pour out all the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. ³¹ He shall remove all the fat, as the fat was removed for the peace offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as a sweet-smelling sacrifice pleasing to Yahweh. This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.

³² If anyone wishes to bring a lamb as an offering for this kind of sacrifice, he is to bring a female without any defect. ³³ He is to lay his hand on the lamb's head and kill it as a sacrifice for sin in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed. ³⁴ The priest shall take a little of the blood of this sacrifice on his finger and put it on the corners of the altar for burnt offerings. Then he shall pour out all the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. ³⁵ He shall remove its fat as was done for the sheep in the peace offering, and the priest shall burn it all on the altar, in addition to the burnt offering for Yahweh. This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.

Some cases requiring sacrifice for sin

5 ¹ Sacrifice for sin is required in the following cases:

A man should have come forward to give evidence in court when officially summoned; but he did not speak and give information about something he had seen or heard; and so he is guilty.



² Or else he accidentally touches something unclean, whatever it may be – the dead body of an unclean animal, wild or tame; or the dead body of one of the unclean beings that swarm – and so without realizing it, he becomes unclean, and guilty.

³ Or else he accidentally touches something human uncleanness, whatever it may be, and contact with it makes him unclean; so he becomes guilty as soon as he realizes what he has done.

⁴ Or else a man makes a careless vow to do either evil or good in any of those matters on which a man may swear unthinkingly; he does not notice it, then, but when he realizes it later, he becomes guilty.

⁵ He who is guilty in any of these cases, shall confess the sin committed, ⁶ and bring to Yahweh as a sacrifice for the sin committed a female of the flock (sheep or goat); and the priest shall offer the sacrifice for the man's sin to free him from his sin.

⁷ If a man cannot afford a sheep or a goat, he shall offer to Yahweh, as payment for the sin he has committed, two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a sacrifice for sin and the other for a burnt offering. ⁸ He will bring them to the priest who is to offer first the one intended for the sacrifice for sin. The priest shall wring its neck, without removing the head. ⁹ He shall sprinkle the side of the altar with the victim's blood, and then drain out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. This is a sacrifice for sin. ¹⁰ Of the other bird he is to make a burnt offering according to the regulations. When the priest offers the sacrifice for the man's sin, he will be forgiven.

¹¹ If this man cannot afford two turtledoves or two young pigeons, he is to bring two pounds of flour as an offering for the sin committed; but he shall not mix oil with it or put incense on it, for it is a sacrifice for sin. ¹² He is to bring it to the priest, who is to take a handful of it to be put on the burnt offering for Yahweh in order to recall this man to Yahweh. This is a sacrifice for sin. ¹³ This is how the priest is to offer the sacrifice for the sin the man committed in any of these cases, and he will be forgiven. In this case, as in the case of a grain offering, the rest of the flour belongs to the priest.

¹⁴ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

¹⁵ If anyone is guilty of unintentionally cheating by failing to hand over the payments that are sacred to Yahweh, he is to bring to Yahweh as a sacrifice of payment a ram with no defects. This ram is to be valued according to the official standard. This is a sacrifice of repayment. ¹⁶ He must make the payments he has failed to hand over, pay an extra fifth as well, and give it to the priest. The priest shall offer the ram as a sacrifice for the man's sin and he will be forgiven.

¹⁷ If anyone sins and does one of the things forbidden by the commandments of Yahweh without realizing it, he is guilty and must pay the penalty for his fault. ¹⁸ As a sacrifice of repayment he is to bring to the priest a ram without any defect. Its value will be according to the official standard. The priest shall offer the sacrifice for the sin he has committed without realizing it and he will be forgiven. ¹⁹ This is a sacrifice of repayment for the man who was guilty in the eyes of Yahweh.

Sacrifices for evil-doing

²⁰ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

²¹ "This refers to the man who sins against Yahweh by not returning to his neighbour a deposit or a security, or withholding something due to him or cheating him; ²² and also to the one who finds lost property and swears he has not found it; and also to the man who swears falsely in one of the cases in which people usually swear. ²³ In all these cases the man who sins and becomes guilty is to give back what he has taken or demanded that does not belong to him: the deposit entrusted to him, the lost property that he found, ²⁴ or any object about which he has sworn untruthfully. He must repay the owner in full and give an extra fifth as well on the day when he is found guilty. ²⁵ Then he is to bring a ram without any defect to Yahweh as a sacrifice of repayment. ²⁶ The priest shall offer the sacrifice for the man's sin and he will be forgiven, whatever the act of which he became guilty."

Priesthood and sacrifice

6 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: ² "Give these regulations to Aaron and his sons. This is the regulation for burnt offerings: the burnt offering shall stay on the altar

1. Pro 29, 24

2. 11, 1

■ Among so many laws dealing with cooking, note the following details:

6:5: The fire must never be put out. A lamb was offered as a holocaust daily in the morning and in the afternoon.

6:20: What is offered to God belongs to

him and becomes as if totally permeated by the Holiness of God.

6:22-23: In order for the sacrifice to be effective, the meat – which through the sacrifice was made holy – must be eaten. In this way the priest is assured of a livelihood.



all night until morning and the fire is to be kept burning.

³ The priest is to put on his linen shirt and his linen drawers. Then he must remove the greasy ashes of the sacrifice consumed by the altar fire and place them at the side of the altar.

⁴ Then he is to change his clothes and carry the ashes to some place that is clean, outside the camp.

⁵ The fire that consumes the burnt offering on the altar must not be allowed to go out. Every morning the priest must put firewood on it, arrange the burnt offering on it and burn the fat from the peace offerings. ⁶ An undying fire is always to burn on the altar; it must not go out.

⁷ This is the regulation for the grain offering: One of the priests, a son of Aaron, is to bring it into the presence of Yahweh in front of the altar; ⁸ he is to take a handful of the fine flour (with the oil and incense which have been added to it) and burn it on the altar as a memorial, to recall to Yahweh the person making the offering so that it becomes a sweet-smelling odor pleasing to Yahweh. ⁹ After that, the remainder is to be given to Aaron and his sons; they shall eat it in the form of unleavened loaves. They are to eat it in a sacred place within the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁰ The share I give them of my burnt offering must not be baked with yeast. It is most holy, like the sacrifice for sin and the sacrifice of repayment. ¹¹ All the males of Aaron's family may eat this part of Yahweh's burnt offering – this is a law forever for all your descendants. Everything that touches the offering becomes consecrated as well.

¹² Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

¹³ "This is the offering that Aaron and his sons are to make to Yahweh on the day of their anointing as priests: two pounds of flour as a daily offering, half in the morning and half in the evening. ¹⁴ It must be fried on the griddle and mixed with oil; you must bring the paste as a grain offering in several pieces, offering them as a sweet-smelling odor pleasing to Yahweh. ¹⁵ Every descendant of Aaron who succeeds him as high priest shall do the same. This is a law forever. This grain offering shall be completely burned as a sacrifice for Yahweh. ¹⁶ Every grain offering made by a priest must be a total sacrifice; none of it is to be eaten."

¹⁷ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said, ¹⁸ "Say to Aaron and his sons: This is the regulation for the sacrifice for sin:

The victim for the sacrifice is to be killed before Yahweh in the place where the animals

for the burnt offerings are killed. It is a most holy offering. ¹⁹ The priest who offers this sacrifice is to eat it. It must be eaten in a holy place within the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. ²⁰ Everything that touches the flesh of this animal will become consecrated; if any of the blood splashes on clothing, the stain must be cleaned in some holy place. ²¹ The clay pot in which the meat is cooked must be broken; if a bronze pot has been used for the cooking, it must be scrubbed and thoroughly rinsed with water. ²² Any male who is a priest may eat the meat. It is a most holy thing. ²³ But no one may eat any part of the animals offered for sin, whenever any of the blood is brought into the Tent and used in the sacrifice to take away sin. The meat must be thrown on the fire.

The sacrifice of repayment

7 ¹ This is the regulation for the sacrifice of repayment:

² It is a most holy offering. The animal for this offering is to be killed in the place where the animals for the burnt offerings are killed, and the priest must pour out the blood on the sides of the altar. ³ Then he is to offer all the fat: the tail, the fat that covers the internal organs, ⁴ the two kidneys, the fat that is on them and on the loins, and the best part which he will remove from the liver and kidneys. ⁵ The priest must burn these pieces on the altar as a burnt offering for Yahweh. This is a sacrifice of repayment. ⁶ Any male who is a priest may eat it, but it must be eaten in a holy place because it is a most holy thing.

⁷ As with the sacrifice for sin, so with the sacrifice of repayment; the regulation is the same for both. The offering which he has used in the sacrifice for sin belongs to the priest.

⁸ The skin of the animal presented by a man to the priest is to be offered as a burnt offering belongs to the priest. ⁹ Every grain offering baked in the oven, every grain offering fried in the pan or on the griddle shall belong to the priest who offered it. ¹⁰ Every grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, is to belong to all the sons of Aaron equally.

The peace offering

¹¹ This is the regulation for the peace offering presented to Yahweh:

¹² If it is offered as a thanksgiving offering, there must be added to it an offering of unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and fine flour in the form of cakes mixed with oil. ¹³ This offering, then, must be added to the loaves of leavened bread



and to the thanksgiving offering. ¹⁴ One of the cakes of this offering is to be presented as an offering to Yahweh: it shall belong to the priest who pours out the blood of the peace offering. ¹⁵ The flesh of the animal must be eaten on the day when the offering is made; nothing must remain until the next morning.

¹⁶ If the animal is presented before Yahweh as a sacrifice freely offered, it is to be eaten on the day it is offered and also on the following day; ¹⁷ but on the third day whatever remains of the animal's flesh must be thrown on the fire. ¹⁸ If the meat offered as a peace offering is eaten on the third day, the man who has offered it shall not be accepted nor receive credit for it, for it is defiled meat, and the man who eats it should suffer the penalty of his fault.

¹⁹ If this meat has touched anything unclean, it cannot be eaten; and must be thrown on the fire.

²⁰ Anyone who is clean may eat meat of the peace offering, but whoever eats the meat of a peace offering presented to Yahweh even though he is unclean shall be cut off from his people. ²¹ If anyone touches anything unclean, whether human or animal, or any crawling creature, and then eats the meat of a peace offering presented to Yahweh, this man shall be cut off from his people."

²² Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said, ²³ "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them:

You must not eat the fat of ox, sheep or goat. ²⁴ The fat of an animal that has died a natural death or been killed by a wild animal may be used for any other purpose, but you must not eat it. ²⁵ Anyone who eats the fat of an animal offered as a burnt offering to Yahweh shall be cut off from his people.

²⁶ Wherever you live, you must not eat blood, whether it be of bird or animal. ²⁷ Anyone who eats blood, whoever he may be, shall be cut off from his people."

16. Num 15, 3; Ps 22, 26; 50, 14 17. Dt 16, 10; Ex 1, 4 24. Dt 14, 21; Ezk 4, 14 26. 17, 10 34. Dt 18, 3

◆ With the detailed description of Aaron's consecration by his brother Moses, Leviticus teaches the ceremony for consecration of the High Priest.

Vestments, ornaments and purifications express the sacred character of the man "taken from among men to represent them before God and to offer sacrifices for them" (Hb 5:11).

These rituals did not come down from heaven; rather they reflect the religious mentality of the times. For those people there were two kinds of people and things in the world: those belonging to God, that is, sacred and others not belonging to God, that is, profane. Some were considered clean, others unclean; some were said to be

The priests' share

²⁸ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said, ²⁹ "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them:

Anyone who offers a peace offering to Yahweh is to bring himself the part of his sacrifice that is offered to Yahweh. ³⁰ He is to bring Yahweh's burnt offering, that is, the fat that is near the breast and also the breast, with his own hands. Then he will make the gesture of offering before Yahweh. ³¹ The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, and the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. ³² You must set aside and give to the priest the right hind leg from your peace offering. ³³ The right hind leg shall be the share of the son of Aaron who offers the blood and fat of the peace offering. ³⁴ Thus, I keep back this breast and hind leg out of every peace offering presented by the sons of Israel, and give these to Aaron the priest and to his sons: this is a law for the sons of Israel forever."

³⁵ This is the share of Aaron and his sons in Yahweh's burnt offerings since the day he called them to be his priests. ³⁶ This is what Yahweh commands the sons of Israel to give them from the day they are ordained as priests: this is a law for all their descendants for all time to come.

³⁷ Such is the regulation for burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices for sin, sacrifices of repayment, ordination and peace offerings. ³⁸ This is what Yahweh commanded Moses on Mount Sinai when he told the people of Israel to make their offerings to Yahweh in the wilderness of Sinai.

Ordination ceremonies

◆ ⁸ ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: ² "Take Aaron, his sons with him, and the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sacrifice for sin, the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. ³ Then call the whole com-

"holy," and others to "carry a sin," which simply meant they could not be used in worship.

God took into account the primitive mentality of the people of those times and educated them little by little. With time, they would discover that sin is not some external blemish, or defect, but man's fault. The prophets first, and then the Gospels, would state that sin is *what comes from man*.

Priests were consecrated through an *anointing with oil*. Kings would also be consecrated by an anointing. Priests and kings would thus be the *anointed* of God, expressed by the word *Mesiah* in Hebrew, and *Christ* in Greek. The High Priest was called the *Christ* of God: this prefig-

munity together at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting."

⁴ Moses did as Yahweh commanded; the community gathered at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, ⁵ and Moses said to them, "This is what Yahweh has commanded."

⁶ He made Aaron and his sons come forward, and washed them with water. ⁷ He put the shirt on Aaron, passed the sash around his waist, dressed him in the robe and put the Ephod on him. Then he tied around his waist the woven band of the Ephod with which he clothed him. ⁸ He put the embroidered linen Breastpiece on him, and placed the Urim and Thummim in it. ⁹ He put the turban on his head, with the golden ornament on the front; this is the sacred sign of dedication as Yahweh commanded Moses to do.

¹⁰ Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Holy Tent and everything in it, to consecrate them. ¹¹ He sprinkled the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and its furnishings, the basin and its stand, to dedicate them all to Yahweh. ¹² Then he ordained Aaron by pouring the anointing oil on his head.

¹³ Then Moses made Aaron's sons come forward; he put the shirts on them, tied the sashes around their waists and put on their headaddresses, as Yahweh had commanded him to do.

¹⁴ Then he had the bull for the sacrifice for sin brought forward. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the bull's head ¹⁵ and Moses slaughtered it. Then he took the blood and with his finger put some of it on the corners around the altar, to take away its sin. Then he poured out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar, which he dedicated to Yahweh by performing the atonement over it. ¹⁶ Then he took all the fat that covers the internal organs, the best part of the liver, the two kidneys and their fat; and he burned them all on the altar. ¹⁷ After that he burned outside the camp the bull's skin, its flesh and its intestines as Yahweh had commanded him to do.

¹⁸ Then he had the ram for the burnt offering brought forward. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head ¹⁹ and Moses slaughtered it. He poured its blood out on the sides of the altar. ²⁰ Then he quartered the ram and burned the head, the pieces and the fat. ²¹ He washed the internal organs and legs, and burned the whole ram on the altar. This was a burnt offering, a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, a burnt offering by fire for Yahweh, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

²² Then he had the other ram brought forward, for the sacrifice of ordination of priests. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram's head ²³ and Moses slaughtered it. He took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot. ²⁴ Then he made the sons of Aaron come forward and he put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, the thumbs of their right hands and the big toes of their right feet. Next Moses poured the rest of the blood on the sides of the altar. ²⁵ Then he took the fat: the tail, all the fat that is on the internal organs, the best part of the liver, the two kidneys and their fat, and the right hind leg. ²⁶ From the basket of unleavened bread placed before Yahweh, he took an unleavened cake, a loaf of bread made with oil, and a wafer; he placed these on the fat and the right hind leg, ²⁷ put it all into Aaron's hands and those of his sons, who waved them before Yahweh. ²⁸ Then Moses took them back and burned them on the altar in addition to the burnt offering. This was the sacrifice for ordination of priests, a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, an offering by fire to Yahweh. ²⁹ Then Moses took the breast and made the gesture of offering before Yahweh. This was the share of the ram of ordination for Moses, as Yahweh had commanded.

³⁰ Then Moses took the anointing oil and the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled Aaron and his vestments with it, and his sons and their vestments. In this way he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and his sons and their vestments to Yahweh.

³¹ Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Cook the meat at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and eat it there, and also the bread for the sacrifice of priestly ordination that is in the basket, as I commanded, when I said: Aaron and his sons are to eat it. ³² What remains of the meat and bread you will burn. ³³ For seven days you must not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, until the time of your ordination is over, for your hands will be consecrated for seven days. ³⁴ All that we have done today is the rite of atonement for you as Yahweh has commanded us to do ³⁵ and for seven days, day and night, you must remain at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, doing what Yahweh has commanded, lest you die. For this is the commandment I received." ³⁶ And Aaron and his sons did everything that Yahweh had commanded through Moses.

The priests offer sacrifices

9 ¹On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. ²He said to Aaron, "Take a calf to offer a sacrifice for sin, and a ram for a burnt offering, both without any defect, and bring them before Yahweh. ³Then say to the people of Israel, 'Take a goat to be offered as a sacrifice for sin, and as burnt offering a calf and a lamb both one year old and without any defect, and for peace offering an ox and a ram to be slaughtered before Yahweh; and finally a grain offering mixed with oil. For Yahweh will appear to you today.'"

⁴They brought what Moses had commanded in front of the Tent of Meeting; then he whole community gathered and stood before Yahweh. ⁵Moses said, "This is what Yahweh has commanded to be done, so that his glory may appear to you." ⁷Moses then said to Aaron, "Go to the altar and offer your sacrifice for sin and your burnt offering to take away your sins. Then present the people's offering to take away their sins as Yahweh has commanded."

⁸Aaron went to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sacrifice for his own sin. ⁹Then the sons of Aaron presented the blood to him; he dipped his finger in it and put some on the corners of the altar, and then poured out the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. ¹⁰The fat of the sacrifice for sin and the kidneys and the best part of the liver, he burned on the altar, as Yahweh had commanded Moses; ¹¹the flesh and the skin he burned outside the camp.

¹²Next Aaron slaughtered the animal which was for his own burnt offering; his sons handed him the blood and he poured it on the sides of the altar. ¹³Then they handed him the slaughtered animal and its head too, and he burned these on the altar. ¹⁴He washed the internal organs and legs and burned them on the altar in addition to the burnt offering.

¹⁵He then presented the people's offering. He took the goat for the people's sacrifice for sin, killed it and offered it as a sacrifice for sin in the same way as the first. ¹⁶Then he had the animal for the burnt offering brought forward and offered it according to the regulations. ¹⁷Next he had the grain offering brought forward, took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning burnt offering.

¹⁸Finally, he slaughtered the ox and the ram as a peace offering for the people. Aaron's sons handed him the blood and he poured it out

on the sides of the altar. ¹⁹The fat of the ox and of the ram – the tail, the fatty covering, the kidneys, the best part of the liver – ²⁰all of this he laid on the breasts and burned it all on the altar. ²¹With the breasts and the right hind leg Aaron made the gesture of offering by waving them as Yahweh had commanded.

²²Then Aaron raised his hands toward the people and blessed them. Having thus performed the sacrifice for sin, the burnt offering and the peace offering, ²³he came down and entered the Tent of Meeting with Moses. Then they came out together to bless the people and the Glory of Yahweh appeared to the whole people – ²⁴a flame leaped forth from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the fat that was on the altar. At this sight the people shouted for joy and fell on their faces.

The story of Nadab and Abihu

+10 ¹Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, each took his censer, put fire in it and incense on the fire, and presented unlawful fire before Yahweh, fire which he had not commanded them to present. ²Then from Yahweh's presence a flame leaped out and burned them to death in the presence of Yahweh. ³And Moses said to Aaron, "That is what Yahweh meant when he said:

"I will show my holiness through those who approach me, and before all the people I will show my glory."

And Aaron had to remain silent.

⁴Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Come and take the corpses of your brothers far away from the sanctuary, out of the camp." ⁵They came and carried them away, still in their shirts, out of the camp as Moses had commanded.

⁶Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not leave your hair uncombed nor tear your clothes to show that you are mourning; lest you die and the punishment extend to the whole community. All the people of Israel shall mourn the death of your brothers, who died because of Yahweh's fire." ⁷But you shall not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, lest you die; for the anointing oil of Yahweh is on you." And they obeyed Moses.

⁸Yahweh spoke to Aaron; he said:

⁹"Before coming to the Tent of Meeting, you and your sons with you, do not drink wine or strong drink; lest you die. This is a law for all your descendants for all time to come." ¹⁰so

7. Heb 7, 27

6. Ezk 44, 20

22. 2 S 6, 16; 1 K 8, 10

9. Is 28, 7

1. Num 17, 2

2. Num 16, 35; 2 K 1, 10

+ The story in this chapter (the death of Aaron's sons) is a figurative way of presenting some of the duties of Israel's priests.

bodies of one of these animals will be unclean until evening. ²⁶ The same with animals that have hoofs, unless their hoofs are divided and they chew the cud; ²⁷ and also four-footed animals which walk on the flat of their feet. Anyone who picks up their dead bodies must wash his clothing and will be unclean until evening.

²⁸ These are the small animals crawling on the ground that shall be unclean for you: rats, mice and several kinds of lizards. ²⁹ The gecko, the chameleon, the agama, the skink and the mole. ³¹ Anyone who touches them when they are dead will be unclean until evening.

³² Anything on which the dead body of any of these creatures falls becomes unclean: wooden utensil, clothing, skin, sackcloth—any utensil at all. It must be dipped in water and it will remain unclean until evening; then it will be clean. ³³ If the creature falls into a clay pot, the pot must be broken; whatever the pot contains is unclean. ³⁴ Any food on which water from such a pot has poured will be unclean. Anything on which the dead body of such a creature may fall will be unclean; if it is a clay oven or oven, this must be broken; for they are clean and you must treat them as unclean. A spring or cistern for collecting water remains clean; but whoever touches the dead body becomes unclean. ³⁷ If one of their dead bodies falls on any seed whatever, the seed will remain clean; ³⁸ but if the seed has been tilled, and such a dead body falls on it, then you must consider it unclean.

³⁹ If one of the animals that you use as food dies, then anyone who touches the dead body will be unclean until evening; ⁴⁰ anyone who eats the meat of the dead animal must wash his clothing and will be unclean until the evening. And anyone who picks up the dead body will also be unclean until the evening and has to wash his clothing.

⁴¹ All the creatures that swarm on the ground are unclean and may not be eaten.

⁴² Everything that crawls on its belly or goes on four legs, or has many legs, may not be eaten.

⁴³ Do not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that might defile you. ⁴⁴ For I am Yahweh your God. Take the way of holiness and be holy, for I am holy.

Do not make yourselves unclean with any of the creatures that swarm on the ground, ⁴⁵ for I am Yahweh who brought you from the land of Egypt, that I might be your God. Be holy because I am holy.

⁴⁶ This is the law for animals and birds and for every living creature that moves in the water or that crawls on the ground. ⁴⁷ Let everyone distinguish between the clean and the unclean, between creatures that may be eaten and creatures that may not.

Purification of a woman after childbirth

+12 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses: ² "Say to the Israelites: when a woman gives birth to a male child, she shall be unclean for seven days as in the days of her monthly

44. 19, 2; Ex 22, 30; 1 P 1, 16

45. Jer 11, 4

some marriages fail in spite of mutual love because strength of character is lacking or because, as children, the spouses were not given necessary disciplined education to make them responsible.

Thus the Bible, with its instructions concerning appearances (Rom 2:28) and the flesh (Phil 3), helped to prepare a people who would love God in a more responsible way.

Many of the laws, whose purpose escapes us, served mainly to make God's people different from others in terms of their meals, feasts and their customs.

Israelites, often established in the midst of other people, were not to mix with their pagan neighbors: the law, by regulating their lives in every detail, prevented them from adopting the customs of others and prevented them from adopting their thinking, as well. Although it is an interior attitude which must differentiate the believer from others, external discipline helps him become aware of his own spirit. The Old Testament's laws addressed a people who had not yet come to religious maturity and for that reason imposed on them a different way of life. These laws began to be strictly observed from

the time of Ezra and were followed by the Jewish community of the last centuries before Christ. Neh 13 illustrates the danger they were exposed to in being separated from other people.

In Jesus' time the Jews were clinging excessively to these prescriptions which were originally certain external requirements only for those wishing to take part in religious acts. Jesus criticized this confusion of legal purity with purity of conscience (Mk 7:15).

11:6 The Bible is not a book that teaches science.

+ Primitive people often contrast the "pure" and noble blood of a male, shed in wars, to the "impure" flow of blood during a woman's period. Therefore, childbirth and a woman's periods preoccupy men (they are the ones who impose the rules and make the laws) and they require purification rituals.

In this we see how, although they are part of the word of God, the rules of the Old Testament were adapted to ancient times and to the criteria of the people of Israel. God's people were aware of this, which they expressed in their own way by saying that the Law was planned by angels: Acts

period. ³ On the eighth day the child is to be circumcised; ⁴ then she shall wait for thirty-three days to be purified of her bleeding. She shall not touch anything that is consecrated nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed.

⁵ If she gives birth to a daughter she shall be unclean for two weeks as in her menstruation; then she shall wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.

⁶ And when the days of her purification are completed whether for a son or daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the door of the Tent of Meeting, a lamb born that year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. ⁷ The priest shall then offer it to Yahweh to make atonement for her and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood.

This is the Law for the woman who gives birth to a child, male or female. ⁸ But if she cannot offer a lamb, she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering, the other for a sin offering. The priest shall make atonement for her and she will be purified.

A regulation for lepers

13 ¹ Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, ² "If someone has a boil, an inflammation or a sore on his skin which could develop into leprosy, he must be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of the priests, his descendants. ³ The priest shall examine him and if the hair on the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be deeper than the surrounding skin, then it is indeed the sore of leprosy. When the priest sees this, he shall declare that person unclean.

⁴ But if the sore is white and does not appear to be deeper than the skin around it and the hairs have not turned white, the priest is to isolate the sick person for seven days. ⁵ On the seventh day the priest shall again examine him. If he sees that the sore looks the same and

has not spread on the skin, he shall isolate the sick person for another seven days and once more examine him on the seventh day. ⁶ If the sore has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall declare that person clean: it was only eczema.

⁷ But if the sore spreads over the skin after the sick person has been examined by the priest and declared clean, then he must present himself again to the priest. ⁸ After examining him and finding that the sore has spread over the skin, the priest must declare him unclean: it is leprosy.

⁹ When a leprous disease strikes a man, he must be taken to the priest. ¹⁰ who must examine him, and if he finds on the skin a whitish swelling which turns the hairs white and an ulcer is forming, ¹¹ then it is leprosy in the skin and the priest must declare him unclean. It is useless to isolate him for a time; he is unclean.

¹² But if the leprosy spreads all through the skin, if it covers him entirely from head to foot so far as the priest can see, ¹³ then the priest must examine the sick person and, if he finds that the leprosy covers his whole body, declare the sick person clean. Since it has all turned white, he is clean. ¹⁴ But as soon as an open sore appears on him, he will be unclean. ¹⁵ After examining the sore, the priest is to declare him unclean: the open sore is leprous. ¹⁶ But if the sore becomes white again, the man must go to the priest. ¹⁷ The priest shall examine him and, if he finds that the disease has turned white, he shall declare the sick person clean: he is clean.

¹⁸ When a boil appears on a person's skin, which, after healing, ¹⁹ leaves a whitish swelling or a shiny spot of reddish white, that person must show himself to the priest. ²⁰ The priest shall examine him, and if he finds a spot deeper than the surrounding skin and the hairs in it have turned white he shall declare him unclean: it is a case of leprosy that has broken out in a boil. ²¹ But if on examination the priest finds neither white hair in it nor a deep spot on

8. Lk 2, 24

7:38; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2.

Jesus and his mother submitted themselves to these rituals (Lk 2:21).

■ In cases of leprosy, a frightful and contagious disease, the sick person was required to live apart from the community. A leper was considered "unclean," meaning that he could not participate in public or religious life (see what is said in 8:1 and 11:1).

At a time when misfortunes were thought to be divine punishment, leprosy was seen as a sign of a divine curse. The people easily believed that the leper excluded from the community was actually unclean in God's eyes.

Among their obligations, priests had to diagnose leprosy and prescribe the isolation of lepers. They were also responsible for verifying cures and for allowing lepers to return to their families. This is what Jesus recalled when he healed lepers (Mk 1:43).

Sacrifices for the purification of lepers were part of ancient folk ways. The mysterious "sin" which, according to them, had caused leprosy, was transferred to two birds (14:5). One of them was killed so that the sin would disappear with the bird. And for more assurance, the other bird was released to take far away that same sin now dissolved in the dead bird's blood (14:6-7).

the skin, but it is lighter in color, he shall isolate the sick person for seven days.²² If the disease has indeed spread over the skin, he shall declare him unclean: it is a case of leprosy.²³ But if the shiny spot remains unchanged and has not spread, then it is only the par of a boil and the priest is to declare the man clean.

24 If someone has had a burn, and on the burn an ulcer forms, a shiny spot reddish white or whitish in color, ²⁵ then the priest must examine it. If he finds that the hairs in that spot have turned white and it seems to be deeper than the surrounding skin, this means that leprosy has broken out in the burn. The priest shall declare the man unclean: it is a case of leprosy. ²⁶ If on the other hand the priest on examination does not find white hair on the mark and it is not deeper than the surrounding skin, but is light in color, then the priest shall isolate him for seven days. ²⁷ On the seventh day he shall examine him, and if the disease has spread on the skin, he shall declare him unclean: it is a case of leprosy. ²⁸ If the mark is still unchanged and has not spread over the skin, but instead is light in color, this means that it is only a swelling due to the burn. The priest shall declare the man clean: it is merely a burn scar.

30 If a man or woman has a sore on the head or chin, 30 the priest must examine this sore; and if it seems to be deeper than the surrounding skin, with the hair on it yellow and thin, he must declare the sick person unclean. It is a leprosy of the skin disease, that is to say, leprosy of the head or chin. 31 If on examining this case the priest finds no spot which seems deeper than the surrounding skin, and no yellow hair, he shall isolate the person for seven days. 32 He shall examine the infected part on the seventh day, and if he finds that the disease has not spread, that the hair on it is not yellow, and that there is no spot which seems deeper than the surrounding skin, 33 the sick person will shave his hair, all except the part affected with the disease, and the priest is to isolate him again for seven days. 34 He must examine the infected part on the seventh day, and if he finds that it has not spread over the skin, and that there is no spot which seems deeper than the surrounding skin, the priest shall declare the sick person clean. After washing his clothes he will be clean. 35 But if after this purification the disease does spread over the skin, 36 the priest must examine him; if he finds that it has indeed spread over the skin, this means that the sick person is unclean, and there is no need to look and see whether the hair is yellow.

Whereas if, so far as he can see, the disease

has not spread and dark hair is beginning to grow on it, this means that the sick person is cured. He is clean, and the priest is to declare him clean.

³⁸ If shiny spots break out on the skin of a man or woman, and if these spots are white, ³⁹ the priest must examine them. If he finds them to be a dull white, it is a rash that has broken out on the skin; the sick person is clean.

⁴⁰ If a man loses the hair on top of his head, this is baldness of the scalp but the man is clean. ⁴¹ If he loses his hair from the front of the head, this is baldness of the forehead but the man is clean. ⁴² If, however, a reddish white sore appears on the top of his head or forehead, this means that leprosy has broken out. ⁴³ The priest must examine it, and if he finds a reddish white swelling on the head or forehead, which looks like leprosy of the skin, ⁴⁴ this means that the man is leprous: he is unclean. The priest shall declare him unclean; he is suffering from leprosy of the head.

⁴⁵ A person infected with leprosy must wear torn clothing and leave his hair uncombed; he must cover his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean." ⁴⁶ As long as the disease lasts he must be unclean; and therefore he must live away from others: he must live outside the camp.

Mildew

⁴⁷ When a mark of mildew appears on a piece of clothing – woolen or linen clothing, ⁴⁸ linen or woolen textile material or covering, leather or leatherwork – ⁴⁹ and if this clothing, textile material, covering, leather or leatherwork appears greenish or reddish, it is a spreading mildew to be shown to the priest. ⁵⁰ The priest must examine it and put the object away for seven days. ⁵¹ If on the seventh day he observes that the mildew has spread on the garment, textile material, covering, leather or leatherwork, whatever it may be, it is a case of spreading mildew and the object is unclean. ⁵² The priest will burn this clothing, textile material, linen or woolen covering, leather article of any kind, on which the mildew has spread and which must be destroyed by fire.

⁵³ But if on examination the priest finds that the mildew has not spread on the clothing, textile material, covering or leather object whatever it may be, ⁵⁴ he is to order the object to be washed and is to isolate it again for a period of seven days. ⁵⁵ After the cleansing he must examine it again and if he finds that the mildew has not changed color, even though it has not spread, the article is unclean. It must be destroyed by fire.

⁵⁶ But if on examination the priest finds that the mildew has faded after washing, he is to cut it out of the clothing, leather, textile material or covering. ⁵⁷ But if the mildew reappears on the same clothing, textile material, covering or leather article whatever it may be, this means that the mildew is spreading again and the owner must destroy the article by fire. ⁵⁸ The clothing, textile material, covering or leather article whatever it may be, from which the mildew disappears after washing, is to be clean after it has been washed a second time.

⁵⁹ Such is the law for a case of leprosy in a linen or woollen garment, in textile material, in clothing or in anything of skin – for judging whether it is clean or unclean."

Purification from leprosy

14 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses: ² "This shall be the law for the leper on the day of his purification.

He shall be brought to the priest ³ and the priest shall take him outside the camp and examine him. And if the person has been healed from leprosy, ⁴ the priest shall order two live, clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. ⁵ The priest shall also give orders that one of the birds be slain on an earthenware pot over fresh water. ⁶ He shall take the live bird and also the cedar wood, the crimson yarn and the hyssop, and he will plunge them together, including the live bird, in the blood of the bird that was slain over fresh water. ⁷ Then he will sprinkle the one to be purified seven times. After that he shall declare him clean and he shall let the live bird go free over the open fields.

⁸ The person to be purified must wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water; then he will be clean. After this he may enter the camp but he must stay outside his tent for seven days. ⁹ On the seventh day he shall shave off all the hair on his head, chin and eyebrows. He shall wash his clothes, bathe himself in water and then he will be clean.

¹⁰ On the eighth day he is to take two lambs and a yearling ewe lamb, all without defect, and three-tenths of a measure of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering and a log of oil. ¹¹ The priest who declares him clean shall present the man to be purified and his offerings before Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ¹² The priest will then take the first lamb and present it as a guilt offering together with the log of oil. He shall wave them before Yahweh. ¹³ He shall slaughter the male lamb in

the place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering – the holy place. For the guilt offering like the sin offering belongs to the priest; it is most holy.

¹⁴ The priest shall then take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be purified, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. ¹⁵ The priest shall take the log of oil and pour it on the palm of his own left hand.

¹⁶ Then, dipping his right forefinger in it, he shall sprinkle it seven times before Yahweh.

¹⁷ Then he is to take a little of the oil that remains in the palm of his hand and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the man who is being purified, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot over the blood of the sacrifice of reparation. ¹⁸ The rest of the oil which is in his palm, he shall put on the head of the man who is being purified. In this way he shall perform over him the right of atonement before Yahweh.

¹⁹ Then the priest shall offer the sacrifice for sin, and perform the rite of atonement for the man who is being purified. After this he must slaughter the animal for the burnt offering ²⁰ and offer it with the grain offering on the altar. When the priest has performed the rite of atonement over him in this way, the man will be clean.

²¹ If the leper is poor and cannot afford all this, he shall take only one lamb for the guilt offering to be offered with the gesture of offering in the rite of atonement. And for the grain offering he will bring only one tenth of wheaten flour mixed with oil, and the log of oil, ²² and finally two turtledoves or two young pigeons – if he can afford them – one to be used as a sacrifice for sin and the other for the burnt offering. ²³ On the eighth day he must bring them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before Yahweh, for his purification.

²⁴ The priest is to take the lamb for the guilt offering and the log of oil, and present them before Yahweh with the gesture of offering.

²⁵ Then he must slaughter the lamb for the guilt offering, take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the man who is being purified, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. ²⁶ He is to pour the oil into the palm of his left hand, ²⁷ and with this oil he must make seven sprinklings with his finger before Yahweh. ²⁸ He is to put some of it on the lobe of the right ear of the man who is being purified, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot as he

hid with the blood of the guilt offering. ²⁹ The remainder of the oil in the palm of his hand he must put on the head of the man who is being purified, performing the rite of atonement over him before Yahweh. ³⁰ Of the two turtledoves or two young pigeons – if he can afford them – he is to offer ³¹ a sacrifice for sin with one, and with the other a burnt offering together with a grain offering – if he can afford them. In this way the priest will have performed before Yahweh the rite of atonement over the person who is being purified.

³² Such is the law concerning a person afflicted by leprosy who cannot afford the means for his purification."

"Leprosy" in houses

³³ Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron; he said:

³⁴ "When you reach the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your inheritance, if a strike a house with mildew in the land you are to possess, ³⁵ the owner must come and warn the priest; he must say, 'I have seen something like mildew in the house.' ³⁶ The priest is to give orders for the house to be emptied before he goes to examine the infection; thus nothing in the house will be declared unclean. Then the priest must go and look at the house; ³⁷ and if on examination he finds reddish or greenish spots that appear to be eating into the wall, ³⁸ the priest is to go out of the house, to the floor, and shut it up for seven days. ³⁹ On the seventh day he shall go back again and if on examination he finds that the infection has spread over the walls of the house, ⁴⁰ he shall give orders for the affected stones to be removed and thrown into some unclean place outside the town. ⁴¹ Then he shall have all the inside of the house scraped, and the plaster that comes off must be emptied out into an unclean place outside the town. ⁴² The stones must be replaced by new ones and the house given a new coat of plaster.

⁴³ If the infection spreads again after the stones have been removed and the house scraped and replastered, ⁴⁴ the priest is to come and examine it. If he finds that the infection has

spread, this means that mildew is affecting the house: it is unclean. ⁴⁵ It must be pulled down and the stones, woodwork and all the plaster be taken to an unclean place outside the town.

⁴⁶ Anyone who enters the house while it is closed will be unclean until evening. ⁴⁷ Anyone who sleeps there must wash his clothing. ⁴⁸ But if the priest finds, when he comes to examine the infection, that it has not spread in the house since it was plastered, he is to declare the house clean, for the infection is cured.

⁴⁹ As a sacrifice for the sin of the house, he is to take two birds, cedar wood, red cord and a sprig of hyssop. ⁵⁰ He shall slaughter one of the birds in an earthenware pot over running water. ⁵¹ Then he shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the red cord and the live bird, and dip them into the blood of the bird that was slaughtered and into the running water. ⁵² He shall sprinkle the house seven times; and after having offered a sacrifice for the sin of the house with the blood of the bird, the running water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop and the red cord ⁵³ he shall set the live bird free to fly out of the town into the open country. When the rite of atonement has been performed over the house in this way it will be clean.

⁵⁴ Such is the law for all cases ⁵⁵ of dreaded skin diseases, mildew of clothing and houses, ⁵⁶ swellings, scabs and shiny spots. It defines the cases when things are unclean and when they are clean. ⁵⁷ Such is the law on leprosy."

Sexual impurities

◆15 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron; he said,

² "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them:

³ When a man has a discharge from his body, that discharge makes him unclean. The rules about his uncleanness are:

Whether his body allows the discharge to flow or whether it retains it, he is unclean.

⁴ Any bed the man lies on and any seat he sits on shall be unclean. ⁵ Anyone who touches his bed must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

⁶ Anyone who sits on a seat where the man

3. Num 5, 2; 2 S 3, 29

◆ In all primitive people we find a sacredness surrounding everything related to sex and birth. That is the origin, somehow, of these prescriptions about sexual purity and impurity. It would be wrong to interpret them as if sexual relations were impure in themselves; they are only so when the demands of genuine love are not respected.

The Canaanites, among whom the Israelites

settled, yielded to the forces of nature which they thought to be divine, and sexual orgies accompanied all their religious feasts. For the Israelites, however, the many purifications concerning sexual life were recalling that sex was part of human nature as God created it and that its drives had to be subject to the Law of God. The baptized person is guided by other considerations: 1 Cor 6 and 7.



has sat must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.⁷ Anyone who touches the body of a man so affected must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.⁸ If the sick man spits on someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

⁹ Any saddle the sick man travels on will be unclean.¹⁰ All those who touch any object that may be under him will be unclean until evening. Anyone who picks up such an object must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

¹¹ All those whom the sick man touches without washing his hands must wash their clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.¹² Any clay pot the sick man touches must be broken and any wooden utensil must be rinsed.

¹³ When the man suffering from a discharge is cured, he must allow seven days for his purification. He must wash his clothing and take a bath in running water and he will be clean.¹⁴ On the eighth day he must take two turtledoves or two young pigeons and come before Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and give them to the priest.¹⁵ The priest is to offer a sacrifice for sin with one of them, and with the other a burnt offering. So the priest will perform the rite of atonement before Yahweh for the man's discharge.

¹⁶ When a man has a seminal discharge, he must bathe his whole body with water and he shall be unclean until evening.¹⁷ Any clothing or leather touched by a seminal discharge must be washed and it will be unclean until evening.¹⁸ When a woman has slept with a man, both of them must take a bath and they will be unclean until evening.

¹⁹ When a woman has a discharge of blood, and blood flows from her body, this uncleanness of her monthly periods shall last for seven days. Anyone who touches her will be unclean until evening.²⁰ Any bed she lies on will be unclean; any seat she sits on will be unclean.

²¹ Anyone who touches her bed must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.²² Anyone who touches any seat she has sat on must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.²³ If there is anything on the bed or the chair on

which she sat, anyone who touches it will be unclean until evening.

²⁴ If a man sleeps with a woman who is unclean because of her monthly period, he shall be unclean for seven days. Any bed he lies on will be unclean.

²⁵ If a woman has a flow of blood for several days outside her period, or if her period is prolonged, during the time this flow lasts she shall be unclean as during her monthly periods.²⁶ Any bed she lies on during the time this flow lasts will be unclean as during her monthly period. Any seat she sits on will be unclean; as it would be during her monthly periods.²⁷ Anyone who touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothing and take a bath and will be unclean until evening.

²⁸ When she is cured of her flow, she will let seven days pass; then she will be clean.²⁹ On the eighth day she is to take two turtledoves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.³⁰ With one of them the priest is to offer a sacrifice for sin and with the other a burnt offering. This is the way in which the priest will perform the rite of atonement over her before Yahweh for the flow that made her unclean.

³¹ Make the sons of Israel aware of everything unclean, lest they die because of defiling the Tent of my presence among them.

³² Such is the law concerning a man with a discharge, anyone made unclean by a seminal discharge, a woman unclean because of her monthly periods, a man or a woman with discharge, a man who sleeps with an unclean woman."

The great joy of atonement

o16 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the presence of Yahweh.

²Yahweh said to Moses, "Tell your brother, Aaron, not to enter at any time he pleases the Most Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy Seat which is on the ark, lest he die, for I appear in the cloud over the mercy Seat.

³This is how Aaron will enter the Holy Place with a bullock for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.⁴ He is to put on the

o The ceremony for the feast of Atonement was very expressive: one of two he-goats was set aside to carry the punishment for sin and therefore had to die; the other was sent off toward Azazel. Symbolically the *he-goat* bore the sins of

the people.

The Letter to the Hebrews, chapters 9 and 10, recalls these Jewish rituals when it mentions the forgiveness of sins that Christ won through his death and resurrection.

20. Gen 31:34

24. Ezk 18, 6

25. Mt 9, 20

Nm 29, 7; Heb 9, 7

2. Heb 6, 19



sacred linen tunic and linen undergarments next to his body; he is to have the linen sash around him and wear the linen turban. These are sacred garments, so he must bathe in water before he puts them on.

⁵ The assembly of the sons of Israel has to give him two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. ⁶ Then Aaron shall offer the bullock for a sin offering for himself to make atonement for himself and for his household. ⁷ He shall take the two male goats and present them to Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats, one lot for Yahweh and one lot for Azazel. ⁹ Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot fell for Yahweh as a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel will be placed alive before Yahweh to make atonement by being sent into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

¹¹ Aaron will then bring the bullock as a sin offering for himself to make atonement for himself and his household and he shall slaughter the bullock for the sin offering which is for himself. ¹² Then he shall take a censer full of coals from the fire above the altar before Yahweh and two handfuls of powdered, fragrant incense and take them inside the veil. ¹³ He shall put the incense on the fire before Yahweh and the cloud of incense will cover the mercy Seat that is on the ark of the Statement, so that he will not die. ¹⁴ He will take the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy Seat to the east and also in front of the mercy Seat he shall sprinkle blood seven times. ¹⁵ Then he shall slay the goat for the sin offering of the people and take its blood inside the veil and do with its blood what he did with the blood of the bullock. He shall sprinkle it on the mercy Seat and in front of it. ¹⁶ In this way he shall make atonement for the Holy Place because of the uncleanness of the Israelites and because of all their sins. And he shall do the same for the Tent of Meeting which stands among them in the midst of all their uncleanness.

¹⁷ No one shall be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes to make atonement until he comes out. After he has made atonement for himself, for his household and for the whole assembly of Israel, ¹⁸ he shall go out to the altar before Yahweh and make atonement for it. Then he shall take some of the bullock's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides. ¹⁹ He shall sprinkle it with blood seven times, and cleanse

it and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

²⁰ When he has finished making atonement for the Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and for the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He shall lay his hands on the head of the goat and confess over it all the wickedness of the sons of Israel and all the sins they have committed against me. So he will charge them on the head of the goat and send it away to the wilderness by the hand of an assistant. ²² So the goat will carry away all their wickedness to an arid land, when the man releases it in the wilderness.

²³ Then Aaron is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he had put on before he entered the sacred place. He shall leave them there, ²⁴ bathe himself with water in a sacred place and put on his clothes. After that he will come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people to make atonement for himself and the people. ²⁵ The fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar.

²⁶ The man who releases the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, after which he may re-enter the camp. ²⁷ The bullock of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be brought outside the camp and they shall burn their hides, their flesh and their dung in the fire. ²⁸ The one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, after which he may re-enter the camp.

²⁹ This shall be a lasting ordinance for you: on the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and do no work – neither the native nor the stranger living among you – ³⁰ for on this day atonement will be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be cleansed of your sins before Yahweh. ³¹ It is a sabbath of solemn rest when you must deny yourselves. It is a lasting ordinance. ³² The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father will make atonement. He shall put on the linen garments, the holy garments, ³³ and will make atonement for the Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement for the priests and all the people of the assembly. ³⁴ This shall be for you a lasting ordinance to make atonement for the people of Israel once a year, because of all their sins."

And Moses did as Yahweh commanded him.

15. Heb 9, 12

27. Heb 13, 11

In 16:29-34 it is again said that these commands will be the everlasting law: how do we

explain that the church cancelled them when Christ came? Paul explains this in Gal 3-5.



THE LAW OF HOLINESS

+17 ¹Yahweh said to Moses, ²"Speak to Aaron, his sons and all the Israelites and say to them: This is what Yahweh has commanded: ³Any man from the house of Israel who kills an ox, or a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside the camp ⁴and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to make an offering of it to Yahweh before the tabernacle of Yahweh – that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed. He has shed blood and he shall be cut off from among his people.

⁵The reason for this ordinance is so that the sons of Israel may bring the sacrifices that they used to slay in the fields to Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, to the priests, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace to Yahweh.

⁶The priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of Yahweh at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and burn the fat as a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh. ⁷This way they shall no longer slay their sacrifices for the goat idols to whom they prostituted themselves.

This is to be a lasting ordinance for them in the generations to come.

You shall not eat blood

⁸Then you shall give them this ordinance: Any man from the house of Israel or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice ⁹and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to Yahweh, that man shall be cut off from his people.

¹⁰If any man from the house of Israel or any alien living among them eats blood, I will set my face against that person and I will cut him off from among his people. ¹¹For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it

to you to rescue your life on the altar. Offered blood makes atonement because of the life within it. That is why I said to the sons of Israel: No one among you shall eat blood, nor may any alien who lives among you eat blood.

¹²If any Israelite or any alien living among you snares in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten, ¹³he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust. ¹⁴For the blood of every creature contains its life and I have therefore said to the people of Israel: You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is within its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.

¹⁵And every person who eats an animal that dies or that is torn by wild beasts, whether he be a native or an alien shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and remain unclean until evening; then he will be purified. ¹⁶But if he does not wash his clothes or bathe his body he shall carry his guilt."

The law of holiness

■ 18 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²"Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: I am Yahweh, your God.

³You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you used to live, nor shall you do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not follow their practices. ⁴My practices instead you will follow, and you will carry out my ordinances; I am Yahweh your God.

7. 2 K 23, 8 8. 20, 11-21 10. 7, 26 11. Gen 9, 4; Dt 12, 16 12. Acts 15, 21; Heb 9, 22 15. 7, 24; Eek 4, 14

+ In this chapter, we have the beginning of the *Law of Holiness*, or, the law of a people consecrated to God.

The law about blood was a way of instructing about and instilling a sense of the sacred meaning of life. This is summarized in chapter 17.

Just as most primitive people, the Hebrews believed that life was in the blood. Therefore, blood is sacred, even the blood of animals, and it can only be offered to God (see Gen 9:5). If it was not offered on the altar, it must be poured on the ground, but it must not be consumed.

Even in the time of Christ, the Jews felt such a repulsion for blood that, for some years, Christians coming from other nations had to observe that law in order not to scandalize their Jewish brothers (Acts 15).

Verse 11 explains why Christ chose a death in which he shed his blood. Whenever we read "Christ saved us through his blood," we must understand "through the offering of his life."

■ The Law of Holiness continues with more sexual prohibitions. These bans, now seen by so many people as outdated prejudices, are, in fact, basic to human dignity in the sense that they submit whims to a law. They are also at the root of married fidelity and of mutual respect between the members of the same family.

As was mentioned in chapter 15, the Canaanites did not know these bases of human culture (*you shall not do what is done in the land of Canaan*) and the Israelites saw in such rules a moral responsibility closely related to their Covenant with Yahweh which had made



⁵ Keep my practices and ordinances, for whoever keeps them finds life; I am Yahweh.

⁶ None of you shall have sexual intercourse with a blood relative; I am Yahweh.

⁷ Do not have intercourse with your father or your mother.

⁸ Do not have intercourse with your father's wife; respect your father.

⁹ Do not have intercourse with your sister or your stepsister, whether born in the same house or elsewhere.

¹⁰ Do not have intercourse with your granddaughter; that would dishonour you.

¹¹ Do not have intercourse with a half sister; she, too, is your sister.

¹² Do not have intercourse with an aunt, whether she is your father's sister ¹³ or your mother's sister.

¹⁴ Do not have intercourse with your uncle's wife; she, too, is your aunt.

¹⁵ Do not have intercourse with your daughter-in-law ¹⁶ or with your brother's wife.

¹⁷ Do not have intercourse with both a woman and her daughter or her granddaughter; they are blood relatives; that is wickedness.

¹⁸ While your wife is living, do not take her sister as a wife so that you make her jealous.

¹⁹ Do not have intercourse with a woman during her monthly period.

²⁰ Do not have intercourse with your neighbour's wife and defile yourself with her.

²¹ Do not give any of your children to be

sacrificed to Molech and do not profane the name of your God; I am Yahweh.

²² Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination.

²³ Also do not have sexual relations with an animal; that is infamous.

²⁴ Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways for this is how the nations I am driving out before you, became defiled. ²⁵ As the land was defiled I came to punish it, and it has vomited out its inhabitants.

²⁶ You shall keep my laws and decrees, and you shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native nor the alien living among you. ²⁷ Recall the people who did all these things before you in these lands and became defiled. ²⁸ If you defile the land it will vomit you out as it did the nations before you. ²⁹ The one who does any of these abominations shall be cut off from his people.

³⁰ Keep my laws and do not follow any of these abominable customs which were practised before you, so as not to defile yourselves by them; I am Yahweh, your God."

19 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²"Speak to the entire assembly of the people of Israel and say to them: Be holy for I, Yahweh, your God, am holy. ³Each of you must revere his mother and father; and you shall keep my sabbaths; I am Yahweh, your God.

⁴ Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am Yahweh, your God.

⁵ When you offer a sacrifice of peace offering to Yahweh, sacrifice it so that you may be accepted. ⁶It shall be eaten on the day you offer it or on the next day. And whatever remains shall be burned on the third day. ⁷If it is eaten on the third day it is unclean and will not be accepted. ⁸Whoever eats it will pay for his sin, for he has profaned a holy thing of Yahweh and this person shall be cut off from his people.

Love your neighbour as yourself

◆ ⁹When you reap the harvest of your land do not reap to the extreme

3. Ex 23, 24

5. Dt 4, 1; Pro 4, 4; Lk 10, 28;

Rom 10, 5; Gal 3, 12

8. Gen 35, 22

21. 2 K 17, 17; Jer 7, 31

22. Gen 19, 5

2. Ex 22, 30; 1 P 1, 16

9. Dt 24, 19; Rt 2, 15

them into a holy people different from all the other people.

Do not give any of your children to be burned (v. 21). This, too, was done in Canaan. Where instincts rule, there is no respect for life. It was among God's people that the dignity of the human person was discovered. Cannibalism was being practiced among the most refined groups of China. Among most ancient peoples,

a father had the right to destroy a newborn, not to mention the right to offer human sacrifices.

Lest the land vomit you (v. 27). In the Promised Land the Israelites have to live according to the laws of Yahweh; if they do not observe them, they will be exiled. This stay in the promised land is a sign in the Bible. See in particular Dt chap. 8. Paul recalls this in Gal 5:21.



limits of your field or gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ Do not strip your vineyard bare and do not gather the grapes that have fallen; leave them for the needy and the stranger. I am Yahweh, your God.

¹¹ Do not steal or lie or deceive one another. ¹² Do not swear falsely by my name so as to profane the name of your God; I am Yahweh.

¹³ Do not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. ¹⁴ You shall not curse a deaf man nor put a stumbling block in the way of the blind; but you shall fear your God; I am Yahweh.

¹⁵ Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor nor bow to the great; you are to judge your neighbour fairly so as not to share in his guilt. ¹⁶ Do not go about as a slanderer of your people and do nothing that would endanger your neighbour's life; I am Yahweh.

¹⁷ Do not hate your brother in your heart; rebuke your neighbour frankly so as not to share in his guilt. ¹⁸ Do not seek revenge or nurture a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself; I am Yahweh.

¹⁹ Keep my decrees. You shall not let your cattle breed with another kind. You shall not

sow your field with two kinds of seed and you shall not wear clothing made of two different materials.

²⁰ If a man lies with a woman who is a slave promised to another man, and she has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there shall be punishment. They shall not be put to death because she was not free, ²¹ but he shall bring a ram as a guilt offering to Yahweh for himself, to the door of the Tent of Meeting. ²² The priest is to make atonement for him before Yahweh with the ram of the guilt offering, and the sin he has committed will be forgiven.

²³ When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, you shall count the fruit as unclean. For three years it shall be unclean for you and it must not be eaten. ²⁴ In the fourth year all the fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. ²⁵ But in the fifth year you may eat of the fruit, that its yield may increase for you. I am Yahweh, your God.

²⁶ Do not eat anything with the blood in it nor practise divination or witchcraft. ²⁷ Do not round off the side-growth of your heads or clip off the edges of your beard. ²⁸ Do not make cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or make tattoo marks on yourselves. I am Yahweh.

²⁹ You shall not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

³⁰ Keep my sabbaths and revere my sanctuary. I am Yahweh.

³¹ Do not turn to mediums or spiritists for you will be defiled by them. I am Yahweh, your God.

³² Rise in the presence of the aged and honour the elderly; in doing this you honour your God. I am Yahweh.

³³ When a stranger stays with you in your land, do him no wrong. ³⁴ He shall be to you as

12. Ex 20, 7; Mt 5, 33	13. Dt 24, 14; James 5, 4	14. Dt 27, 18	17. Mt 18, 15	18. Rom 12, 19; Jer 3, 12;
Mt 5, 43; 19, 19; Ga 5, 14; James 2, 8	26. Dt 18, 10	29. Dt 23, 18	31. Dt 18, 11; 1 S 28, 3; Is 8, 19	

♦ Among so many laws which show the still primitive level of God's people, we marvel to find some prescriptions teaching deeply human attitudes often lacking in us.

These prescriptions, addressed to a people of small farmers, must be interpreted in order to adapt them to the circumstances of our present lives.

They teach us that "right of ownership" is not absolute and that it never justifies oppression of the poor, nor does it excuse us from helping them. We are ordered to care for our brothers, assuring everyone what is necessary in order to live.

Do not seek revenge, but love your neighbour as yourself. Here, neighbour means the brother of the same race. They must be loved

and there must be solidarity with them because God embraces all those who belong to his people with the same love.

This was written six centuries before Jesus. He was to give the word *neighbour* a much broader meaning (Lk 10:25), teaching us universal love (Mt 5:43).

• Various customs of pagan religions were also forbidden. Mediums and fortune-tellers were also forbidden just as in Dt 18:10.

The stranger shall be as the native among you. You will note that the Bible, which forbids sharing with pagan foreigners, always insists on respecting the alien living in Israel. Along with widows and orphans, foreigners are the most defenseless and they must be protected.



the native among you. Love him as yourself for you have been strangers in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh, your God.

¹⁵ Do no wrong in judgement or in measurement of weight or quantity. ¹⁶ Use honest scales and honest weights for liquids and solids. I am Yahweh, your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁷ You shall keep all my laws and all my decrees and follow them. I am Yahweh."

Some punishments

+ 20 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses ² saying, "To the sons of Israel you shall say this:

Any man from the people of Israel or from among the aliens living in Israel who gives any of his children for the Molech sacrifice, shall be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him. ³ I shall set my face against that man and cut him off from among his people, for by giving his children to Molech he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. ⁴ And if the people of the land hide their eyes from what that man does and do not put him to death, ⁵ then I will set my face against them and against their family and cut them off from their people. I will do the same to all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech.

⁶ I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists and prostitutes himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people.

⁷ Take the way of holiness so that you be holy for I am Yahweh, your God. ⁸ You shall keep my laws and practise them. I, Yahweh, your God am the one who makes you holy. ⁹ The man who curses his father or mother shall be put to death. He has cursed his father or mother. He himself shall account for his blood.

¹⁰ If a man commits adultery with another man's wife, the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. ¹¹ If a man lies with his father's wife, he has dishonoured his father, both of them shall be put to death. They themselves shall account for their blood. ¹² If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law both of them shall be put to death for they have committed incest. They

themselves shall account for their blood.

¹³ When a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both have committed a detestable act and they shall be put to death. They themselves shall account for their blood.

¹⁴ It is wicked for a man to marry both a woman and her mother. He and they must be burned in the fire so that there may be no wickedness among you.

¹⁵ A man who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death and the animal killed. ¹⁶ If a woman approaches an animal to mate with it, kill the woman and the animal. They shall be put to death. They themselves shall account for their blood.

¹⁷ If a man takes his sister, the daughter of his father or his mother and they have sexual relations, it is a shameful thing and they shall be cut off before the eyes of their people. He has dishonoured his sister and carries his guilt.

¹⁸ A man who lies with a woman during her monthly period and has intercourse with her has exposed the source of her flow and she has uncovered it. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people.

¹⁹ You shall not have intercourse with the sister of your father or mother, for that would dishonour a close relative. Both would be guilty. ²⁰ The man who lies with his aunt dishonours his uncle. They will be guilty and die childless. ²¹ It is a wickedness for a man to take his brother's wife. He has dishonoured his brother and they will be childless.

²² Keep, therefore, all my decrees and laws and act according to them so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out of it. ²³ You shall not follow the customs of the nations I shall drive out before you. I felt hatred for them for they did all these things. ²⁴ Because of this I said to you: You will possess their land and it is I who give it to you as your possession, a land flowing with milk and honey.

I, Yahweh, your God have set you apart from the nations. ²⁵ You must therefore make a distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, between the clean and unclean bird and you shall not defile yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps along the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean.

34. Ex 22, 20; Dt 24, 17; Esk 22, 7

3. 18, 21

9. Ex 20, 12

36. Dt 25, 13; Hos 12, 8; Am 8, 5; Pro 11, 1

11. Dt 23, 1; 1 Cor 5, 1

24. Num 13, 27; Dt 6, 3; Jer 11, 5

37. 18, 12-30

+ This chapter lists the penalties corresponding to the previously listed faults. In some cases, human justice punishes. In others, people are threatened with God's curse.

Chapters 21 and 22 deal with the responsi-

bilities and privileges of the priests. All these details may seem too external and foreign to the authentic sanctity which the priestly office requires. But, in those days, these prescriptions were valuable teaching and they still teach us about the sacredness of serving the Lord.

²⁶ You are to be holy for me as I am holy, Yahweh, your God, and I have set you apart from the nations to be mine.

²⁷ Now a man or a woman who is a spiritist shall be put to death; he or she shall be stoned and they shall account for their own blood."

21 ¹ Yahweh said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, sons of Aaron and tell them that not one of them shall make himself unclean for a dead person among his people ² except for those relatives nearest to him, that is for his mother, father, son, daughter or brother, ³ or for an unmarried sister who is dependent on him because she has had no husband. For her, he may make himself unclean. ⁴ As a husband he must not make himself unclean for his family-in-law and so profane himself. ⁵ They shall not make tonsures on their heads nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh. ⁶ They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for it is they who present offerings by fire, the bread of their God, so they shall be holy. ⁷ They must not marry women unclean by prostitution or a woman divorced by her husband, for the priest is holy to his God. ⁸ You shall regard the priest as holy for he offers up the food of your God. Holy he shall be for you because I, Yahweh, am holy who makes you holy.

⁹ If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she profanes her father and shall be burned in the fire.

¹⁰ The high priest, the one among his brothers on whose head the anointing oil has been poured, and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head or tear his clothes. ¹¹ He shall not go near any dead person or defile himself either for his father or his mother. ¹² He shall not leave the sanctuary nor profane the sanctuary of his God for he has on him the consecration of the anointing oil of his God. I am Yahweh.

¹³ The woman he marries must be a virgin. ¹⁴ He shall not take as wife a widow or a divorced woman or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin of his own people, ¹⁵ that he may not defile his children among his people. I am Yahweh who makes him holy."

¹⁶ Yahweh said to Moses, ¹⁷ "Say to Aaron: No man among your descendants in future generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the bread of his God. ¹⁸ No man who has a defect may come near, no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed ¹⁹ or who has a broken foot or hand, ²⁰ or is a hunchback or dwarf, or who has an eye defect or eczema or

scabs or damaged testicles. ²¹ The descendant of Aaron the priest who has a defect shall not approach to offer the burnt offering to Yahweh. He must not approach to offer the bread of his God because of the defect he has. ²² He may eat the bread of his God, both the most holy and the holy, ²³ but he may not go as far as the veil or advance towards the altar because he has a defect. Let him not defile my sanctuary, for it is I, Yahweh, who make them holy."

²⁴ Thus spoke Moses to Aaron and to his sons and to all Israel.

22 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: ² "Tell Aaron and his sons when they have to abstain from the holy offerings of the people of Israel, lest they profane my holy name; for I am the one who makes them holy. I am Yahweh. ³ Tell them this:

Anyone of your descendants, in any generation, who in a state of uncleanness approaches the holy offerings consecrated to Yahweh by the people of Israel, shall be outlawed from my presence. I am Yahweh.

⁴ Anyone of Aaron's line who is afflicted with leprosy or a discharge must not eat holy things until he is clean. Anyone who touches something made unclean by a dead body, or has a seminal discharge, ⁵ or is made unclean by touching either some creeping thing or some man who has communicated to him his own uncleanness of whatever kind, ⁶ in short, anyone who has had any such contact shall be unclean until evening, and must not eat holy things until he has taken a bath. ⁷ At sunset he will be clean and may then eat holy things, for these are his food.

⁸ He must not eat an animal that has died a natural death or been killed by wild animals; he would become unclean by doing this. I am Yahweh.

⁹ Let them keep these rules and not burden themselves with sin lest they die because of having defiled this food. I am Yahweh who makes them holy.

¹⁰ No lay person may eat any of the sacred offerings: neither the guest of a priest, nor his hired servant. ¹¹ But if the priest has acquired a slave by purchase, the slave may eat them. Likewise anyone born in the house may eat a share of the food.

¹² If a priest's daughter marries someone who is not a priest, she must not eat the holy portion set aside; ¹³ but if she is widowed or divorced and, being childless, has had to return to her father's house as when she was young, she may eat her father's food. No lay person may eat it; ¹⁴ if someone does eat a holy thing



unintentionally, he shall restore it to the priest with one fifth added.

¹⁵ They must not profane the holy offerings which the people of Israel have set aside for Yahweh. ¹⁶ If they ate of them, they would have to pay a guilt offering. I am Yahweh, who have sanctified these offerings."

¹⁷ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

¹⁸ "Tell this to Aaron, to his sons, and to all the people of Israel:

¹⁹ This rule refers to anyone of the Israelites or to any stranger living in Israel who brings anything for a burnt offering either in payment of a vow or as a voluntary gift. To be welcomed, he must offer a male ox, sheep or goat without any defect. ²⁰ You must not offer one that has defects: for it would not make you acceptable.

²¹ If anyone offers to Yahweh a peace offering either to fulfill a vow or as a voluntary offering, the animal – from the herd or from the flock – will not please Yahweh unless it be without any defect. ²² You must not offer to Yahweh an animal that is blind, lame, mutilated, ulcerous, or suffering from skin disease or a sore. No part of such an animal shall be laid on the altar as a burnt offering for Yahweh.

²³ As a voluntary offering, you may offer a bull or a lamb that is underdeveloped or deformed; but such will not be accepted in payment of a vow. ²⁴ Don't offer to Yahweh an animal if its testicles have been bruised, crushed, removed or cut. This is not permitted in your land, ²⁵ and you are not to accept any such from the hands of a stranger, to offer as food for your God. Their deformity is a defect and they would not make you acceptable."

²⁶ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

²⁷ "A calf, lamb, or kid shall stay with its mother seven days after birth. From the eighth day it will be acceptable as a burnt offering to Yahweh. ²⁸ No animal, whether cow or ewe,

shall be slaughtered on the same day as its young.

²⁹ If you offer Yahweh a sacrifice of thanksgiving, do it so that Yahweh may be pleased. ³⁰ You must eat it the same day, and nothing should be left till the morning. I am Yahweh.

Final exhortation

³¹ You must keep my commands and put them into practice. I am Yahweh. ³² You must not profane my holy name, so that I may be proclaimed holy among the people of Israel. I, Yahweh who sanctify you. ³³ I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God, I am Yahweh."

The annual feasts

■ 23 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses, ² "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: You shall proclaim holy assemblies on the appointed feasts of Yahweh, which are these:

³ After six days in which work shall be done, there is a sabbath of complete rest on the seventh day, a holy assembly when no work shall be done; it is a sabbath to Yahweh in all your houses.

⁴ Then there are the appointed feasts of Yahweh at the times fixed for them, when you are to proclaim holy assemblies.

⁵ At twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month is Yahweh's Passover. ⁶ And on the fifteenth day of this month it is Yahweh's feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you shall eat bread without leaven. ⁷ On the first day there will be a sacred assembly and no work of a worker shall be done. ⁸ For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to Yahweh and on the seventh day you shall hold a sacred assembly and do no work of a worker."

20. Dt 17, 1; Mal 1, 8 27. Ex 22, 29 33. Jer 11, 4 Ex 23, 14; 34, 18; Dt 16, 11 9. Dt 26, 1; Ex 29, 24

■ Here we are dealing with the feasts or "days" of Yahweh. God's people gather not only to celebrate their joys and sorrows: God is the one who summons them for his feasts through those responsible for his church (do not forget that church means: assembly).

The weekly day of rest (in Hebrew, *sabbath* means rest) is the first of these sacred encounters with God (v. 3).

Then come the three great feasts of Israel:

- The week of unleavened bread, which began with the Passover and recalled the departure from Egypt (9-14).
- The feast of the seven weeks, or Pentecost (which means *fiftieth day*) which was

connected with the remembrance of the Law given on Sinai (15-21).

- The feast of Tabernacles, or of booths, to recall the years in the desert (33-34).

As to the day of Atonement, the yearly asking for forgiveness for the people's sins (26-32) it was celebrated for a while along with the New Year, or during the feast of Tabernacles until it became fixed on a special day.

◆ Below we single out the offering of the sheaf of the first fruits, during the feast of unleavened bread, marking the beginning of the harvest.

God does not need anything. If he does ask something from us it is because we need to give



Offering of the first sheaf

◆ ⁹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁰ "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I will give you and you reap its harvest you will bring to the priest a sheaf, the firstfruits of your harvest ¹¹ and he shall wave the sheaf before Yahweh for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

¹² The day when you wave the sheaf you shall sacrifice a lamb without defect, born that year, as a burnt offering to Yahweh. ¹³ And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of a measure of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to Yahweh, a sweet-smelling offering, with its drink offering of a quarter of a measure of wine.

¹⁴ You shall eat neither bread nor grain, whether roasted or new until the very day you bring the offering to your God. This is to be an everlasting ordinance for all generations in all your families.

¹⁵ From the day after the sabbath, on which you bring the sheaf of offering, you are to count seven full weeks. ¹⁶ The day after the seventh sabbath will be the fiftieth day and then you are to offer Yahweh a new offering. ¹⁷ You must bring bread from your houses to present with the gesture of offering – two loaves, made of two tenths of wheaten flour baked with leaven; these are firstfruits for Yahweh. ¹⁸ In addition to the bread you must offer seven one-year-old lambs without any defect, a young bull and two rams, as a burnt offering to Yahweh together with a grain offering and drink offering, as a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh.

¹⁹ You are also to offer a goat as a sacrifice for sin, and two one-year-old lambs as a peace offering. ²⁰ The priest shall present them before

Yahweh with the gesture of offering, in addition to the bread of the firstfruits. These, and the two lambs, are holy things for Yahweh, and will belong to the priest.

²¹ This same day you are to hold an assembly; this shall be a sacred assembly for you; you will do no work of a worker. This is a perpetual law for your descendants wherever you live.

²² When you gather the harvest in your country, you are not to harvest to the very end of your field, and you are not to gather the gleanings of the harvest. You are to leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am Yahweh your God."

²³ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

²⁴ "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: The first day of the seventh month shall be a day of rest for you, a sacred assembly proclaimed with trumpet call. ²⁵ You must not do any work of a worker and you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh."

²⁶ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said: ²⁷ "The tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. You are to hold a sacred assembly. You must fast, and you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh. ²⁸ You are not to do any work that day, for it is the Day of Atonement, on which the rite of atonement will be performed over you before Yahweh your God. ²⁹ Indeed, anyone who fails to fast that day shall be outlawed from his people; ³⁰ anyone who works that day I will remove from his people. ³¹ No work must be done – this is a perpetual law for your descendants wherever you live. ³² This is to be a day of sabbath rest for you. You must fast; on the evening of the ninth day of the month, from this to the following evening, you must cease to work."

³³ Yahweh spoke to Moses; he said:

³⁴ "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them: The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of Tents for Yahweh, lasting seven days. ³⁵ The first day you shall hold an assembly; you must do no work of a worker. ³⁶ For seven days you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh. On the eighth day you are to hold a sacred assembly and you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh. It is a day of solemn assembly in which you shall do no work of a worker.

of ourselves to be truly human. There is no feast, no shared happiness, no soothed heart if something is not sacrificed.

Titling or the tenth part of the fruits offered to God and which will serve to feed the Levites and the poor becomes spiritual wealth for the people of the Bible.

The first sheaf offered to God may also mean the first part of the workday given to God: the first contribution of the month given to assist a companion in need: the first moment of rest which spouses together offer to the Lord; it means each believer's cooperation in church affairs to make it free before the powerful.



³⁷ These are the appointed feasts of Yahweh in which you are to proclaim holy assemblies for the purpose of offering offerings by fire, burnt offerings, grain offerings and drink offerings to Yahweh, according to the ritual of each day, ³⁸ besides the sabbaths of Yahweh and the presents, and the votive and voluntary gifts that you make to Yahweh.

³⁹ On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have harvested the produce of the land, you are to celebrate the feast of Yahweh for seven days. On the first and eighth days there shall be a complete rest. ⁴⁰ On the first day you shall take choice fruits, palm branches, boughs of leafy trees and willows from the riverbank, and for seven days you shall rejoice in the presence of Yahweh your God. ⁴¹ You are to celebrate a feast for Yahweh in this way for seven days every year. This is a perpetual law for your descendants.

⁴² You are to keep this feast in the seventh month. For seven days you are to live in tents and shelters: all natives of Israel must live in tents and shelters, ⁴³ so that your descendants may know that I made the sons of Israel live in tents when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God."

⁴⁴ These are the regulations that Moses gave to the sons of Israel regarding the feasts of Yahweh.

24 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ² "Command the Israelites to bring you oil from pressed olives for the light, that a lamp may be kept burning continually. ³ Aaron shall keep the flame in order from evening until morning in the Tent of Meeting, outside the veil of the Statement. It shall be a lasting ordinance for all generations. ⁴ He shall set the lamps on the pure gold lampstand to burn continually before Yahweh.

⁵ Then you shall take fine flour and make twelve cakes, two-tenths of a measure in each cake. ⁶ Place them in two rows, six in each, on the pure gold table before Yahweh. ⁷ On each row put pure frankincense, so that the bread may be a memorial, as an offering by fire to Yahweh. ⁸ Every sabbath Aaron shall set the bread in order before Yahweh on behalf of the Israelites as a lasting covenant. ⁹ The bread will be for Aaron and his sons: they are to con-

sider it as a most holy portion of the sacrifices by fire to Yahweh and they shall eat it in a holy place. This is a lasting law."

The blasphemy

¹⁰ The son of an Israelite woman quarrelled with a man of Israel in the camp and ¹¹ the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the name of Yahweh with a curse, so they brought him to Moses. (His mother was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri of the tribe of Dan). ¹² They put him under guard until a decision from Yahweh would be made known.

¹³ Yahweh said to Moses, "Take the man who has cursed out of the camp. ¹⁴ All who have heard him curse will lay their hands on his head and the entire assembly shall stone him to death. ¹⁵ Then say this to the sons of Israel: The man who curses God shall pay for his sin ¹⁶ and whoever blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall be put to death. The whole assembly shall stone him, the alien like the native shall be put to death when he blasphemes the Name.

The law of retaliation

¹⁷ Whoever kills a man shall be put to death.

¹⁸ Whoever kills an animal shall make up the loss, life for life. ¹⁹ If a man injures his neighbour, as he has done, shall it be done to him. ²⁰ Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, just as he has injured another so shall it be done to him. ²¹ He who kills a beast shall make up for it, and he who kills a man shall be put to death.

²² There shall be one law, the same for the alien and the native, for I am Yahweh, your God."

²³ So Moses spoke to the Israelites and they brought the man who had cursed outside the camp and stoned him. In this way the Israelites did as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

The sabbatical year and jubilee

+25 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: ² "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When you

40. Ne 8, 15	2. Ex 25, 31	3. Num 4, 16; 1 S 3, 3	5. 1 S 21, 5; Mt 12, 4	16. Jos 7, 25;
Acts 7, 58	19. Ex 21, 23	20. Mt 5, 38	22. Num 15, 16	1. Dt 15, 1

o *Eye for eye.* In 24:19 we have the so-called "Law of Talion." This law seems cruel. It appears to accept vengeance as normal. But, in fact, it was an attempt to limit violent impulses such as resentment or the desire for retaliation. This is why this law established that an enemy will only be hurt in proportion to the harm

suffered: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. This was a way of civilizing people who were quite far from the Christian ideal. Forgiveness, as Christ preached, is something radically new.

+ The land needs a rest. We know how, in our days, many fields have been exhausted by over-

enter the land I am giving you, let the land rest for Yahweh every seventh year. ³For six years you shall sow your field, prune your vineyard and harvest the produce, ⁴but in the seventh year the land shall have a rest, or sabbath, a sabbath for Yahweh. You shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard; ⁵you shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest nor gather the grapes of your uncultivated vines.

This shall be a year of rest for the land, ⁶but whatever it produces of itself will provide food for you, for your male and female slaves, for your hired servant and for the stranger who lives with you.

⁷Its produce will likewise provide food for your livestock and for the wild animals on your land.

⁸When seven sabbaths of years have passed, that is, seven times seven years, there shall be the time of the seven weeks of years, that is forty-

nine years. ⁹Then on the tenth day of the seventh month sound the trumpet loudly. On this Day of Atonement sound the trumpet all through the land. ¹⁰Keep holy the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom for all the inhabitants of the land. It shall be a jubilation year for you when each one shall recover his family property. ¹¹In this fiftieth year, your year of Jubilee, you shall neither sow nor reap the aftergrowth, nor gather the grapes from the uncultivated vines, ¹²because this Jubilee year shall be holy for you, and you shall eat what the field yields of itself without cultivation.

¹³In this year of Jubilee each of you shall recover his own property.

¹⁴When you sell something to your neighbour or buy something from him, do not wrong one another.

¹⁵According to the number of years after the Jubilee, you shall buy it from your neighbour and according to the number of years left for harvesting

10. Is 61, 2

use. People want to produce more and more and they demand that the land give more than it can give. Nowadays, people also make demands on machines, their workers, and even on their own health: they mistreat themselves and everybody else because they lack trust in God.

God commands that the land be given a rest. The sabbatical year (or the year of rest) occurs every seven years. Besides being beneficial in terms of the productivity of the land, the sabbatical year enables the Israelites to dedicate themselves to religious, cultural or community activities. This provides a slowing down of the feverish involvement in work which often becomes totally alienating for people.

If this sabbatical year occur in times of need, or after an invasion, we can see that it will be very difficult to observe this prescription (see 1 Mac 6:49). Yet, God himself promised to help those who faithfully observe it (23:30), which anticipated what the Gospel says in Matthew 6:23.

Every fifty years a *Jubilee year* is to be celebrated: its value is even more sacred. The word *Jubilee* does not come from *jubilation*, but both words come from the Hebrew *yobel* or *ram's horn* which was used to proclaim this holy year. That year, all slaves had to be liberated: all mortgaged fields and houses would return to

their owners without payment from them.

This has a profound meaning. God does not allow anyone to accumulate the goods of others. This text offers an ideal contrary to economic liberalism which allows anyone to become rich and powerful by monopolizing the means of production which others need. It also is a condemnation of the laws of international trade which always favor the most developed countries.

The land is mine (23). Try saying that to the large landowner or even to the small landowner! This statement was no less shocking at the time it was written. But, what will those who want to adapt Christian faith to a secular world say now?

You are strangers and guests of mine. The people surrounding Israel boasted of having lived in the same country and of owning it ever since the creation of the world. But, for the Israelite, the land is the heritage he received from the Lord. In the long chapters of Deuteronomy and Joshua which relate the conquest of the Holy Land and its distribution, the land is always seen as *inheritance*. It is the inheritance that God gives to the tribes of his people. The land, then, belongs to each of the tribes, and so, along with private property, there are also lands belonging to the community, lands which are distributed periodically.

crops he shall sell to you. ¹⁶ When the years are many the price shall be greater and when the years are few the price shall be less, for it is the number of crops that he is selling to you. ¹⁷ So you shall not wrong one another but you shall fear your God, for I am Yahweh, your God.

¹⁸ Carry out my precepts and obey my laws. In that way you will live securely in the land. ¹⁹ The land will give its fruit so that you may have food in abundance and live securely.

²⁰ But if you ask: 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not sow or gather crops?' see that ²¹ I will send you my blessing in the sixth year that it may produce enough for three years. ²² So in the eighth year the remains of the old crop will provide you with what to sow and to eat until the harvest of the ninth year is ready.

²³ The land shall not be sold forever for the land is mine, where you are but strangers and guests of mine. ²⁴ In all the territory you occupy, the land is to be redeemed.

²⁵ When your brother becomes poor and sells his property, his nearest relative is to come and buy back what his relative has sold. ²⁶ If the man has no relatives to buy back his property, but later has sufficient means to redeem it, ²⁷ he will calculate the value for the years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it and in that way he

shall recover his property. ²⁸ But if he does not find the means to repay him, what has been sold shall remain with the buyer until the Jubilee year when it must be given back to its original owner.

²⁹ In the same way, if a man sells a house in a walled city, his right of redemption shall last until the end of a year from the time of its sale; his right of redemption lasts a whole year. ³⁰ If it is not redeemed by the end of a complete year, the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to the one who bought it and to his descendants, and it shall not be released in the Jubilee year.

³¹ Houses in villages which have no surrounding wall are evaluated as fields; they have redemption rights and may be released in a Jubilee year.

³² As for the towns of the Levites, the houses which belong to them have a permanent right of redemption. ³³ Whatever belongs to the Levites may be redeemed. A house sold in a city of their possession returns at the time of the Jubilee, for the houses in the towns of the Levites are their possession among the Levites. ³⁴ The field also belonging to their towns must not be sold forever; it is their permanent possession.

How to share with our neighbour

■ ³⁵ If your brother becomes poor and is unable to support himself, help him that he may continue to live with you, at least as a stranger and a guest.

³⁶ Do not take interest from him, but fear your God, so that your brother may continue to live among you. ³⁷ Do not give him your silver at interest nor your food for gain.

23. Ps 39, 13

25. Rtc 4, 1

32. Jos 21

35. Dt 15, 7

■ These paragraphs were written by Jewish priests with high ideals, but in the framework of a primitive economy which does not exist any longer. They led to important consequences when capitalism emerged in the thirteenth to the fifteenth century after Christ.

Do not give your silver at interest. This is the law of solidarity and fraternal love. But it does not work on a large scale when people are trying to find the capital necessary for economic development. Individuals with savings will not be convinced to invest if they are not given some incentive and neither will the socialist governments loan without interest.

Such distinctions had not been made when the first capitalist firms were born.

The promoters of capitalism in its beginnings felt alienated from the Church. And thus they were Jews marginalized from Christian society and subject to many obstacles in the exercise of various professions who often played the role of moneylenders, a profession forbidden to Christians. And so they were hated by Christians, noble or otherwise, who were their debtors: they avenged themselves by killing Jews or weighing them down with taxes, and Jews, in their turn, demanded greater interest in order to live.



³⁸ I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of the Canaanites and to be your God.

³⁹ If your brother becomes poor and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave, ⁴⁰ but let him remain with you as a hired servant and an alien until the year of Jubilee. ⁴¹ He shall then leave you, he and his sons with him, and return to his own family and to the property of his fathers. ⁴² For they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt and they are not to be sold as slaves. ⁴³ Do not rule over them harshly, but fear your God.

⁴⁴ As for the male and female slaves, it is from the nations around you that you are to buy them. ⁴⁵ You may also buy from among the aliens who live with you and from their families, born in your land, and they may be your property. ⁴⁶ So you may leave them to your children as inherited possessions and make them slaves for life. But regarding your Israelite brothers, you must not rule over them harshly.

⁴⁷ If an alien or temporary resident becomes prosperous and one of your brothers becomes so poor as to sell himself to a stranger who is living with you or to a member of the stranger's family, ⁴⁸ he shall have the right of redemption. One of his brothers may redeem him, ⁴⁹ or his uncle or the son of his uncle or a near relative may redeem him. ⁵⁰ If he becomes rich, let him redeem himself. He shall reckon with his buyer from the time he sold himself until the year of Jubilee and the price of his sale

shall correspond to the number of years. If many years remain, he shall be reckoned at the price of a hired servant, according to the number of years. ⁵¹ If many years remain, he shall refund out of the price paid for him, according to the remaining time. ⁵² If only a few years remain until the Jubilee year, he will calculate and refund accordingly. ⁵³ He shall be with him as a servant hired year by year and he shall not be harshly dealt with.

⁵⁴ If he is redeemed in any of these ways, he shall be released in the Jubilee year, he and his sons with him.

⁵⁵ For it is to me that the sons of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh, your God.

26 ¹ You shall not make for yourselves idols or set up an image or pillar or carved stone in your land to bow before it for I am Yahweh, your God.

² You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary. I am Yahweh.

Promises of God

◆ ³ If you walk according to my precepts and obey my commandments, if you carry them out, ⁴ I will give you rain in its season and the land will yield its produce, the trees in the field their fruit; ⁵ the threshing time will last to vintage time and the vintage till sowing time. You will have food in abundance and you will live securely in your land.

⁶ I will give you peace in your country and you will sleep without anyone disturbing you. I will banish

37. Ex 22, 24; Dt 23, 20

38. 11, 45; Jer 11, 4

40. Dt 15, 12; Jer 34, 8

2. Jer 17, 19

◆ The law of God is a law of life. When men do not follow it, they destroy themselves. Here God requires of his people justice, kindness and respect for life: he requires this in words which they understand and he also promises blessings or misfortunes in the material sphere.

The end of this chapter, written during the exile, describes the decadence of the Jewish people just before their exile. This destruction was, in some sense, "God's punishment;" but it was also the consequence of their faults, because any society which disregards the foundations of moral life is digging its own grave.

This chapter puts into opposition peace and fruitfulness on the one hand, and on the other, insecurity, waste and division when people do

not listen to God:

- injustice breeds violence;
- the love of money destroys the sense of the common good;
- sexual license weakens the sense of sacrifice;
- the young do not find their place in society, and those who are not satisfied rebel against it, because they lack a goal in life;
- national resources are wasted on luxury and on repressive forces;
- the economy is ruined because people exploit human and natural resources.

Such people come to the point of *eating the flesh of their own children*.



the wild beast and keep the sword of war from passing through the land.⁷ You will rout your enemies and they will fall before your sword;⁸ five of you will pursue a hundred of them and a hundred of you ten thousand of them, and they will fall before you by the sword.

⁹ I will turn towards you to make your families fruitful and your people numerous, and I will strengthen my covenant with you.¹⁰ When you are still eating from the old harvest you will have to discard what is stored to make place for the new.¹¹ I will make my Dwelling among you and I will not reject you.¹² I will walk among you; I will be your God and you will be my people.¹³ I am Yahweh, your God who brought you out of Egypt to be their slaves no longer. I have broken the bars of your yoke letting you walk erect.

Curses

¹⁴ But if you do not heed me and keep my commandments,¹⁵ if you reject my precepts and ignore my decrees, refusing to obey all my commandments and so break my covenant,¹⁶ I, in turn, will do this: I will bring upon you terror, a tuberculosis and fever, weakening your eyes and draining your life. In vain will you sow, for your enemies will eat it.¹⁷ I will turn away from you until you are beaten by your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you and you shall flee when no one pursues you.

¹⁸ If after all this you do not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins.¹⁹ I will break the pride of your power; I will make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze.²⁰ Your strength shall be spent in vain; your land will give no produce and the trees no fruit.²¹ If you defy me and are unwilling to obey me, I will bring seven times as many plagues on you for your sins.²² I will let loose the wild animals and they will rob you of your children and destroy your cattle and make you so few that your roads will be deserted.

²³ If, with all this, you do not repent but remain hostile towards me,²⁴ then I will be hos-

tile towards you and strike you seven times for your sins.²⁵ The sword I will bring against you, and with the sword I will avenge my covenant with you; and when you gather together in your cities I will send pestilence on you and you shall be delivered into enemy hands.²⁶ When I cut off your supply of bread and ten women bake bread in one oven and bring back rationed bread, you will eat and not be satisfied.

²⁷ But if with all that you do not obey me and remain defiant towards me,²⁸ I will go against you in fury and punish you sevenfold for your sins.²⁹ You shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters.³⁰ I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars; I will cast your corpses on those of your idols and I shall hate you.³¹ I will lay waste your cities and make desolate your sanctuaries and no longer shall I relish your sweet-smelling offerings.³² I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be astonished.³³ I will scatter you among the nations and unsheathe the sword behind you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities lie in ruins.

³⁴ Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies waste while you are in the land of your enemies:³⁵ then the land will rest and observe its sabbaths. As long as the land lies desolate it shall have the sabbath rest that it did not have when you inhabited it.

³⁶ As for those of you who are left, I will make them faint-hearted in the land of their enemies. The sound of a wind-blown leaf will chase them and even when no one pursues them,³⁷ they will flee as from the sword and will fall. They will stumble against each other as if running from the sword even when they are not pursued, and you will be unable to stand up before your enemies.³⁸ You shall perish among the nations and die in the land of your enemies.

³⁹ Those among you who remain will rot away because of their wickedness in the land of your enemies and because of the wickedness of their fathers they will rot away with them.⁴⁰ Then they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers. They will admit that their treacheries and their hostility towards me⁴¹ made me hostile, towards them and caused me to bring them to the land of their enemies, and then their uncircumcised hearts may become humble and they will accept the punishment for their sin.⁴² Then I will remember my covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

12. Eek 36, 28; Rev 21, 3
26. Is 3, 1; 4, 1
41. Jer 4, 4; Is 40, 2

14. Dr 28, 15; Dn 9, 11
30. Jer 19, 9; Lam 2, 20
42. Lk 1, 72

19. Eek 33, 28
33. Is 1, 7; Jer 34, 22
44. Lam 3, 22; 5, 21

22. Eek 5, 17
39. Eek 4, 17
25. Eek 21, 14



⁴³ For the land will be abandoned by them and it shall observe its sabbath; it will be desolate without them, while they pay for their sin because they spurned my ordinances and ignored my statutes.

⁴⁴ Yet even so, when they are in the land of their enemies I will not reject them or ignore them to the point of destroying them and breaking my covenant with them, for I am Yahweh, their God. ⁴⁵ For their sake I will remember my covenant with their forefathers whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am Yahweh."

⁴⁶ These are the statutes, the ordinances and the laws that Yahweh established between himself and the sons of Israel, through Moses, on Mount Sinai.

Vows and promises

27 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ² "Tell the sons of Israel about the fixed price for those who have to be ransomed because of a vow.

³ A man between twenty and sixty years of age shall be valued at fifty pieces of silver – the official standard; ⁴ a woman shall be valued at thirty silver coins; ⁵ between five and twenty years, a boy shall be valued at twenty silver coins, a girl at ten silver coins; ⁶ between one month and five years, a boy shall be valued at five silver coins, a girl at three silver coins; ⁷ at sixty years and over, a man shall be valued at fifteen silver coins and a woman at ten silver coins. ⁸ If the person who made the vow is too poor to pay the standard price, he must present the person concerned to the priest, and the priest shall set a value proportionate to the resources of the person who made the vow.

⁹ As for an animal suitable for offering to Yahweh, any such animal given to Yahweh is holy. ¹⁰ It cannot be exchanged or a substitute offered – good for bad, bad for good. If one animal is substituted for another, both of them shall belong to Yahweh. ¹¹ If it is an unclean animal, and not suitable for offering to Yahweh, whatever it may be it must be presented to the priest ¹² and he shall set a price for it, judging it good or bad. ¹³ You must abide by his price. The person who wishes to buy it back must add one fifth to the price set.

¹⁴ If a man dedicates his house to Yahweh, the priest shall set a price for it, judging whether its value is great or little. You must abide by the priest's price. ¹⁵ If the man who has vowed his house wishes to buy it back, he must add one fifth to the price and it shall be given back to him.

¹⁶ If a man dedicates one of the fields of his

patrimony to Yahweh, its value shall be calculated according to its productivity, at the rate of fifty silver coins to one bushel of barley.

¹⁷ If he dedicates the field during the Jubilee year, he must stand by this price. ¹⁸ But if he dedicates it after the Jubilee, the priest shall calculate the price on the basis of the number of years still to run until the next Jubilee and the price shall be reduced accordingly.

¹⁹ If he wishes to buy back the field, he shall add one fifth to the price, and the field shall be given back to him. ²⁰ If he does not buy it back but sells it to another, the right of redemption ceases; ²¹ when the buyer has to give it up at the Jubilee year, it becomes a thing dedicated to Yahweh, the same as a field laid under the ban: the man's property passes to the priest.

²² If he dedicates to Yahweh a field which he has bought, but which is not part of his patrimony, ²³ the priest shall assess the price on the basis of the number of years still to run before the Jubilee year; and the man shall pay this sum the same day, as for a thing dedicated to Yahweh. ²⁴ In the Jubilee year, the field shall return to the seller, to the man to whose patrimony the land belongs. ²⁵ All prices must be made according to the official sanctuary standards at the rate of twenty gerahs to one silver piece.

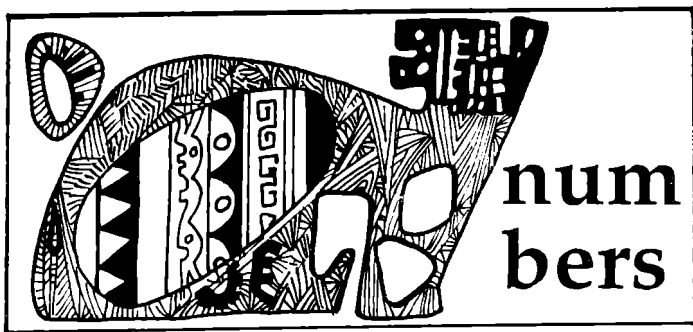
²⁶ No one may dedicate the firstborn of his cattle, for it belongs to Yahweh by right: whether ox or sheep, it belongs to Yahweh. ²⁷ But if it is an unclean animal it may be bought back at the price with one fifth added; if it is not bought back, the animal shall be sold at the price set.

²⁸ Nothing that is dedicated to Yahweh by anathema may be bought back; nothing whether a man, an animal, or a field of patrimony. What is dedicated by anathema becomes a most holy thing and belongs to Yahweh. ²⁹ A human being dedicated by anathema cannot be bought back, he must be put to death.

³⁰ One tenth of all the produce of the earth or the fruits of trees, belongs to Yahweh. ³¹ If a man wishes to buy back part of his tithe, he must add one fifth to its value.

³² In all tithes of flock or herd, the tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff shall be a thing dedicated to Yahweh: ³³ there must be no picking out of good and bad, no substitution. If substitution takes place, both the animal and its substitute shall be things dedicated without possibility of buying them back."

³⁴ These are the commandments that Yahweh laid down for Moses on Mount Sinai, for the people of Israel.



This book is called "Numbers" because it begins by listing the numbers of a census of the Hebrew people. What was said in the introduction of Leviticus applies here too: the census, vents and Yahweh's statements to Moses are simply a way of presenting laws which were put together or edited later by the priests of Israel.

Nevertheless, chapters 11-14 and 20-25 should be looked at separately: there we find various traditions and very ancient memories related to the time in the desert; they complete what we read in the book of Exodus.

The census of Israel

1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after their departure from the land of Egypt. He said:

²"Take a census of the whole community of Israel, by clans and families, taking a count of the names of all the males, head by head. ³You and Aaron will enlist all men of Israel, twenty years of age and over, able to give military service. ⁴From each tribe you shall take a man, the head of his family, to help you in this.

⁵These are the names of those who are to be your helpers: For Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur. ⁶For Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. ⁷For Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab. ⁸For Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar. ⁹For Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon. ¹⁰Of the sons of Joseph: for Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud; for Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. ¹¹For Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideoni. ¹²For Dan, Ahiezer son of Amnishaddai. ¹³For Asher, Pagiel son of Ochran.

¹⁴For Gad, Eliasaph son of Reuel. ¹⁵For Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan."

¹⁶These men were elected by public acclamation; they were leaders of their ancestral clans, chiefs of Israel's hosts.

¹⁷Moses and Aaron took these men who had been named, ¹⁸and on the first day of the second month they called together the whole community. The sons of Israel listed their names according to their clans and families, and one by one the names of all men of twenty years and over were recorded and counted. ¹⁹As Yahweh had commanded, Moses took a census of them in the desert of Sinai.

²⁰When the tribe of Reuben, Israel's first-born, had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ²¹The total of these for the tribe of Reuben was 46,500.

²²When the tribe of Simeon had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one.

o What is the meaning of this census, with its many repetitions and orderly arrangement of the camps of the twelve tribes? It looks somewhat like scenes of a play: Israel appears as an orderly people, Yahweh's armies on their way to

conquer the Promised Land. First come the men of the tribe of Levi, or the Levites, responsible for worship: thus we know that this is a "holy" people, consecrated to God.

²³ The total of these for the tribe of Simeon was 59,300.

²⁴ When the tribe of Gad had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service were recorded one by one. ²⁵ The total of these for the tribe of Gad was 45,650.

²⁶ When the tribe of Judah had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ²⁷ The total of these for the tribe of Judah was 74,600.

²⁸ When the tribe of Issachar had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service were recorded one by one. ²⁹ The total of these for the tribe of Issachar was 54,400.

³⁰ When the tribe of Zebulun had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³¹ The total of these for the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400.

³² The descendants of Joseph: when the tribe of Ephraim had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³³ The total of these for the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500. ³⁴ When the tribe of Manasseh had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³⁵ The total of these for the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200.

³⁶ When the tribe of Benjamin had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³⁷ The total of these for the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400.

³⁸ When the tribe of Dan had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service were recorded one by one. ³⁹ The total of these for the tribe of Dan was 62,700.

⁴⁰ When the tribe of Asher had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ⁴¹ The total of these for the tribe of Asher was 41,500.

⁴² When the tribe of Naphtali had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one.

⁴³ The total of these for the tribe of Naphtali was 53,400.

⁴⁴ Such were the men registered by Moses, Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each representing his tribe. ⁴⁵ Every man of Israel of twenty years and over, able to give military service, was counted according to his tribe.

⁴⁶ Altogether the full total was 603,550.

⁴⁷ But the Levites and their tribe were not included in the count.

⁴⁸ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

⁴⁹ "Do not take any census of the Levites, or register them among the sons of Israel. ⁵⁰ You yourself must enlist the Levites to serve the Holy Tent of the Testimony and to look after its furnishings and its belongings. They are to carry the Holy Tent, and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and set up their camp around it. ⁵¹ Whenever the Holy Tent is to be moved, the Levites shall take it down; whenever the Holy Tent is to be set up again, they shall do this. Any layman coming near it must be put to death.

⁵² The sons of Israel are to set up their tents in formation each man with his own group and under his own banner. ⁵³ But the Levites are to set up their tents around the Holy Tent of the Testimony, lest God's anger fall on the whole community of Israel. The Levites will take care of the Holy Tent of the Testimony."

⁵⁴ The sons of Israel did exactly as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

Israel's armies

2 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said: ² The Israelites are to camp, every man by his own banner, under the flag of his tribe. They are to camp all around the Holy Tent of the Testimony, but at some distance from it.

³ Those who are to camp on the east side, towards the sunrise: the camp of Judah around his banner, in battle arrangement. Leader of the sons of Judah: Nahshon son of Amminadab. ⁴ His command: 74,600 men.

⁵ Encamped next to him:

The tribe of Issachar. Leader of the sons of Issachar: Nethanel son of Zuar. ⁶ His command: 54,400 men.

⁷ The tribe of Zebulun. Leader of the sons of Zebulun: Eliab son of Helon. ⁸ His command: 57,400.

⁹ The assembled strength of the camp of Judah numbers in all 186,400. These are to be first in marching.

¹⁰ On the south side, the banner of the camp of Reuben, in battle formation. Leader of the

sons of Reuben: Elizur son of Shedeur. ¹¹His command: 46,500 men.

¹²Beside him shall camp: the tribe of Simeon. Leader of the sons of Simeon: Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. ¹³His command: 59,300 men.

¹⁴The tribe of Gad. Leader of the sons of Gad: Eliasaph son of Reuel. ¹⁵His command: 45,650 men.

¹⁶The assembled strength of the camp of Reuben numbers in all 151,450. They are to be second in order of marching.

¹⁷Next the Tent of Meeting will move, since the camp of the Levites is located in the middle of the other camps. The order of marching is to be the same order as in camping, every man under his own banner.

¹⁸On the west side, the banner of the camp of Ephraim, in battle formation. Leader of the sons of Ephraim: Elishama son of Ammihud. ¹⁹His command: 40,500 men.

²⁰Next to him: the tribe of Manasseh. Leader of the tribe of Manasseh: Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. ²¹His command: 32,200 men.

²²The tribe of Benjamin. Leader of the sons of Benjamin: Abidan son of Gideon. ²³His command: 35,400 men.

²⁴The assembled strength of the camp of Ephraim numbers in all 108,100. They are to be third in order of marching.

²⁵On the north side, the banner of the camp of Dan, in battle formation. Leader of the sons of Dan: Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. ²⁶His command: 62,700 men.

²⁷Beside him shall camp ²⁸the tribe of Asher. Leader of the sons of Asher: Pagiel son of Ochran. His command: 41,500 men.

²⁹The tribe of Naphtali. Leader of the sons of Naphtali: Ahira son of Enan. ³⁰His command: 53,400 men.

³¹The assembled strength of the camp of Dan numbers in all 157,600. They are to be last in order of marching.

³²Such was the total count of the sons of Israel when the census was made according to tribes. The full count of the entire camp, grouped under the various commands, is 603,550. ³³The Levites, as Yahweh had commanded Moses, were not included in this census of the sons of Israel.

³⁴The sons of Israel did exactly as Yahweh had commanded Moses. This was how they camped, grouped by banners. This was how they broke camp, each in his own clan, every man with his own family.

The tribe of Levi

+3 ¹These are the descendants of Aaron and Moses, at the time when Yahweh spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai.

²These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the eldest, then Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

³These are the names of Aaron's sons, priests anointed and invested with the powers of the priesthood. ⁴Nadab and Abihu died in the presence of Yahweh, in the desert of Sinai, when they offered fire that was unlawful. They left no children and so it fell to Eleazar and Ithamar to exercise the priesthood under their father Aaron.

⁵Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

⁶"Call for the tribe of Levi and appoint them as servants to Aaron the priest. ⁷They are to perform the duties that are laid on him and on the entire community before the Tent of Meeting, in their service of the Holy Tent. ⁸They shall take care of the furnishings for the Tent of Meeting, and serve in the Holy Tent

2. Ex 30, 30

4. Lev 10

+ Chapters 3, 4 and 8 refer to the priests or Levites.

At the time of Abraham, each family head was 'priest' for his own group: he himself was responsible for the sacrifices (Gen 15:10), sacred rituals (Gen 28:18); he gave blessings on behalf of God (Gen 27:27).

Certainly, Moses appointed men in charge of the celebration of worship and of teaching Yahweh's laws to Israel. The group called the tribe of Levi, perhaps a tribe of warriors at first, was responsible for this mission. In the episode of the Golden Calf they supported Moses in restoring order.

Still, heads of families as well as priests kept on celebrating without laws or control (Jgs 17).

David and Solomon established the Jewish clergy: from then on, only men from the tribe of

Levi would be priests. It was perhaps with Josiah's reform that a distinction was made among the Levites. Those of a higher rank were called *priests* and those of a lower rank *Levites* (see 2 Kgs 22:8). Those who returned to Jerusalem at Josiah's command and were forbidden to officiate in the Temple may have been the first "Levites" of a lower rank, while the Jerusalem clergy saw their privileges confirmed. They, the "priests" of the Temple began to form a superior class and, to differentiate themselves within the tribe of Levi, they pretended to be descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother.

The Levites represent the firstborn of Israel, the ones whom Yahweh saved in the first Passover, when the firstborn of Egypt died. Since they were saved by Yahweh, from that time on they belonged to God.

as representatives of the sons of Israel. ⁹ You are to give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given to him by the sons of Israel.

¹⁰ You are to enroll also Aaron and his sons, and they are to carry out the priestly duty. But any layman who comes near is to be put to death."

¹¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

¹² "I myself have chosen the Levites from among the sons of Israel, in place of the firstborn, those who open the mother's womb among the sons of Israel; the Levites therefore belong to me, ¹³ for every firstborn belongs to me. On the day I struck all the firstborn of the Egyptians, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn of Israel, of both man and beast. They are mine; I am Yahweh."

¹⁴ Yahweh spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai. He said: ¹⁵ "You are to take a census of the sons of Levi by families and clans; all the males of the age of one month and over must be counted." ¹⁶ Moses took his census, as Yahweh had ordered. ¹⁷ These are the names of the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

¹⁸ These are the names of Gershon's sons by their clans: Libni and Shimei; ¹⁹ Kohath's sons by their clans: Amran, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel, ²⁰ Merari's sons by their clans: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of Levi, grouped according to their ancestral families.

²¹ From Gershon are descended the Libnite and the Shimeite clans; these are the Gershonite clans. ²² Their number, counting the males of one month and over, came to 7,500.

²³ The Gershonite clans camped behind the Holy Tent, on the west side. ²⁴ The leader of the clan of Gershon was Eliasaph son of Lael. ²⁵ In the Tent of Meeting the sons of Gershon had charge of the Holy Tent, its inner and outer covers, ²⁶ the screen for the entrance and curtains for the court which is around the Holy Tent and the altar, and the ropes needed for all this work.

²⁷ From Kohath are descended the Amramite, the Izharite, the Hebronite and the Uzzielite clans; these are the Kohathite clans.

²⁸ Their full number, counting the males of one month and over, came to 8,300. They were in charge of the sanctuary. ²⁹ The Kohathite clans camped on the south side of the Holy Tent. ³⁰ The leader of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. ³¹ They were in charge of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the sacred vessels used in the liturgy, and the screen.

³² The chief of the Levite leaders was

Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest. He was the head of all those who were in charge of the sanctuary.

³³ From Merari are descended the Mahlite and the Mushite clans; these are the Merarite clans. ³⁴ Their full number, counting the males of one month and over, came to 6,200. ³⁵ The leader of the Merarite clans was Zuriel, son of Abihail. They camped on the north side of the Holy Tent. ³⁶ The sons of Merari were in charge of the framework of the Holy Tent, with its crossbars, posts and bases, all its fittings, ³⁷ and also the posts around the court, with their bases, pegs and ropes.

³⁸ Finally, on the east side, facing the Holy Tent and the Tent of Meeting, toward the sunrise, was the camp of Moses and Aaron and his sons, who had charge of the sanctuary for the people of Israel. Anyone else coming near was to be put to death.

³⁹ Altogether, the total count of Levites of the age of one month and over, whom Moses numbered by clans as Yahweh had ordered, came to 22,000.

⁴⁰ Yahweh said to Moses:

"Take a census of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, all the males from the age of one month and over; take a census of them by name. ⁴¹ Then you will take the Levites for me, Yahweh, instead of the firstborn of Israel; in the same way you will give me their cattle instead of the firstborn cattle of the sons of Israel."

⁴² As Yahweh commanded, Moses took a census of all the firstborn of the sons of Israel. ⁴³ The total count, by name, of the firstborn from the age of one month and over came to 22,273.

⁴⁴ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and said,

⁴⁵ "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn of Israel's sons, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; the Levites shall be my own. ⁴⁶ But you have to buy back the 273 of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who outnumber the Levites. ⁴⁷ So for each one you are to pay five pieces of silver, according to the official standard, ⁴⁸ and you shall give this money to Aaron and his sons."

⁴⁹ Moses received the 1,365 pieces of silver as ransom from those who were left when the rest had been redeemed by the Levites. ⁵⁰ From the firstborn of the Israelites he received one thousand three hundred and sixty five pieces of silver according to the sanctuary standard. ⁵¹ And he gave them to Aaron and his sons as Yahweh had ordered.

The Levite families: the Kohathites

4 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said: ²"Take a census of those Levites who are sons of Kohath, by sub-clans and families ³count all the men between thirty and fifty years of age, those able to give military service who will be given tasks in the Tent of Meeting.

⁴These are the duties of the sons of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting: they are to have charge of the most holy things. ⁵When it is time to move from the camp, Aaron and his sons are to come and take down the veil of the screen. With it they shall cover up the ark of the Statement. ⁶On top of this they shall put a covering of fine leather, and spread over the whole a cloth all of violet. Then they are to fix the poles to the ark.

⁷Over the offertory table they are to spread a violet cloth and put on it the dishes, cups, bowls and jars for the wine offering; the bread offered to the Lord shall be perpetually on it. ⁸Over these they shall spread a cloth of scarlet and cover the whole with a covering of fine leather. Then they are to fix the poles to the table.

⁹They are then to take a cloth of violet and cover the light-bearing lampstand together with the lamps, tongs, trays and all the oil jars that belong to it. ¹⁰They are to put it, with all its utensils, on a covering of fine leather and place it on the carrying frame.

¹¹Over the golden altar they must spread a violet cloth, and cover that with a covering of fine leather. Then they are to fix the poles to it.

¹²They are also to take all the other objects used in the service of the sanctuary. They must put them all on a violet cloth, cover them with

a covering of fine leather and place them together on the carrying frame.

¹³When they have removed the ashes from the altar, they must spread a scarlet cloth over it, ¹⁴and place on this all the objects used in the service at the altar: the fire pans, hooks, shovels, sprinkling basins and all the altar vessels. Over the whole they must spread a covering of fine leather. Then they are to fix the poles to it.

¹⁵When Aaron and his sons have finished covering all the sacred objects and all the equipment in preparation for moving from camp, the sons of Kohath are to come to carry the sacred things, but without touching any of them; otherwise they would die. This is the duty given to the sons of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁶Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, is to watch over the oil for the light, the sweet-smelling incense, the grain offerings and the anointing oil; he must watch over the whole Holy Tent and everything in it: the sacred objects and their equipment."

¹⁷Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said: ¹⁸"Do not let the families of Kohath be cut off from the number of the Levites. ¹⁹This is what you shall do for them, lest they die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons must go in and assign to each of them, his task. ²⁰In this way they can go in and yet not look, even for a moment, on any of the holy things; if they do, they will die."

The Gershonite families

²¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said to him:

²²"Take a census also of the sons of Gershon, by families and sub-clans; ²³count the men between thirty and fifty years of age,

1. Ex 25

15. 2 S 6, 7; Lev 17, 1

23. Lev 13, 45; Dt 23, 11

■ In Israel, every male born into the tribe of Levi was automatically a priest. Besides, each family of that tribe was destined for some form of service. This is the lesson taught in the description of the census taking of the tribe of Levi. The Levites, consecrated to God's service on a permanent basis and for their whole lives (and that of their sons) were, by their very presence, reminding Israel that they were a people destined for the service of God.

This clergy of Israel existed as such at the time of Christ. But later the early church would not give the Levites a privileged task, since Jesus had not been one of them, but had been born from the tribe of Judah.

The early Church had various ministries or services: bishops, presbyters, deacons. But the Church was very aware that all the baptized came to faith through a divine vocation (or call) and were consecrated to God (1 Cor 1:2). Now,

when the number of Christians increased, the Church began to be confused with entire populations. Were children who had been baptized automatically called by God? Could people who were officially Christians, but had not chosen Christ and were not concerned about the Gospel, be considered consecrated to God?

So, for centuries of Christianity, the Church came to be somewhat like what people of Israel had been. The clergy became the authentic people consecrated to God and his service, and the dignity of all the baptized was forgotten. The clergy was constituted a class above the Christian people, as had occurred in Israel, and once again the word priest was used to refer to them.

Expel from the camp... (5:11). Let us not forget that all of this was written in figurative language. The camp stood for the Holy Place, for the Temple. It was a way of saying which people were not allowed to enter the Temple.

those able to give military service, who will be given tasks in the Tent of Meeting.

²⁴ These are the duties of the Gershonites: ²⁵ They are to carry the curtains of the Holy Tent, the Tent of Meeting with its covering and the other covering of fine leather that goes over it, ²⁶ the screen for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the curtains for the court, the screen for the entrance to the court that is around the Holy Tent and the altar, the ropes and all the necessary equipment.

²⁷ They are to be responsible for these things. These are the duties of the sons of Gershon. Their functions and their tasks are to be carried out under the direction of Aaron and his sons: you must see that they fulfill their duties. ²⁸ Such shall be the duties of the Gershonites in the Tent of Meeting. Their work will be supervised by Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest.

The Merarite families

²⁹ You are to count the sons of Merari, by sub-clans and families. ³⁰ Count all the men between thirty and fifty years of age, those able to give military service, who will be given tasks in the Tent of Meeting.

³¹ The burden they are to carry and the duties that are to fall to them in the Tent of Meeting shall be as follows: the framework of the Holy Tent, its crossbars, its posts and bases, ³² the posts around the court with their bases, pegs, ropes and all the fittings used in setting them up. You are to draw up a list of their names with the duty that each man must fulfill.

³³ These are the duties of the Merarite clans. All their duties in the Tent of Meeting will be supervised by Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest."

Census of the Levites

³⁴ Moses, Aaron and the leaders of the community took a census of the sons of Kohath, by sub-clans and families, ³⁵ of every man between thirty and fifty years of age, able to give military service and to be given tasks in the Tent of Meeting, ³⁶ the total of their clans was 2,750 men. ³⁷ This was the number of the Kohathites, of all those who were given tasks in the Tent of Meeting whom Moses and Aaron counted at the Lord's command given through Moses.

³⁸ A census was taken of the sons of Gershon, ³⁹ by sub-clans and families, of every man between thirty and fifty years of age able

to give military service and to be given tasks in the Tent of Meeting. ⁴⁰ The total was 2,630 men. ⁴¹ This was the number of the Gershonites, of all those who were given tasks in the Tent of Meeting, whom Moses and Aaron counted at the Lord's command.

⁴² A census was taken of the sons of Merari, by sub-clans and families, ⁴³ of every man between thirty and fifty years of age, able to give military service and to be given tasks in the Tent of Meeting. ⁴⁴ The total was 3,200 men. ⁴⁵ This was the number of the Merarites whom Moses and Aaron counted at the Lord's command through Moses.

⁴⁶ The total number of Levites, counted according to clans and families – ⁴⁷ all the men between thirty and fifty years of age, able to give military service and to be given tasks of carrying burdens in the Tent of Meeting – amounted to 8,580. ⁴⁸ At Yahweh's command given through Moses, the census was taken to assign to every man his duty and his task; they were numbered as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

Various laws

5 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ² "Order the Israelites to put out of the camp all lepers, and all who suffer from a contagious infection, or who have become unclean by touching a corpse. ³ Man or woman, you must put them out and forbid them to return to the camp. The Israelites must not allow the camp where I dwell among them to become unclean in this way."

⁴ The Israelites did so: they put them out of the camp. The Israelites did as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

⁵ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ⁶ "Tell the people of Israel:

If anyone commits a fault against another person, and thus is unfaithful to Yahweh, ⁷ that person must confess the sin committed and give back in full the amount which was taken plus 20% more. Payment is to be made to the person who was wronged.

⁸ If, however, that person has died and there is no near relative to whom the ill-gotten goods can be returned, this payment owed to Yahweh shall be given to the priest, in addition to the ram of atonement with which the priest makes atonement for the guilty person. ⁹ For of everything consecrated by Israelites and brought to the priest he has a right to the share set aside. ¹⁰ Whatever a person consecrates is his own; whatever is given to the priest belongs to the priest."

¹¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹² "Say this to the people of Israel:

If anyone has a wife who goes astray and is unfaithful to him, ¹³ sleeping with some other man without the husband's knowledge, and she disgraces herself in secret in this way, without any witness against her, and without anyone catching her in the act; ¹⁴ then, perhaps the spirit of jealousy will come over the husband and make him jealous for the wife who has disgraced herself. But perhaps the spirit of jealousy comes upon the husband, and makes him jealous of his wife even though she is innocent. ¹⁵ In these cases the man must bring his wife before the priest, and on her behalf make an offering of two pounds of barley flour. He is not to pour oil on it or put incense on it, because this is an offering for jealousy; a memorial offering to record a fault.

¹⁶ The priest is then to bring the woman forward and stand her before Yahweh. ¹⁷ Then he shall take living water in an earthen jar, and on the water throw dust that he has taken from the floor of the Holy Tent. ¹⁸ After he has placed the woman before Yahweh, he shall loosen her hair and put in her hands the commemorative offering (that is, the offering for jealousy). In his own hands the priest will hold the bowl containing bitter water that brings a curse.

¹⁹ He is then to make the woman agree to an oath. He shall say to her: If it is not true that a man has slept with you, that you have gone astray and disgraced yourself while under your husband's authority, then may this water of bitterness and cursing do you no harm. ²⁰ But if it is true that you have gone astray, ²¹ may Yahweh make of you an example and a curse among your people, making your breast shrink and your stomach swell! ²² May this water of cursing enter your body to swell your stomach and to shrink your breast! The woman must answer: Amen! Amen!

²³ Then the priest shall write these curses down and wash them off in the bowl of bitter water. ²⁴ He must make the woman drink this water of bitterness and of cursing, and this water of cursing shall go into her and be bitter inside her.

²⁵ The priest shall then take the offering for jealousy from the woman's hands, and hold it up before Yahweh with a gesture of offering,

and so carry it up to the altar. ²⁶ He shall take a handful of the flour as a memorial, and burn it on the altar.

He shall then make the woman drink the water. ²⁷ After he has made her drink it, if it is true that she has disgraced herself, deceiving her husband, then the water of cursing that goes into her shall indeed be bitter: her belly will swell and her breast shrink, and she will be a curse among her people. ²⁸ But if she has not disgraced herself and is clean, then she will go unharmed and will bear children.

²⁹ This is the law in cases of jealousy, when a woman has gone astray and disgraced herself while under her husband's authority, ³⁰ or when a spirit of jealousy has come over a man and made him jealous for his wife. When a husband brings such a woman before Yahweh, the priest must apply this law to her in full. ³¹ The husband shall be guiltless, but the woman must bear the punishment for her sin."

The Nazirites

◆6 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel ² and say to them: When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to Yahweh, ³ he shall abstain from wine and strong drink. He shall not drink vinegar made from wine or strong drink; nor shall he drink the juice of the grape or eat fresh or dried grapes. ⁴ All the time he lives as a Nazirite he shall eat nothing produced by the grapevine, from the pips to the skin.

⁵ All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall touch his head. Until the time of his dedication to Yahweh is over, he will be a consecrated person and he shall let his hair grow freely. ⁶ For all the time of his separation in honour of Yahweh he shall not go near a dead person, ⁷ not even for his father, mother, brother or sister, lest he be defiled, for he bears on his head the sign of his consecration to God. ⁸ All the time he lives as a Nazirite he is consecrated to Yahweh.

⁹ If someone suddenly dies near him, his dedicated head is defiled. He then shall be purified on the seventh day and shave his head on that day. ¹⁰ Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meet-

◆ The Nazirites were men who consecrated themselves to God for a while or for life. Samson was a Nazirite (Jgs 13.5) and John the Baptist may have been one also (see Lk 1:15). There were also Nazirites among the first Christians of Jewish descent (Acts 21:23). See also Paul's vow

(Acts 18:18).

We do not know of any religious congregations in Israel as we now have in the Church. Therefore the law concerning the Nazirites enabled any believer to dedicate himself to God in a personal way.

ing.¹¹ The priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering; so he shall make atonement for his sin because of the dead person.¹² And that same day the Nazirite shall again consecrate his head and bring a yearling lamb as a guilt offering. The time of his consecration begins again from that day. The former days are not valid for his separation has been defiled.

¹³ This is the ritual regarding the Nazirite on the day when his period of consecration is completed. He is to be led to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting;¹⁴ and must make his offering to Yahweh: a one-year-old male lamb without any defects for burnt offering, a one-year-old lamb without any defects for sacrifice for sin; a ram without any defects for peace offering,¹⁵ and a basket of unleavened loaves made of fine flour mixed with oil, and of unleavened wafers spread with oil, with the required offerings of grain and wine.¹⁶ When he has brought all this before Yahweh, the priest must offer the sacrifice for sin and the burnt offering for the Nazirite.¹⁷ Then he shall offer the peace offering with the ram and the unleavened bread in the basket, and finally the priest shall offer the accompanying offerings of grain and wine.¹⁸ Then the Nazirite shall shave off his consecrated hair at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and put it in the fire of peace offering.¹⁹ The priest is to take the shoulder of the ram, as soon as it is cooked, with an unleavened cake from the basket, and an unleavened wafer. He is to put them into the hands of the Nazirite who has just shaved off his hair.²⁰ With them he must make the gesture of offering before Yahweh; as it is a holy thing, it belongs by law to the priest, in addition to the breast that has been presented and the leg of the ram that has been set aside. After this the Nazirite may once more drink wine.

²¹ Such is the ritual for the Nazirite, if, besides the hair, he has also vowed a personal offering to Yahweh, he must fulfill the vow he has made, in addition to what the ritual prescribes for his hair."

The blessing

o ²² Then Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ²³ "Speak to Aaron and his sons and say to them: This is how you shall bless the people of Israel; you shall say:

²⁴ May Yahweh bless you and keep you!

²⁵ May Yahweh let his face shine on you,

and be gracious to you!

²⁶ May Yahweh look kindly on you, and give you his peace!

²⁷ In that way shall they invoke my name on the people of Israel and I will bless them."

Offering of wagons

7 ¹ On the day Moses finished setting up the Holy Tent, he anointed and consecrated it with all its furniture, as well as the altar and all its equipment. When he had anointed and consecrated it all,² the leaders of Israel made an offering; these were the heads of the clans, who were leaders of tribes and had supervised the census.³ They brought their offering before Yahweh: six covered wagons and twelve oxen, one wagon for every two leaders and one ox each. They brought them before the Holy Tent.⁴ Yahweh then spoke to Moses and said, ⁵ "Accept these from them, and let them be set apart for the service of the Tent of Meeting. You are to give them to the Levites, to each as his duties require."

⁶ Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites.⁷ To the sons of Gershon he gave two wagons and four oxen for the duties they had to perform.⁸ To the sons of Merari he gave four wagons and eight oxen, for the duties they had to perform under the direction of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest.⁹ But to the sons of Kohath he gave none at all, because the sacred duty given to them had to be carried on their shoulders.

¹⁰ The leaders then made an offering for the dedication of the altar, on the day it was anointed. They brought their offering before the altar,¹¹ and Yahweh said to Moses, "Let the leaders each bring an offering each day for a period of twelve days for the dedication of the altar."

¹² On the first day an offering was brought by Nahshon son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah.¹³ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil,¹⁴ one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with

13. Acts 21, 23
10. Ezk 43, 18

20. Lev 7, 34

24. Ps 121, 7; Jn 17, 11

25. Ps 122, 6; Sir 36, 18

1. Ex 40, 17

o Blessing of Moses which St. Francis of Assisi always used.

incense. ¹⁵ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ¹⁶ one goat for the sacrifice for sin; ¹⁷ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab.

¹⁸ On the second day an offering was brought by Nethanel son of Zuar, leader of Issachar. ¹⁹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ²⁰ one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense. ²¹ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering. ²² one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ²³ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Nethanel son of Zuar.

²⁴ On the third day an offering was brought by Eliab son of Helon, leader of the sons of Zebulun. ²⁵ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ²⁶ one golden bowl weighing 50 ounces, filled with incense. ²⁷ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ²⁸ one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ²⁹ and for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Eliab son of Helon.

³⁰ On the fourth day an offering was brought by Elizur son of Shedeur, leader of the sons of Reuben. ³¹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ³² one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense. ³³ one young bull, one ram, and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering. ³⁴ one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ³⁵ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Elizur son of Shedeur.

³⁶ On the fifth day an offering was brought by Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, leader of the sons of Simeon. ³⁷ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ³⁸ one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense. ³⁹ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering,

⁴⁰ one goat for the sacrifice for sin; ⁴¹ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.

⁴² On the sixth day an offering was brought by Eliasaph son of Reuel, leader of the sons of Gad. ⁴³ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ⁴⁴ one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense, ⁴⁵ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering. ⁴⁶ one goat for sacrifice for sin, ⁴⁷ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Eliasaph son of Reuel.

⁴⁸ On the seventh day an offering was brought by Elishama son of Ammihud, leader of the sons of Ephraim. ⁴⁹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ⁵⁰ one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces filled with incense. ⁵¹ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁵² one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁵³ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Elishama, son of Ammihud.

⁵⁴ On the eighth day an offering was brought by Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, leader of the sons of Manasseh. ⁵⁵ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ⁵⁶ one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense. ⁵⁷ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁵⁸ one goat for the sacrifice for sin; ⁵⁹ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Gamaliel son of Pedahzur.

⁶⁰ On the ninth day an offering was brought by Abidan son of Gideoni, leader of the sons of Benjamin. ⁶¹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil. ⁶² one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense. ⁶³ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-



old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁶⁴ one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁶⁵ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Abidan son of Gideon.

⁶⁶ On the tenth day an offering was brought by Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai, leader of the sons of Dan. ⁶⁷ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled, for the grain offering, with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁶⁸ one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense, ⁶⁹ one young bull, one ram, and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering, ⁷⁰ one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁷¹ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai.

⁷² On the eleventh day an offering was brought by Pagiel son of Ochran, leader of the sons of Asher. ⁷³ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁷⁴ one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense, ⁷⁵ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁷⁶ one goat for the sacrifice for sin; ⁷⁷ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Pagiel son of Ochran.

⁷⁸ On the twelfth day an offering was brought by Ahira son of Enan, leader of the sons of Naphtali. ⁷⁹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁸⁰ one golden bowl weighing 4 ounces, filled with incense, ⁸¹ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁸² one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁸³ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Ahira son of Enan.

⁸⁴ These were the offerings made by the leaders of Israel for the dedication of the altar on the day it was anointed: twelve silver bowls, twelve silver sprinkling bowls, and twelve golden bowls. ⁸⁵ Each silver bowl weighed 50 ounces, and each sprinkling bowl 30 ounces, the silver of these objects weighing in all 60 pounds. ⁸⁶ The twelve golden bowls

filled with incense weighed 4 ounces each, the gold of these bowls weighing in all 48 ounces.

⁸⁷ The sum total of animals for the burnt offering: twelve bulls, twelve rams, twelve male one-year-old lambs, together with their accompanying grain offering. For the sacrifice for sin, twelve goats. ⁸⁸ The sum total of animals for the peace offering: twenty-four bulls, sixty rams, sixty goats, and sixty male one-year-old lambs.

These were the offerings for the dedication of the altar, after it had been anointed.

⁸⁹ When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the Mercy Seat which was on the Ark of the Covenant, from between the two cherubim.

8 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ² "Say this to Aaron: Set up the lamps, so that the seven lamps throw their light toward the front of the lampstand."

³ Aaron set up the lamps to the front of the lampstand, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ⁴ This lampstand was made of hammered gold; from its stem to its petals, it was of hammered gold. This lampstand had been made according to the pattern Yahweh had shown to Moses.

The Levites are offered to Yahweh

⁵ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ⁶ "Separate the Levites from the other Israelites and purify them. ⁷ You shall sprinkle them with the water of purification, and they shall shave their bodies all over and wash their clothing. They will then be clean. ⁸ They shall next take a young bull, with the accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take a second young bull for a sacrifice for sin. ⁹ Then bring the Levites before the Tent of Meeting, and call together the whole community of Israel. ¹⁰ When you have brought the Levites before Yahweh, the sons of Israel must lay their hands on them. ¹¹ Aaron shall then offer the Levites, and make the gesture of offering waving them before Yahweh on behalf of the Israelites. From that time, they will be dedicated to the service of Yahweh.

¹² The Levites must then lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, one of which you are to offer as a sacrifice for sin, and the other as a burnt offering to Yahweh; this is the rite of atonement for the Levites. ¹³ Having brought the Levites before Aaron and his sons, you will present them to Yahweh and wave them before



him. ¹⁴ So you shall set the Levites apart from the rest of the sons of Israel, so that they may be mine. ¹⁵ The Levites may begin their ministry in the Tent of Meeting when you have purified them and offered them with the gesture of offering. ¹⁶ They are given me from among all the sons of Israel. They are to replace all the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. I have taken them for my own. ¹⁷ For all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, man and beast, belong to me: the day I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated them to myself. ¹⁸ and now, in place of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, I have taken the Levites. ¹⁹ But now I give them to Aaron and his sons from among the sons of Israel and they will minister in the Tent of Meeting on behalf of the sons of Israel, and perform the rite of atonement over them, so that none of the sons of Israel may be struck down for approaching the sanctuary."

²⁰ Moses, Aaron and the whole community of the sons of Israel dealt with the Levites exactly as Yahweh had ordered Moses; this is what the sons of Israel did with them. ²¹ The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes, and Aaron presented them and waved them before Yahweh. Then he performed the rite of atonement over them. ²² The Levites were then allowed to perform their ministry in the Tent of Meeting in the presence of Aaron and his sons. As Yahweh had ordered Moses concerning the Levites, so it was done to them.

²³ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ²⁴ "This concerns the Levites. The Levite shall exercise his ministry and do his duties in the Tent of Meeting from the age of twenty-four onward. ²⁵ After the age of fifty, he is no longer bound to the ministry; he shall have no further duties; ²⁶ but he can still help his brothers to perform the services in the Tent of Meeting, though he himself will no longer have any ministry. See that this is the rule for the ministry of the Levites."

Date of the Passover

9 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the second year after the exodus from Egypt, in the first month. He said:

² "Let the sons of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. ³ The fourteenth day of this month, between the two evenings, is the appointed time for you to keep it. Then you must celebrate the Passover according to all the laws and customs proper to it."

⁴ So Moses gave orders for the sons of Israel to celebrate the Passover. ⁵ They cele-

brated it in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the two evenings. The people of Israel did exactly as Yahweh had ordered Moses.

⁶ It happened that some men had become unclean by touching a dead body and they could not celebrate the Passover that day. They came the same day to Moses and Aaron, ⁷ and said to them, "We have become unclean by touching a dead body. Why should we be forbidden to celebrate the sacrifice to Yahweh at the proper time with the rest of the Israelites?" ⁸ Moses answered them, "Wait there till I hear what Yahweh tells me about you."

⁹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁰ "Say this to the Israelites: If anyone, among you or your descendants, becomes unclean by touching a dead body or is far away on a journey, he can still celebrate the Passover for Yahweh. ¹¹ He shall do it one month later instead, on the fourteenth day, between the two evenings. Then you shall celebrate it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs; ¹² nothing of the victim must be left over until morning, nor must they break any of its bones: You shall keep all the regulations of the Passover. ¹³ But anyone who is clean and not away on a journey, and who fails to celebrate the Passover, shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the offering to Yahweh at its appointed time. So he must suffer the punishment for his sin.

¹⁴ "If a stranger is living among you and wants to celebrate the Passover for Yahweh, he must celebrate it in accordance with the laws and customs of the Passover. There is to be only one law among you, for settler and native alike."

By means of the cloud, God leads his people

¹⁵ On the day the Holy Tent, that is the Tent of Meeting, was set up, the Cloud covered it. At nightfall the Cloud took the appearance of fire over the Holy Tent and remained so until the morning. ¹⁶ The Cloud covered it continually in daytime and at night it looked like fire.

¹⁷ Whenever the Cloud lifted above the Tent, the Israelites took down their tents and continued their journey; whenever the Cloud stopped, there the Israelites camped. ¹⁸ The Israelites left at the command of Yahweh, and at his command they camped.

The people remained in camp as long as the Cloud rested on the Holy Tent. ¹⁹ As long as the Cloud stayed above the Holy Tent the Isra-



elites obeyed Yahweh and did not move on.

²⁰ Whether the Cloud happened to stay for many days above the Holy Tent or only one day, they camped at Yahweh's command and moved on at Yahweh's command. ²¹ If the Cloud happened to remain only from evening to morning, they moved on when it lifted the next morning. Or, if it stayed for a whole day and night, they moved on only when it lifted. ²² Sometimes it stayed there for two days, a month, or a year; however long the Cloud stayed above the Holy Tent, the Israelites remained in camp in the same place, and when it lifted they moved on. ²³ At Yahweh's command they camped, and at Yahweh's command they moved on. They obeyed Yahweh's command given through Moses.

10 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ² "Make two trumpets of hammered silver that you shall use for calling the people together, and for sounding the order to move on. ³ Whenever both trumpets are sounded, the whole community is to gather around you, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁴ But if only one trumpet is sounded, then only the leaders, the chiefs of clans are to gather around you.

⁵ When the trumpet sounds shrilly, the camps to the east shall move on. ⁶ At the second shrill blast, the camps pitched to the south shall move on. The trumpet blast shall be shrill when they are to leave; ⁷ but to gather the people, the trumpet shall be sounded plainly. ⁸ The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to sound the trumpets; this is a law for you and your descendants for all time to come.

⁹ When you are in your own land and are to go to war against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall sound the trumpet shrilly so Yahweh your God will remember you, and you will be delivered from your enemies.

¹⁰ On joyful occasions, on your festival and new moon feast, you will sound the trumpet at the time of your burnt offering and your communion sacrifices, and they will call you to the remembrance of your God. I am Yahweh your God."

Israel's armies in ordered array

¹¹ On the twentieth day of the second month in the second year after the people left Egypt, the Cloud lifted over the Holy Tent of the Covenant ¹² and the Israelites moved on, in marching order, from the desert of Sinai. The Cloud came to rest in the desert of Paran.

¹³ This was the first stage of the Israelites' journey at the command of Yahweh given through Moses: ¹⁴ in the front was the banner of the camp of the tribe of Judah, in battle formation. In command of Judah's force was Nahshon son of Amminadab; ¹⁵ in command of the tribe of Issachar, in battle formation, was Nethanel son of Zuar; ¹⁶ in command of the tribe of Zebulun, in battle formation, was Eliab son of Helon.

¹⁷ Then, the Holy Tent was taken down and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari started out, carrying the Holy Tent.

¹⁸ Then came the banner of the camp of the tribe of Reuben, in battle formation. In command of Reuben's force was Elizur son of Shedeur; ¹⁹ in command of the tribe of Simeon, in battle formation, was Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai; ²⁰ in command of the tribe of Gad, in battle formation, was Eliasaph, son of Reuel.

²¹ Then came the sons of Kohath, who carried the sanctuary (the Holy Tent was set up before their arrival.)

²² Then came the banner of the camp of the sons of Ephraim, in battle formation. In command of Ephraim's force was Elishama son of Ammihud; ²³ in command of the tribe of Manasseh, in battle formation, was Gamaliel son of Pedahzur; ²⁴ in command of the tribe of Benjamin was Abidan son of Gideoni.

²⁵ Last of all, serving as rearguard of all the camps, came the sons of Dan, in battle formation. In command of the force of Dan was Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai; ²⁶ in command of the tribe of the sons of Asher, in battle formation, was Pagiel son of Ochran; ²⁷ in command of the sons of Naphtali, in battle formation, was Ahira son of Enan.

²⁸ Such was the order of march for the Israelites, in battle formation. ²⁹ So they set out.

MEMORIES OF THE DESERT (1st PART)

+ ²⁹ Moses said to Hobab, son of Moses' father-in-law, Reuel the Midianite, "We are setting out for the land which Yahweh has promised to give us. Come with us, and we will treat you well, for Yahweh has promised hap-

piness to Israel." He answered, ³⁰ "I will not come with you. I would rather go to my own land and my own family." Moses replied, ³¹ "Do not leave us, for you know where we can camp in the desert, and so you will be our eyes."



³² If you come with us, you will share in the blessing with which Yahweh blesses us."

³³ They moved on from the Mountain of Yahweh, a three days' journey, and for three days the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh went before them, ³⁴ seeking out a resting place for them.

Yahweh's cloud was over them by day when they left the camp. ³⁵ Whenever the Ark left, Moses would say, "Arise, Yahweh, and let your enemies be scattered and let those who hate you flee before you." ³⁶ And when it came to rest, he would say, "Come back, Yahweh, to the multitude – the armies of Israel."

11 ¹ Now the people were seeking a quarrel against Yahweh. Yahweh heard and his anger was aroused. A fire from Yahweh flared out against them and burned the outer part of the camp. ² Then the people cried out to Moses and he interceded for them to Yahweh and the fire died out. ³ They called the place Taberah, because the fire of Yahweh was inflamed against them.

⁴ Now the rabble that was among them had greedy desires and even the Israelites wept and said, "Who will give us meat to eat?" ⁵ We remember the fish we ate without cost in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and garlic. ⁶ Now our appetite is gone; there's nothing to look at, nothing but manna."

⁷ Now the manna was like coriander seed and had the appearance of bedellium. ⁸ The people went about gathering it up and then ground it between millstones or pounded it in a mortar. They boiled it in a pot and made cakes with it which tasted like cakes made with

oil. ⁹ As soon as dew fell at night in the camp, the manna came with it.

¹⁰ Moses heard the people crying, family by family at the entrance to their tent and Yahweh became very angry.

This displeased Moses. ¹¹ Then Moses said to Yahweh, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Is it because you do not love me that you burdened me with this people?" ¹² Did I conceive all these people and did I give them birth? And now you want me to carry them in my bosom as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their fathers? ¹³ Where would I get meat for all these people, when they cry to me saying: 'Give us meat that we may eat?' ¹⁴ I cannot, myself alone, carry all these people; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ Kill me rather than treat me like this, I beg of you, if you look kindly on me, and let me not live in distress."

¹⁶ Yahweh said to Moses, "Assemble seventy men from the elders of Israel whom you recognize as elders and men of authority over them and bring them to the Tent of Meeting and let them take their stand there with you. ¹⁷ I shall come down to speak with you and I shall take some of the spirit that is in you and put it in them. From now on they will share with you the burden of the people so that no longer will you bear it alone.

¹⁸ You shall say to the people of Israel: Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of Yahweh, saying: Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt!

34. Ex 40, 34

35. Ps 68, 2

8. Ex 16, 13

11. Ex 32, 11

16. Ex 18, 21

+ This is the beginning of a series of ancient traditions which form the essence of chapters 11-14. In this section we use the normal print for these ancient stories and italics for the parts coming from the priests-editors of the book of Numbers.

- In this chapter two traditions are merged:
 - One referring to the quails and the manna, similar to what we have in Exodus 16.
 - The other, about the gift of the "spirit of Yahweh" to the elders, that is to the leaders of Israel.

Yahweh will give you meat and ¹⁹ you shall eat, not only one day, or two, or five or ten or twenty days ²⁰ but a whole month until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you. For you have rejected Yahweh who is in your midst and have wept before him saying: Why did we ever leave Egypt?"

²¹ And Moses said, "The people I am with are six hundred thousand on foot and yet you say, 'I will give them meat and they shall eat it for a whole month!'" ²² Will sheep and cattle be slaughtered in sufficient number for them?"

²³ And Yahweh said to Moses, "Is Yahweh's arm shortened? Now you shall see whether or not my word is true."

The spirit given to the elders

◆ ²⁴ Moses then went out and told the people what Yahweh had said. He assembled seventy men from among the elders and placed them round about the Tent. ²⁵ Yahweh came down in the cloud and spoke to him. He took some of the spirit that was upon him and put it on the seventy elders. Now when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But this they did not do again.

²⁶ Two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad, the name of the other Medad. However the spirit came on them for they were among those who were registered though they had not gone out to the Tent. As they prophesied inside the camp, ²⁷ a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸ Joshua, the son of Nun, who ministered to Moses from his youth said, "My lord Moses, stop them!"

²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets and that Yahweh would send his spirit upon them!" ³⁰ Then Moses and all the elders of the people returned to the camp.

³¹ A wind arose, sent by Yahweh, that drove in quails from the sea and let them down beside the camp covering the distance of a day's walk on one side and almost a day's walk on the other side around the camp; they were about three feet deep on the ground.

³² The people spent that day, the whole night and all the next day gathering the quail. He who gathered the least had ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves around the camp. ³³ The meat was still between their teeth when already the anger of Yahweh was

22. Jn 6, 7 23. Is 50, 2; Jer 32, 17; Eek 12, 25
29. Jl 3, 1; Acts 2 31. Ex 16

25. 1 S 10, 9; 19, 20; 2 K 2, 9 28. Mk 9, 58

◆ The first awareness that the Israelites had of the Spirit of God came to them through the prophets' deeds. The prophets were men who knew something of God's secrets, men with whom God had shared some of his wisdom, men who on certain occasions possessed an irresistible power. By the way the prophets acted, the Israelites came to understand that God communicated his spirit like a violent and sudden wind (in Hebrew the same word *ruah* means *spirit* and *wind*).

In order to better understand this story, it would help to compare it with 1 Sam 10:1-3 and 19:18-14.

This story teaches us that the Spirit acts in many varied ways (see 1 Cor 12 and 14). It is one thing to say and do strange things, to speak

in tongues, etc.; it is quite another and more important to have received the responsibility to guide and teach God's people. From Moses, God's representative (who did not speak in tongues nor prophesy while in a trance), the Spirit was poured out on the inspired ones.

The episode of Eldad and Medad also shows that God does not always give his Spirit through the official channels. It is true that Eldad and Medad were on the list, but they were not near Moses. The same way the authorities of the people of God should not be surprised if, at times, the Spirit is given where they are not and without asking their permission: such will be the case with Cornelius (Acts 10) and Paul (Acts 9).

Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets. (see Joel 3:1 and Acts 2:17).



kindled against the people and he struck them with a very severe plague.

³⁴ That place was named Kibroth-hattaavah because there they buried these greedy people. ³⁵ From Kibroth-hattaavah the people moved on towards Hazeroth where they remained.

Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses

12 ¹ Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married ² and they said, "Has Yahweh only spoken through Moses? Has he not also spoken through us?" And Yahweh heard.

³ Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than any man on the face of the earth. ⁴ Yet suddenly Yahweh said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, all three of you, to the Tent of Meeting." The three of them came out.

⁵ Yahweh came down in the pillar of cloud and, standing at the door of the Tent, called Aaron and Miriam. They both went out and ⁶ he said, "Listen carefully to what I say,

If there is a prophet among you, I reveal myself to him in a vision and I speak to him in a dream.

⁷ It is not so for my servant, Moses, my trusted steward in all my household.

⁸ To him I speak face to face, openly, and not in riddles, and he sees the presence of Yahweh.

Why then did you not fear to speak against my servant, against Moses?"

⁹ Yahweh became angry with them and he departed.

¹⁰ The cloud moved away from above the Tent and Miriam was there white as snow with leprosy. Aaron turned towards Miriam and he saw that she was leprous. ¹¹ And he said to Moses, "My lord, I beg you, do not charge us with this sin that we have foolishly committed. ¹² Let her not be like the stillborn whose flesh is half-eaten when he comes from his mother's womb."

¹³ Then Moses cried to Yahweh, "Heal her, O God, I beg of you." ¹⁴ But Yahweh said to Moses, "If her father spat in her face, would she not hide in shame for seven days? Let her then be confined outside the camp for seven days; only then shall she be admitted again."

¹⁵ And so Miriam was confined for seven days outside the camp and the people did not move on until she had been re-admitted.

¹⁶ After that the people set out from Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

Moses sends scouts to explore the Promised Land

13 ¹ Yahweh then spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Send men to explore the land of Canaan that I am giving to the sons of Israel; send one man from each of the ancestral tribes, all of them leaders."

34. Dt 9, 22	Ex 15, 20; Heb 20, 1	2. Ex 4, 15	7. Dt 34, 10; Heb 3, 2	8. 1 Cor 13, 12
10. Dt 24, 9	12. Ex 32, 11	14. Lev 13, 4	2. Dt 1, 19	

o In the Gospel Jesus would declare that no prophet is accepted by his own family (see Mk 6.4). Miriam and Aaron, the "brothers" of Moses, criticized what he was doing and they may have been right. However, it was an attempt to make themselves equal to Moses and God intervened to defend his prophet. God's answer clarifies two things:

- Moses has a special place in revelation: he is to establish the foundations of faith in a Liberating, Just, Holy and Merciful God and no prophet will be able to change that afterward. What is more, prophets will have to be accepted by the leaders of God's

people who are Moses' successors.

- To him I speak face to face. Visions and dreams can be one of God's ways of revealing himself to prophets, though these ways are of an inferior nature, since all kinds of spirits may be involved and they may even be illusions from the devil. In the case of Moses and the major prophets, God communicated from spirit to spirit. Taking over their freedom, he transformed and sanctified them.

Moses was a very humble man, a clear sign that he had encountered God.



³So Moses sent these men from the wilderness of Paran as Yahweh commanded. All were leaders among the Israelites ⁴and these were their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; ⁵from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; ⁶from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; ⁷from the tribe of Issachar, Igal; ⁸from the sons of Joseph and from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; ⁹from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; ¹⁰from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; ¹¹from the sons of Joseph and from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; ¹²from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; ¹³from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; ¹⁴from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; ¹⁵from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Mahci.

+ ¹⁶These are the names of the men sent by Moses to explore the country. But Hoshea, the son of Nun, Moses called Joshua.

¹⁷So Moses sent them to explore the land of Canaan and said to them, "Go up by the south and then into the hill country ¹⁸and see what the land is like, whether the people there are strong or weak, many or few. ¹⁹See also whether the land they live in is good or barren. See what their cities are like, if they are open camps or fortresses. ²⁰See if the soil is fertile or poor, if the land is wooded or not. Be courageous and take some of the fruit of the land." It was the season for early grapes.

²¹They went up and surveyed the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob near the entrance of Hamath.

²²They went up by the south and reached Hebron, an old city which had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt; the Anakites, Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi were living there.

²³And they came to the valley of Eshcol where they cut down a branch with a cluster of grapes. Two of them carried this by means of a pole. They also brought pomegranates and figs. ²⁴Because of the cluster that the sons of Israel had cut, they called that place the Valley of Eshcol.

²⁵After forty days of exploration, they returned. ²⁶They went and met Moses, Aaron and the whole community of Israelites in the wilderness of Paran at Kadesh. They gave an account to them and the whole community and showed them the fruit of this land. ²⁷And they said,

"We entered the land where you sent us, truly a land flowing with milk and honey and here is the fruit. ²⁸But how strong are the people who inhabit the land! The cities are fortified with walls and bars, and we even saw there descendants of the Anakites. ²⁹Amalekites live in the region of the Negeb; Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; the Canaanites are by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan."

³⁰Caleb then quieted the people who rose up against Moses and said, "We should go up and take over the land, for we shall surely overcome it."

27. Ex 3, 8

+ In those days, the land promised to the Hebrews was called Canaan. Later, it would be called Israel since the Israelites became its owners. Its name would also be Palestine. In their dreams they looked upon this land as a paradise. They cut a branch with a cluster of grapes which two of them carried on a pole. This fabulous detail shows a beautiful land "of milk and honey." This image is used by today's Israelites as the emblem of their country.

However, when the explorers return and stress how difficult it will be to conquer the land,

the people become discouraged. The Bible is full of God's marvelous promises to his people, but God does not want to give us things without any effort on our part.

Here, the Bible describes one of the great sins of Israel, as in Ex 32. It would not have been difficult for Israel to believe in Yahweh if he had not required that they conquer the land, a challenge which frightened them. In the same way today, many Christians filled with spiritual fervor get scared when the Church asks them to commit themselves to the task of justice and reconciliation in every area of the world.

³¹But the men who had gone up with him said, "We cannot advance against these people for they are stronger than we are."

³²And they spread a bad report about the land that they had explored, saying to the Israelites, "The land we went through to explore is a land that devours its inhabitants and all the people we saw there are men of great size. ³³We even saw giants (these giants were the Anakites). We felt like grasshoppers before them, and to them we must have seemed the same."

Rebellion at Kadesh

■ 14 ¹Then all the community broke out in loud cries and wept during the night. ²All the people grumbled against Aaron and Moses; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in Egypt or died in the wilderness. ³Why is Yahweh bringing us to this country where we shall fall under the sword, and our women and little children become part of the plunder? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" ⁴And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and return to Egypt."

⁵Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the Israelite community. ⁶Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh

from those who had explored the country, tore their clothes ⁷and then spoke to the whole community of Israel, saying, "The land we went through to explore is, indeed, a very good land. ⁸If Yahweh is pleased with us, he will lead us to this land and give it to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁹Only do not rebel against Yahweh, and don't be afraid of the people of the land for they will be bread for us; their protection is withdrawn and Yahweh is with us. Have no fear of them!"

¹⁰All the community spoke of stoning them when the Glory of Yahweh appeared before all the people of Israel in the Tent of Meeting.

"Yahweh said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn me? How long will they refuse to believe me, in spite of the signs I performed among them? ¹²I will strike them with a plague and destroy them, and then I will make of you a greater and more powerful nation than they are."

¹³And Moses said to Yahweh, "The Egyptians know that you have brought out this people from their midst by your power. ¹⁴and they told it to the inhabitants of the land. They know that you, Yahweh, are in the midst of your people, and that they have seen you face to face. They know that your cloud stands with your people and that you go before

33. Gen 6, 4

2. Ex 14, 11; 16, 3

12. Ex 32, 10; Gen 12, 2

14. 9, 15; Ex 13, 21

■ We can recall experiences very similar to this rebellion.

Fear is a bad adviser: it turns cowards into violent people.

Mediocre people kill the prophets either to preserve their peace, or to return "to the slavery of Egypt."

Yet, God comes to the rescue of the person who confronts the crowds for the sake of God.

How long will this people refuse to believe me. These words are also meant for all those who say in the face of alcoholism, graft and corruption, favoritism: nothing can be done. Such people are not constructive: they dis-

courage others and are anti-Christian.

Pardon then the sin of this people. Once again Moses appears in his role as intercessor. In his intimate relationship with the Lord, Moses has learned that God is rich in kindness and mercy.

God forgives, but this does not exempt people from having to pay the price of their errors. The rebellion of Kadesh and the following defeat are the reason why the Hebrews will be delayed in entering Canaan. For years they will be confined in Kadesh and those who do not want to become involved in the conquest of the land will die there.

them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ And now you would destroy this people at one go!

Then the nations that have heard of you will say: ¹⁶ Yahweh was not able to bring this people to the land he had promised them in oath, so he slaughtered them in the desert. ¹⁷ Now let your power be seen, my Lord. For, according to your words, ¹⁸ you are slow to anger and rich in steadfast love: you forgive sin and rebellion, yet you do not declare innocent those who are guilty, but you punish children to the third and fourth generation for the wickedness of their fathers. ¹⁹ Pardon then, I pray you, the sin of this people according to the greatness of your mercy just as you have pardoned them from Egypt even until now."

²⁰ Then Yahweh said, "I pardon them as you have pleaded, ²¹ but as truly as I live and the Glory of Yahweh fills the earth, ²² I swear that they will not see the land I promised to their fathers. For all these have seen my Glory and the signs I have performed in Egypt and in the desert, and yet have put me to the test ten times and have not heeded my voice. ²³ Only my servant Caleb will enter it, ²⁴ because he has a different spirit and because he has followed me faithfully. I will bring him to the land where he has already been and his descendants shall possess it, ²⁵ while the Amalekites and the Canaanites will remain in the valley.

So you shall turn tomorrow and leave for the desert by way of the Red Sea."

²⁶ Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, ²⁷ "How long will this wicked community grumble against me?" I have heard the

grumbings of the people of Israel against me. ²⁸ Say to them: As truly as I live, it is Yahweh who speaks, I will do to you what you have said in my hearing. ²⁹ All of you of twenty years or more, numbered in the census, who grumbled against me, your corpses will fall in the desert. ³⁰ You will not enter the land where I swore to settle you, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh and Joshua, son of Nun. ³¹ But your children, whom you said would be part of the plunder, them I will bring and they will know the land that you have rejected. ³² Your corpses will fall in the desert ³³ and your sons will wander with their flocks for forty years in the desert, bearing the guilt of your faithlessness till the last of you lies dead in the desert.

³⁴ According to the number of days spent in exploring the land – forty days, for every day a year – for forty years you shall bear the guilt of your sins and you shall know what it is to oppose me. ³⁵ I, Yahweh, have spoken. Surely this is what I will do to this wicked community that has conspired against me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed and this is where they shall die."

³⁶ The men sent by Moses to explore the land and who on their return had made the community grumble against him, ³⁷ those men who wickedly spread a bad report on the land, died of a plague before Yahweh. ³⁸ Only Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, survived out of those who went to explore the land.

³⁹ When Moses related this to the Israelites, the people mourned bitterly. ⁴⁰ They rose early in the morning and went up to the mountain saying, "Here we are! We have sinned but now we are ready to go to the place that Yahweh spoke of." ⁴¹ But Moses said, "Why are you going to disobey Yahweh's command? You will not succeed. ⁴² Do not go up, for Yahweh is not with you, lest you be struck down by your enemies. ⁴³ The Amalekites and the Canaanites are there ahead of you and you will fall by the sword, for you turned away from following Yahweh and he will not be with you."

⁴⁴ They insisted on going up to the top of the mountain but neither the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh nor Moses moved from the inside of the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in the hill country came down and defeated them, beating them back as far as Hormah.

18. Ex 20, 5; 34, 6;	Dr 5, 9; Jon 4, 2	21. Is 6, 3	23. Ps 95, 11	24. Jos 14, 6; Jdg 1, 20
25. Dt 1, 40	29. Heb 3, 17; 1 Cor 10, 5	43. Dt 1, 42		

MORE LAWS

15 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²"Tell this to the people of Israel: This is a rule for you when you have entered the land I give to you. ³When you make a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, either as a burnt offering or in payment of a vow, or as a voluntary gift, or on the occasion of one of your solemn feasts, whoever takes from his herds and flocks for a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh ⁴ shall bring also, as a gift to Yahweh, a grain offering of two pounds of fine flour mixed with two pints of oil. ⁵ He shall also make a wine offering, two pints for each lamb, in addition to the burnt offering or sacrifice. ⁶ For a man, he shall make a grain offering of four pounds of fine flour mixed with three pints of oil, ⁷ and a wine offering of three pints of wine, offering it as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh. ⁸ If he offers a bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, in payment of a vow or as a peace offering to Yahweh, ⁹ he shall offer also a grain offering of six pounds of fine flour mixed with four pints of oil, ¹⁰ and a wine offering of four pints of wine, as a burnt offering, sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh. ¹¹ This must be done for every bull, every ram, every lamb or goat. ¹² Whatever the number of victims you have for sacrifice, you must do the same for each of them.

¹³ This must be done by every man of your people who makes a burnt offering, as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh. ¹⁴ If any stranger living among you, or among your descendants, will also make a burnt offering, as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh: just as you act, so must the stranger do. ¹⁵ There shall be only one law for you and for the foreigner among you. This is a law that shall bind your descendants forever before Yahweh: you and the stranger are alike. ¹⁶ There is to be the same law, and the same regulation for you and for the stranger who lives among you."

¹⁷ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁸ "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: 'When you have entered the land to which I am bringing you, ¹⁹ and you eat the

bread of this country, you shall set aside a share for Yahweh. ²⁰ You must set aside one loaf as the first fruits of your grain, and set this offering aside like the one set aside from your threshing. ²¹ You are to set aside for Yahweh a share of the best of your flour, and your descendants are to do the same, from generation to generation.

²² If without meaning to do so, you fail in any of these commands that Yahweh has given to Moses ²³ and that Yahweh has commanded you through Moses, this is what you have to do, you and your descendants. ²⁴ If it is an unintentional fault of the community, the community as a whole must make a burnt offering of a young bull, a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh, with the required offering of flour and wine, and a he-goat must be offered as a sacrifice for sin. ²⁵ The priest must perform the ceremony of atonement over the entire community of Israel, and pardon will be given, since it was an unintentional fault and they have brought their offering as a burnt offering to Yahweh, not counting their sacrifice for sin for their unintentional fault. ²⁶ The entire community of Israel will be forgiven, as also the stranger who lives among them, since the entire people have sinned without meaning to do so.

²⁷ If it is an individual who has sinned unintentionally, he must offer a one-year-old goat in sacrifice for sin. ²⁸ The priest shall perform the ceremony of atonement before Yahweh over the person who has gone astray by this sin of inadvertence; when the ceremony of atonement has been performed over him, he will be forgiven, ²⁹ whether he is an Israelite, or a stranger living among them. There shall be only one law among you for the one who sins by an unintentional fault.

³⁰ But the one who sins deliberately, whether native or stranger, angers Yahweh himself. Such a person must be cut off from the community; ³¹ he has rejected the word of Yahweh and broken his command. This person must be entirely cut off because of sin.

1. Ex 29, 40; Lev 2, 1

27. Lev 4, 27

◆ In chapters 15-19 we again have laws and customs of Israel.

- 15:17: Instructions about offering the first batch of bread, or the first loaves from flour of the harvest. The people of God will be a well-trained and courteous people: they will not eat without giving thanks nor serve themselves first, but will offer the first part

to the Levite or the poor, which means offering it to God.

15:37: The *purple cord* can be compared to the badges which many people wear today: an external sign which is good insofar as it corresponds to an interior disposition. Jesus accepted this prescription (Mt 9:20) but he criticized those who wore these tassels only for show (Mt 23:5).

Breaking the sabbath

³² While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, a man was caught gathering wood on the sabbath day. ³³ Those who caught him gathering wood brought him before Moses, Aaron and the whole community. ³⁴ He was kept under guard because the penalty he should undergo had not yet been decided. ³⁵ Yahweh said to Moses, "This man must be put to death: the whole community shall stone him outside the camp." ³⁶ The whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him till he was dead, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

³⁷ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ³⁸ "Speak to the people of Israel and tell them to put a fringe on the hems of their garments and a violet cord on this fringe. ³⁹ You must then have a fringe, and the sight of it will remind you of all the commands of Yahweh. You are then to put them into practice, and no longer follow the desires of your heart and your eyes, which would lead you to go astray. ⁴⁰ So you will remember all my commandments to put them into practice, and you will be consecrated to your God. ⁴¹ It is I, Yahweh your God, who have brought you out of the land of Egypt so that I may be your God, I, Yahweh, your God."

Pretensions of Korah; rebellion of Dathan and Abiram

16 ¹ Korah, son of Izhar, son of Kohath, from the tribe of Levi – and also Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben – rebelled against Moses. ² Two hundred fifty Israelites followed him; all were well known leaders in the community and members of the council.

³ They came together and addressed Moses and Aaron saying, "It is enough! The whole community are consecrated to Yahweh and he lives

among them. Why then, do you set yourselves over the community of Yahweh?"

⁴ When Moses heard this, he threw himself face downward on the ground. ⁵ Then he said to Korah and all his followers, "Tomorrow morning Yahweh will make known who belongs to him and who is consecrated to him, and he will let them come near him." ⁶ You Korah with all your followers, take your censers tomorrow. ⁷ Then you will fill them with burning coals and put incense in them before Yahweh, and Yahweh will indicate the one who is holy. Sons of Levi, you have gone too far!"

⁸ Moses said to Korah, "Listen to me now, you sons of Levi. ⁹ Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the rest of the community of Israel, and called you close to himself for service in the Holy Tent of Yahweh, to stand before this community and perform the sacred service on their behalf? ¹⁰ He has called you to be near him, you and all your brother Levites with you, and now you want the office of priesthood as well! ¹¹ What is the misdeed of Aaron that you complain against him? It is against Yahweh himself that you and your followers have rebelled."

¹² Moses sent messengers to summon Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up. ¹³ Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to die in the

38. Dt 22, 12; Mt 23, 5; Lk 8, 44
3. Ex 19, 6

5. Ex 16, 7

41. Ex 20, 2; Lev 22, 33
9. Dt 10, 8

Ps 105, 16; Sir 45, 18; Jud 11

o The whole community is sacred and Yahweh lives among them. This is true but there is a hierarchy which comes from God. This is the lesson in this chapter and Paul will recall it later: "One cannot claim the honour of being a priest: he must be called by God as Aaron was" (Heb 5:4).

Several stories are combined in this text:

- in the first, the Levite Korah claimed for himself the privileges of the priests, sons of Aaron; and fire from heaven devoured him along with his two hundred partisans;
- in the second, Dathan and Abiram, from the tribe of Reuben, rebelled against Moses and the earth swallowed them up.

wilderness? Do you also want to lord it over us?" ¹⁴You did not bring us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor give us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you suppose that all these people are blind? We will not come."

¹⁵Moses then became angry and said to Yahweh, "Do not look favourably on their offering. I have not taken a single donkey, nor have I harmed any of them."

¹⁶Moses said to Korah, "You and all your company be present before Yahweh tomorrow, you and they, together with Aaron. ¹⁷Each of you take his censer, put incense on it and present it before Yahweh – 250 censers! – and Aaron will do the same."

¹⁸So every man took his censer and put incense in it and they stood at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹Korah assembled all the community against them at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and the Glory of Yahweh appeared to all the community.

²⁰Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, ²¹"Stand aside from this community so that I may immediately destroy them." ²²They fell on their faces and said, "God, God of the spirits of all mortals, for one man's sin will you become angry with the whole congregation?"

²³Yahweh answered Moses, ²⁴"Speak to the community and say this: Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram."

²⁵Moses got up and went towards Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed them. ²⁶He spoke to the community saying, "Move away from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing that belongs to them lest you perish because of all

their sins." ²⁷They withdrew from the area near the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; they came out and were standing with their wives, their sons and little ones.

◆ ²⁸Then Moses said, "By this you shall know that Yahweh sent me to do all these deeds and that it is not my doing. ²⁹If these men die a natural death, merely suffering the fate of all men, then Yahweh has not sent me. ³⁰But if Yahweh works a miracle and the earth, opening its mouth, swallows them, together with all they possess, and they descend alive to Sheol, you will know that these men have rejected Yahweh."

³¹As Moses finished saying all this, the earth under them split in two, ³²opened its mouth and engulfed them with their household and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. ³³They descended alive to Sheol with all that belonged to them; the earth covered them and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴On hearing their cries, all the Israelites who were around them fled, for they said, "Let not the earth swallow us as well!"

³⁵A fire then came forth from Yahweh and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense.

+17 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ²"Tell Eleazar, son of Aaron, the priest to take the censers from the blaze and scatter the fire some distance away, for the censers are now holy ³because these men sinned at the cost of their lives. Let the censers be made into plates to cover the altar, because they have been offered before Yahweh and are sacred. Let them be a sign to the Israelites."

⁴So Eleazar the priest, took the bronze censers of those men who were burned during the offering and had them hammered out to make a covering for the altar ⁵ and to serve as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no one who

15. 1 S 12, 3 22. Job 12, 10; Gen 18, 16; 1 S 24, 17 28. Ex 3, 12; Jn 2, 11

◆ Compare Nm 16:28 with John 5:19 and 5:36.



is not a priest, a descendant of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before Yahweh, lest he become like Korah and his followers, just as Yahweh had said to Eleazer through Moses.

Aaron pleads for the people

⁶ On the following day, the entire community of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have brought death to the people of Yahweh."⁷ As the community was rising together against Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the Tent of Meeting; and there was the Cloud covering it, and the Glory of Yahweh appeared.⁸ And Moses and Aaron went to the door of the Tent of Meeting.

⁹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁰ "Stand away from this community; I am going to destroy them here and now." The two of them threw themselves face downward on the ground. ¹¹ Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take the firepan, fill it with burning coals from the altar, put incense in it and hurry to the community to ask the mercy of Yahweh for them. The anger has come down from Yahweh and the terrible disease has begun."¹² Aaron did as Moses said and ran among the community, but the terrible disease was already at work among them. He put in the incense and asked for the mercy of Yahweh on the people. ¹³ Then he stood between the living and the dead, and the terrible disease stopped. ¹⁴ There were 14,700 victims of the terrible disease, not counting those who died because of Korah. ¹⁵ Then Aaron came back to Moses at the Tent of Meeting; the terrible disease had been stopped.

Aaron's branch

¹⁶ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁷ "Tell the people of Israel to give you walking sticks, one for each tribe; that is twelve sticks for the leaders of the twelve tribes, and write the name of each on his stick;¹⁸ and on the stick of Levi write the name of Aaron because he is the first among the families of Levi. ¹⁹ Then put them in the Tent of Meeting before the place where I meet you. ²⁰ The man whose stick sprouts will be the one I have chosen; this is how I shall stop the complaints that the Israelites make against you."

²¹ Moses spoke to the Israelites, and each of their leaders gave him a stick, twelve sticks in

all for their tribes; and Aaron's stick was among them. ²² Moses placed them before Yahweh in the Tent of the Meeting. ²³ On the following day, Moses came to the Tent of the Testimony and there, already sprouting, was Aaron's stick, standing for the tribe of Levi. Buds had opened, flowers had blossomed, and almonds had already ripened. ²⁴ Moses took all the sticks away from before Yahweh and brought them back to all the people of Israel; they examined them and each one took back his own stick.

²⁵ Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's stick before the Ark and keep it as a sign to these rebels, so that I will no longer hear their complaints and they may not die."²⁶ Moses did as Yahweh had commanded.

Atonement: the duty of the priesthood

²⁷ The people of Israel said to Moses, "We are lost! We are all to die! ²⁸ Anyone who draws near the Holy Tent of Yahweh dies! Are we doomed to die to the last one?"

18 ¹ Then Yahweh said to Aaron: "You and your sons, and your whole family shall be responsible for the sanctuary. You and your sons with you shall suffer the guilt for any faults committed while serving as priests in the Holy Tent. ² Let your brothers of the tribe of Levi, your father's tribe, come with you too. They are to join you and serve you, yourselves and your sons, before the Tent of the Statement. ³ They are to be at your service and the service of the whole Tent. But let them not come near the sacred vessels or the altar, lest they die and you as well. ⁴ They are to help you, they are to take charge of the Tent of Meeting for the entire ministry of the Tent, and no layman shall come near you.

⁵ Let you yourselves take charge of the sanctuary and the altar, and my anger will never again fall on the Israelites. ⁶ I myself have chosen your relatives, the Levites, from among the Israelites as a gift to you. They will belong to Yahweh, to serve at the Tent of Meeting. ⁷ But you and your sons will undertake the priestly duties in all that concerns the altar and all the sacred things that lie behind the veil. You will perform the worship services, the duties of which I entrust to your priesthood. But the layman who comes near shall die."

25. Heb 9

1. Heb 7, 25

+ Various miracles show Aaron's authority, and the effectiveness of his prayer because he is a priest chosen by God. Aaron's staff (17:23) images the fruitfulness that God

grants to every action done in response to his command and to every person who dedicates himself to him (Jer 17:8; Ps 92:15).

The priests' share

⁸ Yahweh said to Aaron: "I myself have given you all that is set aside for me, from every offering of the people of Israel. I give it to you and to your sons as your share forever. ⁹ This is what shall be yours of the most holy things, of the consecrated food: every offering that the Israelites give back to me, whether it be a grain offering or a sacrifice for sin or a sacrifice of repayment is a thing most holy; it shall belong to you and your sons. ¹⁰ You may eat these most holy things. Every male may eat them. You are to consider them sacred.

¹¹ To you also shall belong all the firstfruits that are set aside and offered by the Israelites; this I give to you, as well as to your sons and daughters, forever. Every person in your house who is clean may eat it. ¹² All the best of the oil, all the best of the wine and wheat, the firstfruits given by them to Yahweh, these I give to you. ¹³ All the first harvest of their land which they bring to Yahweh shall be yours. Every person in your house who is clean may eat them. ¹⁴ Everything in Israel which has been dedicated to me shall be yours. ¹⁵ Every firstborn brought to Yahweh shall be yours, the firstborn of all living creatures, whether child or animal. Nevertheless, you must make the people buy back the firstborn child and the firstborn of an unclean animal. ¹⁶ They must buy back the child in the month in which it is born at the price of five pieces of silver according to the official standard. ¹⁷ The firstborn of cow, sheep and goat – these alone you shall not buy back. They are holy: you must sprinkle their blood on the altar and burn the fat as a burnt offering, a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh; ¹⁸ the meat shall be yours, together with the breast that has been presented with the gesture of offering, and the right hind leg. ¹⁹ All that the Israelites set aside for Yahweh from the holy things, this I give to you, and to your sons and daughters, forever. This is a covenant of salt, an everlasting covenant before Yahweh, for you and your descendants after you."

The Levites' share

²⁰ Yahweh said to Aaron: "You shall have no property in the land of Israel, no share of it shall be yours. It is I who will be your share and

your inheritance among the people of Israel.

²¹ See, to the Levites I give as their inheritance all the tithes collected in Israel, in return for their services, for the ministry they render in the Tent of Meeting. ²² In this way the Israelites will no longer go near the Tent of Meeting; this sin would carry the death to them.

²³ The Levites will take care of the Tent of Meeting, and have the full responsibility for it. This is a law forever for all your descendants: because of this the Levites are to have no inheritance among the Israelites. ²⁴ The tithe that the people of Israel set aside for Yahweh, I give to the Levites for their inheritance. For this reason I have told them that they are to have no inheritance among the people of Israel."

²⁵ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said,

²⁶ "You are to say to the Levites: When you receive the tithe that the people of Israel must pay and which I am giving you as your inheritance, you are to set aside a part of this as a special contribution for Yahweh. ²⁷ This will take the place of the offerings of new grain and new wine that all the people have to give me. ²⁸ Thus you too will set aside a share for Yahweh, of all the tithes you receive from the Israelites, and you will give to Aaron the priest this part you have set aside for Yahweh. ²⁹ Out of all the gifts you receive you will set aside the best as a share for Yahweh.

³⁰ This best part that the Levites set aside shall be credited to you as an offering of the threshing floor and the wine press. ³¹ You may eat them anywhere, you and your families; this is your payment for serving in the Tent of Meeting. ³² You will not be guilty of any sin because of this, as long as you have presented the best part to Yahweh. You will not eat any of the gifts before the best part is offered. In this way you will not defile the sacred gifts of the Israelites and you will not die."

The ashes of the red cow

19 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said: ²"This is a regulation and a law that Yahweh gives to you. Say to the people of Israel that they are to bring you a red cow which has no defects and has never been made to work. ³You will give it to Eleazar the priest so that it may be taken outside the

9. Ex 44, 28

13. Ex 13, 12

20. Dt 10, 9; Jos 13, 14

25. Dt 14, 22

■ The letter to the Hebrews refers particularly to this chapter when it speaks of the sacrifices of the Old Testament which could not really give interior purity to men and were only announcing the perfect sacrifice of Christ (see Hb 9:13; and 13:11).

Verses 17-21 deal with water for purification. Many people used water in their religious rituals. Here we see how the Jews used it.

After washing us through baptism, the Church also uses holy water. The Church does not attribute magical power to it but is aware that

camp and slaughtered in his presence. ⁴ Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of the cow's blood on his finger, and sprinkle this blood seven times toward the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁵ The cow shall then be burned in his presence; including hide, flesh, blood, and the intestines too. ⁶ Then the priest is to take cedar wood, a twig of hyssop leaves and a red cord, and throw them on the fire where the cow is burning. ⁷ Finally he shall wash his clothing and bathe his body in water, after which he may go back to the camp, but he will remain unclean until evening. ⁸ The man who has burned the cow shall also wash his clothing and bathe his body in water and will remain unclean until evening. ⁹ A clean man shall gather up the ashes of the cow and put them outside the camp, in a clean place. They must be kept for the community of Israel to prepare the water of purification.

¹⁰ The man who has gathered up the ashes of the cow shall wash his clothing and will remain unclean until evening. This will be a law forever, for the people of Israel as well as for the stranger living among them.

A case of uncleanness

¹¹ Anyone who touches a corpse of any person whatsoever, will be unclean for seven days. ¹² He shall purify himself with these waters on the third and the seventh day, and he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third and the seventh day he will not be clean. ¹³ Anyone who touches a dead person, the body of a man that has died, and has not purified himself, defiles the Holy Tent of Yahweh; such a person must be cut off from Israel because the waters for purification have

not flowed over him; he is unclean, and his uncleanness remains in him.

¹⁴ This is the law when a person dies in a house. Anyone who goes into the house, or anyone who is already there, becomes unclean for seven days. ¹⁵ Equally unclean shall be every open jar and pot in the house that has not been closed with a lid or fastening.

¹⁶ Anyone in the open country who touches a person who has been killed, or a person who had died, or human bones or a tomb, becomes unclean for seven days.

¹⁷ For the unclean, you shall take some of the ashes of the cow that was offered for the sin and you shall throw it into water in a vessel. ¹⁸ A clean man shall dip in the water a twig of hyssop and sprinkle it on the house and everything in it, and on the persons as well who were there. And he shall sprinkle it on the one who touched the bone or the dead body or the one slain, or the grave.

¹⁹ The clean man shall sprinkle water on the unclean on the third and the seventh days. So, on the seventh day the unclean is cleansed; he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself on this day and in the evening he will become clean. ²⁰ But if the unclean man does not cleanse himself, he shall be cut off from the assembly, lest he defile the sanctuary of Yahweh. As long as the water of purification has not been thrown upon him, he is unclean.

²¹ This shall be a lasting ordinance for you. The man who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes and those who touch this water are unclean until the evening. ²² Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean and whoever touches it shall be unclean until evening."

MEMORIES OF THE DESERT (2nd PART)

You did not trust me

◆20 ¹ The whole congregation of Israel came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month and the people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died and was buried there.

² Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered

together against Moses and Aaron. ³ They disputed with Moses saying, "Would that we had perished with our kinsmen in the presence of Yahweh!

⁴ Why have you led Yahweh's community to this desert to die here with our cattle? ⁵ And why did you bring us out of Egypt to this wretched!

6. Lev 14 9. Heb 9, 13; 13, 11 11. Lev 21, 2; Hg 2, 13 19. Dt 21, 1 1. Ex 17, 1 2. Ex 14, 11

visible signs help bring about proper dispositions in us: the sign of the cross with holy water, made attentively and with faith, helps us put aside our daily preoccupations at the entrance to the church.

◆ With chapters 20-25 we return to ancient traditions concerning the desert events. Once again in this section, we will use normal print for the ancient story and italics for paragraphs added by the priests.

place? It's no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates and there's not even water for drinking."

⁶Moses and Aaron fled from the assembly to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and fell on their faces. Then the Glory of Yahweh appeared and Yahweh spoke to Moses. ⁸"Take your rod and assemble the community, you and Aaron, your brother. In their presence command the rock to give forth water and you will make water gush from the rock for the community and their livestock to drink."

⁹So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as he had been ordered.

¹⁰Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly in front of the rock and said to them, "Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you from this rock?" ¹¹Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. And then water in abundance gushed out for the community and their livestock to drink.

¹²But Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "You did not trust me nor treat me as the Holy One in the sight of the Israelites; because of that you shall not lead this community into the land that I am giving you."

¹³It was at the waters of Meribah that the sons of Israel quarreled with Yahweh and where he showed his holiness to them.

Edom refuses right of way

¹⁴Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to

the king of Edom, and they said to him, "This is the petition of your brother Israel: you know the trials we had to suffer. ¹⁵Our fathers went down to Egypt and we lived there for a long time. But the Egyptians treated us badly as they did our fathers. ¹⁶Then we cried to Yahweh and he listened to us. He sent an angel to bring us out of Egypt and now we are in Kadesh, the town which is on the borders of your territory. ¹⁷We want you to let us pass through your land. We will not cross any fields or vineyards, or drink any water from the wells, but we will keep to the king's road without turning to right or left until we are out of your land."

¹⁸Edom answered, "You shall not pass through my land. If you do, I will come out to attack you." ¹⁹The Israelites then said, "We will keep to the road and we will even pay for the water we and our cattle drink. We ask only for your permission to pass through with our sheep."

²⁰Edom answered, "You shall not pass through." And the Edomites marched out to meet Israel with many armed men and a strong army. ²¹It was so, as Edom refused to let Israel pass through his land, and Israel had to turn away.

Death of Aaron

²²The Israelites set out from Kadesh and the whole community came to Mount Hor.

²³There, on the border of the land of Edom, Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, ²⁴"Aaron must now be gathered to his people. You shall not enter the land that I am giving to Israel since you rebelled against me at the waters of Meribah. ²⁵Take Aaron and Eleazar, his son, and bring them up Mount Hor. ²⁶There, strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son, before Aaron is gathered to his people. For he is to die there."

²⁷Moses did as Yahweh ordered. In the sight of the whole community they went up Mount Hor. ²⁸There Moses stripped Aaron of

11. 1 Cor 10: 4; Jn 7: 38 12. Dt 1: 37; Num 106: 32

The event related at the beginning seems to be the same as the one in Ex 17:1. You did not trust me. This reproach is somewhat mysterious: nevertheless, Moses' sin seems to be in his answer of verse 10. He did not dare say: "Yahweh will make water spring forth from this rock," but instead, as if doubting, he said: Shall we bring water from this rock? The prophet was supposed to give a command to the rock and not to dialogue with the people.

Thus, in the life of their greatest prophet, the Jewish people saw the wounds of sin and lack of

faith. The Bible adds that because he did not trust God in that place, Moses did not have the joy of bringing Israel to the land of Canaan. This, in fact, contains a much more profound lesson: Moses could not introduce Israel to their real homeland and neither could he, himself, come to it, without having been redeemed by another.

As Paul reminds us: "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23) and all need Christ.

Another example of materialism can be noted in 20:5.

14. Jdg 11: 16 16. Ex 23: 20 28. 33, 38; Ex 29: 29

his garments and put them on Eleazar his son, and Aaron died there on top of the mountain. ²⁹When the Israelites saw that Aaron had died, the whole community wept for him for thirty days.

21 ¹ When the Canaanite king of Arad, in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he attacked Israel and took some prisoners. ² Then Israel made this vow to Yahweh, "If you put these people into my hand, I will consecrate their towns by anathema." ³ Yahweh heard the voice of Israel and delivered the Canaanites into their hands. They were wiped out and their towns were destroyed according to the anathema. Because of this that place was named Hormah.

The bronze serpent

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the Red Sea road to go around the land of Edom. The people was discouraged by the journey ⁵ and began to complain against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is neither bread nor water here and we are disgusted with this tasteless manna."

⁶ Yahweh then sent fiery serpents against them. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died. ⁷ Then the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, speaking against Yahweh and against you. Plead with Yahweh to take the serpents away."

Moses pleaded for the people ⁸ and Yahweh said to him, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a standard; who-

ever has been bitten and then looks at it shall live."

⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a standard. Whenever a man was bitten, he looked towards the bronze serpent and he lived.

Towards Transjordan

¹⁰ The Israelites set out and camped at Oboth, ¹¹ Then they left Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness that borders Moab, toward the sunrise. ¹² They set out from there and camped in the Valley of Zered. ¹³ They set out from there and camped beyond the Arnon. This valley in the desert begins in the land of the Amorites and is on the border of Moab, between the Moabites and the Amorites. ¹⁴ Because of this, it is written in the book of the Wars of Yahweh: Waheb, by Suphah, and the Valley of Arnon ¹⁵ and the slope of the ravine that runs down to Ar along the border of Moab.

¹⁶ From there they went on to Beer. This is the well of which Yahweh said to Moses, "Call the people together and I will give them water." ¹⁷ Then it was that Israel sang this song, "Let the water spring! Sing out for the well; ¹⁸ the well sunk by princes, the well dug by the leaders of the people with their sticks, with their staves."

From the desert they went to Mattanah: ¹⁹ from Mattanah to Nahaliel; from Nahaliel to Bamoth; ²⁰ from Bamoth to the valley that gives on to the country of Moab, toward the heights of Pisgah which looks down on the desert.

Conquest of Transjordan

²¹ Israel sent this message to Sihon, king of the Amorites, ²² "We want to pass through your land. We will not cross any fields or vineyards or drink any water from the wells. We

1. 33, 40; Jdg 1, 16 5. Ex 14, 11 6. 1 Cor 10, 9 8. 2 K 18, 4; Jn 3, 14 10. Dt 2, 26

¹⁰ The people complained. The Israelites complain again: this is the inner rebellion of those who do not accept sacrifices and will not exert the necessary efforts in order to become better and who, instead, blame others.

¹¹ Make a bronze serpent. A strange command to the Israelites, but the bronze serpent will be a prophetic sign: God wants to cure the sin with the very instrument of the sin.

¹² Whoever looks at it shall live: another prophetic statement. Sinners will not have to follow strict prescriptions: let them merely look with faith at the sign God sends for their healing. Jesus will say: "Just as Moses lifted up the

serpent in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up (on the cross) so that he who believes in him will have eternal life" (Jn 3:14).

The story of the serpent in the Bible is one of those images with a hidden meaning, and people had to wait for the day when Christ would give them meaning. The same happens with the story of Melchizedek (Gen 14) and the story of Joseph.

The same is true in our lives; in our past there have been some incidents which we did not understand at that time. Why did this happen to me? Some day, the light of Christ will reveal the meaning.

will keep to the king's road until we are out of your land."

²³But Sihon refused to let Israel pass through his land. He gathered all his people, marched into the desert to meet Israel and reached Jahaz. There he gave battle to Israel. ²⁴But Israel struck him down and conquered his country from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the Ammonites' land. ²⁵Israel occupied all the cities and the towns of the Amorites, including Heshbon and the towns depending on it.

²⁶Heshbon was the capital of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and captured from him all this territory as far as the Arnon. ²⁷Because of this the poets continue singing this song: "Courage, Heshbon, city of Sihon, well built and well founded! ²⁸A fire came out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon. It devoured Ar of Moab and the Baals of the high places of Moab. ²⁹Woe to you, Moab! You are lost, people of Chemosh! Your sons have fled; your daughters were taken captive. ³⁰For Sihon, king of the Amorites, has destroyed Heshbon. The little children and the women were brought as far as Dibon and Nophah, the men were taken as far as Medeba."

³¹When the Israelites settled in the country of the Amorites, ³²Moses sent spies to explore Jazer. Israel took this city with all the towns depending on it, and the Amorites who lived there were eliminated.

³³After that the Israelites turned and went up to Bashan. Og, king of Bashan, set out with all his people to meet them and gave them battle in Edrei. ³⁴Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him, for I have given him into your hands with all his people and his land. You shall deal with him as you did with

Sihon, king of the Amorites who lived in Heshbon." ³⁵The Israelites killed him, his sons and all his people to the last. And they took possession of his land.

22 ¹Then the Israelites journeyed on and camped in the plains of Moab along the Jordan opposite Jericho.

The story of Balaam

■ ²Now Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that the Israelites had done to the Amorites. ³And the Moabites were afraid of Israel, because it was a very numerous people. In fact, they were terrified. ⁴So the Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "Look, this horde is destroying everything around us as easily as the ox eats the grass of the field."

So Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab at the time, ⁵sent messengers to summon Balaam, son of Beor at Pethor, near the Euphrates in the land of the Amawites. Balak said, "A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the earth and are settling opposite me. ⁶Come and put a curse on these people because they are too powerful for me. Then perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I well know that those you bless are indeed

28. Jer 48, 45 2. 31, 8; Dt 23, 5; Jos 24, 9; Ne 13, 2; Mt 6, 5; 2 P 2, 15; Rev 2, 14 7. 1 S 9, 7

+ After their years of confinement in Kadesh were over, the Israelites together with Moses started their march toward the land of Canaan which they had to conquer.

They surrounded the country to the south and the east and temporarily settled in the territories east of the Jordan. Two victories occurred there and, once again, the Israelites saw that God saves his people. In Psalm 136, after praising God "who made them cross the Red Sea because his love is everlasting" they recall that "he struck great kings to death, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan."

■ Here begins the very meaningful story of Balaam, developed in the form of a legend. When they set out on the way to freedom, the people of God faced several enemies as well as their own cowardice about the sacrifices asked of them. But an even greater danger threatens

them now without their knowing it: Balaam is coming from Babylon, land of sorcerers, to bring curses upon them, not from God but from the devil. Everyone knows, though we may use more modern words to express this curse – that our own demons can lead us to disaster: to civil war or economic failure.

In the rest of the Bible we read how God reminded the Israelites of the way he protected them in the Balaam incident: not only did God shield them from their visible human enemies, but also from invisible ones which neither men nor rulers could foresee or detain (see Joshua 24:9 and Micah 6:5).

I did not want to sin, but I did not know you were on the road (22:34). What a likeable sorcerer Balaam is. He is obstinate in his crooked projects until he discovers that God himself blocks his way!

blessed and those you curse are cursed."

⁷The elders of Moab and Midian set out, taking with them the fee for divination. They went to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. ⁸Balaam said to them, "Stay here tonight and I will give you whatever answer Yahweh will have given me." So the Moabite elders stayed in Balaam's house.

⁹God came to Balaam and asked him, "Who are these men with you?"

¹⁰Balaam said to God, "Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent them to me with this message: ¹¹A people has come out of Egypt and covers the face of the earth. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps I shall then be able to fight and drive them away." ¹²But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you must not put a curse on them because they are blessed."

¹³Next morning Balaam got up and said to the elders of Balak, "Return to your country for Yahweh has refused to let me go with you." ¹⁴So the Moabite elders returned to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

¹⁵Balak sent other leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. ¹⁶They went to Balaam and said, "This is what Balak, son of Zippor says: Do not refuse to come to me; ¹⁷I will greatly honour you; whatever you ask of me I will do for you. Please come and lay a curse on this people for me."

¹⁸Balaam answered the servants of Balak, "Even if Balak gave me his house full of silver and gold I could not do anything great or small beyond the command of Yahweh, my God. ¹⁹Now you, too, stay here tonight as the others did, till I wait for what else Yahweh may tell me."

²⁰God came to Balaam at night and

said, "If these men have come to summon you, go with them, but you may only do what I tell you." ²¹Balaam got up next morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite leaders.

Balaam's donkey

²²But the anger of God was aroused because of his going and Yahweh's angel posted himself on the road, a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam was riding on the donkey and his two boys were with him. ²³When the donkey saw the angel, she turned off the road and went into the field. Then Balaam hit the donkey to get her back on to the road. ²⁴But the angel of Yahweh stood on a narrow lane between vineyards with a stone wall in either side. ²⁵When the donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, she shrank against the wall crushing Balaam's foot against it so he beat her again.

²⁶Then Yahweh's angel went ahead and stopped at a narrow place where there was no room to go either to the right or left. ²⁷When the donkey saw Yahweh's angel there, she lay down under Balaam; he was angry and beat her with a stick.

²⁸But now Yahweh opened the mouth of the donkey and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me three times?"

²⁹Balaam answered, "You have made a fool of me. If I had a sword just now I would kill you." ³⁰And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey that you have ridden to this day? Have I ever dared to do this to you?" He said, "No!"

³¹Then Yahweh opened Balaam's eyes and he saw Yahweh's angel standing on the road with a drawn sword. He bowed and fell downward, his face to the ground.

³²Yahweh's angel said to him, "Why did you strike your donkey three

times? I have come here to oppose you because you are going a wrong way. ³³The donkey saw me and turned away three times. Otherwise I would have killed you, but not her."

³⁴And Balaam said to Yahweh's angel, "I did not want to sin. I did not know you were posted against me on the road. But if this journey displeases you I will go back."

³⁵Yahweh's angel said to Balaam, "Go with these men, but you may say only what I tell you." So Balaam went on with Balak's men.

Balaam and Balak

³⁶When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went to meet him at the boundary city of Moab on the Arnon border. ³⁷Then Balak said to Balaam, "I sent an urgent summons to you; why didn't you come? Did you think I would not pay you well enough?"

³⁸Balaam then said to Balak, "Now I have come to you; but what can I say? Only what Yahweh puts on my lips."

³⁹So Balaam went with Balak and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. ⁴⁰There Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep and gave some to Balaam and the leaders who were with him. ⁴¹Next morning Balak took Balaam up to the high places of Baal and from there he saw some of the people of Israel.

23

¹Balaam said, "Build me seven altars here and prepare seven bullocks and seven rams for me." ²Balak did just as Balaam had ordered and Balak and Balaam offered up a bullock and a ram on each altar. ³Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your offering while I go aside. Perhaps Yahweh will meet me and whatever he lets me see I will tell you." So he went to a barren hill.

⁴God met Balaam who said, "I have prepared the seven altars and on each altar I have offered a bullock and a ram." ⁵Yahweh then put a message on Balaam's lips and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message." ⁶Balaam returned and found Balak standing beside his offering, together with the leaders of Moab. ⁷Then Balaam pronounced his oracle:

"From Aram, Balak has brought me, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains: Come, curse Jacob for me!

Come, denounce Israel! ⁸How can I curse him whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce him whom God has not denounced?"

⁹From the peak of the crags I see him, from the heights I behold him. I see a people that lives apart, a people different from all the nations.

¹⁰Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright and may my end be like theirs!"

¹¹Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies and you have actually blessed them."

¹²And Balaam answered, "Must I not take care to say what Yahweh puts on my lips?"

¹³Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place where you will see them. You will not see all of them, only the tail end, and there you shall curse them for me." ¹⁴So he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah and built seven altars and offered a bullock and a ram on each altar. ¹⁵Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your burnt offering while I go and meet Yahweh over there."

¹⁶Yahweh met Balaam and put words on his lips and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message." ¹⁷He returned and found Balak posted beside his burnt offering with the leaders of Moab. Balak asked, "What did Yahweh say?" ¹⁸Balaam then pronounced his oracle,

"Be ready to hear, Balak; listen to me, son of Zippor. ¹⁹God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent. Has he said he will do something and will not do it? Has he promised something and not fulfilled it?"

²⁰See, I have received a command to bless: when he has blessed I cannot change it. ²¹He has not seen misfortune in Jacob or observed misery in Israel. Yahweh, their God is with them, and the shout of a king among them.

²²God has brought them out of Egypt; he is for them like the horns of a wild ox. ²³There are no diviners or magicians in Israel. But it shall be made known to them what God will do with them.

²⁴Behold a people that rises like a lioness, that rouses itself like a lion. It shall not lie down before it devours its prey, and drinks the blood of its victims."

²⁵Balak said to Balaam, "Even though you cannot curse them, do not bless them." ²⁶But Balaam answered, "Did I not tell you that whatever Yahweh says, I will do?" ²⁷And

Balak said to Balaam, "Come, I will take you to another place. Perhaps it is God's will that you curse them for me there."

²⁸ Then Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor which overlooks the wasteland, ²⁹ and Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here and prepare seven bullocks and seven rams." ³⁰ Balak did just as Balaam ordered and offered a bullock and a ram on each altar.

Balaam's blessing

24 ¹ But Balaam saw that Yahweh did willingly bless Israel. He did not seek out signs as he had done before, but turned towards the desert. ² He looked up and saw Israel camping, tribe by tribe; and the spirit of God came upon him ³ and he uttered his song:

"Word of Balaam, son of Beor, the seer, the one who hears the words of God,

⁴ and beholds the vision of the Almighty, in ecstasy, with eyes unveiled.

⁵ How goodly are your tents, Jacob, your encampments, Israel!

⁶ Like valleys stretching far, like gardens beside a stream, like aloes planted by Yahweh, like cedars beside the waters.

⁷ His king becomes stronger than Agag, and his kingdom grows.

⁸ His God brought him out of Egypt and fights for him like the horns of a wild ox.

He devours the carcasses of his enemies and crushes their bones in pieces.

⁹ He lies like a lion, or like a lioness; who dares rouse him?

Blessed is he who blesses you!

And cursed is he who curses you!"

¹⁰ Balak's anger burned against Balaam: he beat his hands together and said, "I called you to curse my enemy and you have blessed him three times! ¹¹ So flee to your place now. I said I would greatly reward you but Yahweh has taken off your reward."

¹² Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers: ¹³ though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, good or bad, of my own accord beyond Yahweh's command. What Yahweh speaks, I speak. ¹⁴ Now, before I return to my people, come that I may warn you what this

people will do to your people in the days to come."

+ ¹⁵ Then Balaam pronounced his oracle:

"Word of Balaam, son of Beor, the seer,

¹⁶ the one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High,

and sees the vision of the Almighty, in ecstasy, with eyes unveiled.

¹⁷ I see a figure, but not really.

I behold him but not near.

A star shall come forth from Jacob, he rises with the staff in his hand; he shatters the forehead of Moab and tears down all the sons of Sheth.

¹⁸ He conquers the land of Edom, and takes the cities of his enemies. Israel grows strong;

¹⁹ Jacob reaches to the first place."

²⁰ Then Balaam looked to Amalek's country; he said, "Amalek, the first of the nations, will finally meet with destruction."

²¹ Then he looked to the Kainite land and continued his oracle: Your dwelling place is enduring, your nest is set in the rock. ²² but you shall be destroyed; and finally Asshur shall take you captive."

²³ Balaam continued his oracle and said: "Alas! Who will live when God does this?"

²⁴ Ships shall come from Kittim and shall conquer Asshur, but also Eber; they too shall be destroyed."

²⁵ Then Balaam rose and set out on his journey home while Balak also went on his way.

Israel's licentiousness in Baal Peor

25 ¹ Israel settled at Shittim and the men began to enjoy themselves with the Moabite women and to have sex with them. ² These women invited the people to the sacrifices of

5. Is 54, 2 9. Gen 12, 3 17. Rev 2, 28; Gen 49, 10; Jer 48, 45 24. Dn 11, 30 2. 1 Cor 10, 8; Rev 2, 14

+ This prophecy shows us how God wants to proclaim the marvelous destiny of his people to the whole world, even through Balaam's mouth. We single out the most famous of the poems, or prophecies of Balaam (24:15-19) announcing the *star of Jacob*. This star referred to king

David, chosen by God to begin the Rule of God in Israel. Through him we recognize another one, Christ, the truly chosen one of God.

♦ Sexual licentiousness is not without effect on a people's welfare. It is not a question of

their gods. There the people ate and bowed down before their gods.

³ The Israelites prostituted themselves to the god of Peor, so Yahweh became angry against them ⁴ He said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people and hang them in broad daylight before Yahweh, so that his fierce anger may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses told the Israelite judges, "Each of you shall slay any of your men who have joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor."

⁶ Then a man, an Israelite, came back bringing a Midianite woman to his family in view of Moses and the Israelite community while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁷ When Phinehas, a son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand ⁸ and followed the Israelite into the tent. There he drove the spear through both the man and the woman. So the plague against the Israelites was checked ⁹ but those who had already died numbered twenty-four thousand.

¹⁰ Yahweh spoke to Moses, ¹¹ "Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned away the strikes of my anger from the sons of Israel, zealous as he was for me; he has defended my honour among you. Because of this, I did not feel zealous for my honour so that I should destroy the people of Israel.

¹² Therefore tell him that I am making with him a covenant of friendship. ¹³ I grant to him and his descendants that they be my priests forever, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel."

o ¹⁴ The Israelite slain with the Midianite woman was Zimri, son of Salu, a leader of a Simeonite family. ¹⁵ And the name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi, daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family.

¹⁶ Yahweh said to Moses, ¹⁷ "Attack the Midianites and crush them, ¹⁸ for they have been your enemies, deceiving you with regard to Peor and with regard to Cozbi, their kinswoman, daughter of a Midianite leader, who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor."

After the plague, it happened that . . .

3. Dt 4, 3

13. Ex 32, 25; Dt 33, 8; Erk 44, 15

private morality, but it weighs heavily on the social development insofar as it is related to the level of responsibility and capacity for self-sacrifice. In the Bible, the struggle against sexual immorality always goes hand in hand with faithfulness to God.

When the Israelites took the land of Canaan over, the pagan cults of that country were a constant temptation for them. One of the most common practices of these cults consisted in having relations with prostitutes consecrated to the god Baal. As a lesson, we are told here that the people had already fallen into that sin at the time of Moses, and also what the punishment was. To

unite with a prostitute was to be united with the god Baal, and the only God does not tolerate such treason: a double prostitution, the physical one and the infidelity of man betraying his Saviour.

He was zealous for his God: he was not afraid of being called a puritan, a man with outdated ideas, with an intolerant mind. He did not resign himself to laughing and taking pictures.

o Here conclude the ancient traditions referring to the time of Moses. Yet, in Deuteronomy 34, we find the remembrance of Moses' death.

LAWS AND FEASTS

The second census

26 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest. He said: ²"Take a census of all the community of Israel, by families: all those of twenty years and over, able to give military service." ³So Moses and Eleazar the priest enlisted the people in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan opposite Jericho as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ⁴They counted the men twenty years and over among the Israelites who had come out of the land of Egypt.

⁵Reuben, the firstborn of Israel. The tribe of Reuben: for Hanoch, the Hanochite clan; for Pallu, the Palluite clan; ⁶for Hezron, the Hezronite clan; for Carmi, the Carmite clan. ⁷These were the Reubenite clans. They numbered 43,730 men.

⁸The descendants of Pallu: Eliab. ⁹The sons of Eliab: Nemuel, Dathan and Abiram. These two, Dathan and Abiram, councillors of the community, were the ones who rebelled against Moses and Aaron; they belonged to the followers of Korah who rebelled against Yahweh. ¹⁰The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them (Korah died with his followers), when fire destroyed the 250 men as a warning to the people. ¹¹The sons of Korah were not killed.

¹²The tribe of Simeon by clans: for Nemuel, the Nemuelite clan; for Jamin, the Jaminite clan; for Jachin, the Jachinite clan; ¹³for Zerah, the Zerahite clan; for Shaul, the Shaulite clan. ¹⁴These were the Simeonite clans. They numbered 22,200 men.

¹⁵The tribe of Gad by clans: for Zephon, the Zephonite clan; for Haggi, the Haggite clan; for Shuni, the Shunite clan; ¹⁶for Ozni, the Oznite clan; for Eri, the Erite clan; ¹⁷for Arod, the Arodite clan; for Areli, the Arelite clan. ¹⁸These were the clans of the tribe of Gad. They numbered 40,500 men.

¹⁹The tribe of Judah: Er and Onan. Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. ²⁰The other sons of Judah became clans: for Shelah, the Shelanite clan; for Perez, the Perezite clan; for Zerah, the Zerahite clan. ²¹The sons of Perez were: for Hezron, the Hezronite clan; for Hamul, the Hamulite clan. ²²These were the clans of Judah. They numbered 76,500 men.

²³The tribe of Issachar, by clans: for Tola, the Tolaite clan; for Puvah, the Puvite clan; ²⁴for Jashub, the Jashubite clan; for Shimron, the Shimronite clan. ²⁵These were the clans of Issachar. They numbered 64,300 men.

²⁶The tribe of Zebulun by clans: for Sered,

the Seredite clan; for Elon, the Elonite clan; for Jahleel, the Jahleelite clan. ²⁷These were the clans of Zebulun. They numbered 60,500 men.

²⁸The tribe of Joseph, by clans: Manassch and Ephraim.

²⁹The tribe of Manassch: for Machir, the Machirite clan; Machir was the father of Gilead: for Gilead, the Gileadite clan. ³⁰These were the clans of Gilead: for Iezer, the Iezerite clan; for Helek, the Helekite clan; ³¹Asriel, the Asrielite clan; Shechem, the Shechemite clan; ³²Shemida, the Shemidaite clan; Hephher, the Hephherite clan. ³³Zelophehad son of Hephher had no sons but only daughters; these are the names of Zelophehad's daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. ³⁴These were the clans of Manassch. They numbered 52,700 men.

³⁵The tribe of Ephraim by clans: for Shuthelah, the Shuthelahite clan; for Becher, the Becherite clan; for Tahan, the Tahanite clan.

³⁶These are the sons of Shuthelah: for Eran, the Eranite clan. ³⁷These were the clans of Ephraim. They numbered 32,500 men.

These were the descendants of Joseph, by clans.

³⁸The tribe of Benjamin, by clans: for Bela, the Belaite clan; for Ashbel, the Ashbelite clan; for Ahiram, the Ahiramite clan; ³⁹for Shephupham, the Shephuphamite clan; for Hupham, the Huphamite clan. ⁴⁰Bela had Ard and Naaman for sons: the Ardite clan; for Naaman, the Naamite clan. ⁴¹The tribe of Benjamin by clans numbered 45,600 men.

⁴²The tribe of Dan, by clans: for Shuham, the Shuhamite clan. ⁴³All the Shuhamite clans numbered 64,400 men.

⁴⁴The tribe of Asher, by clans: for Imnah, the Imnite clan; for Ishvi, the Ishvite clan; for Beriath, the Beriite clan. ⁴⁵The clans of Heber and Malchiel were descendants of Beriath. ⁴⁶The daughter of Asher was called Serah. ⁴⁷These were the clans of Asher. They numbered 53,400 men.

⁴⁸The tribe of Naphtali, by clans: for Jahzeel, the Jahzeelite clan; for Guni, the Gunite clan; ⁴⁹for Jezer, the Jezerite clan; for Shillel, the Shillemite clan. ⁵⁰The clans of Naphtali numbered 45,400 men.

⁵¹The sons of Israel numbered in all 601,730 men.

⁵²Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ⁵³"The land is to be divided among the tribes as a heritage, according to the number of those registered. ⁵⁴To a tribe large in number you are to give a large area of land; to a small one in

number, a small area; to each the heritage will be in proportion to the number registered.⁵⁵ The dividing of the land is, however, to be done by lot.⁵⁶ Each tribe is to receive its inheritance according to the number of men registered."

⁵⁷ These are, by clans, the Levites that were registered: for Gershon, the Gershonite clan; for Kohath, the Kohathite clan; for Merari, the Merarite clan.

⁵⁸ These are the Levite subclans: the Libnites, the Hebronites, the Mahlites, the Mushites, the Kohathites. Kohath was the father of Amram.⁵⁹ who married Jochebed, descendant of Levi, born in Egypt. She bore Aaron, Moses and Miriam their sister.⁶⁰ Aaron was the father of Nadab and Abihu. Eleazar and Ithamar.⁶¹ Nadab and Abihu died when they offered unlawful fire before Yahweh.

⁶² Altogether there were registered 23,000 males of one month and over. They were listed separately from the rest of the Israelites, because they would receive no property in Israel.

⁶³ These were the men registered by Moses and Eleazar the priest who took this census of the Israelites in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan River, opposite Jericho.⁶⁴ Not one of them was among those whom Moses and Aaron had listed in the desert of Sinai:⁶⁵ for Yahweh had told them that these were to die in the desert and none would remain, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, son of Nun.

27 Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was the son of Hephher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, son of Joseph. These are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.¹ They appeared before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and the whole community, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and said,² "Our father died in the desert. He was not one of those who rebelled against Yahweh, nor among the followers of Korah; but he died for his own sin as all the people and he did not leave any sons.³ Why must our father's name disappear from among his clan? Since he had no son, give us some property among our father's relatives."

⁴ Moses took their case before Yahweh, and Yahweh spoke to Moses. He said,⁵ "The daughters of Zelophehad have a just case. Give them property for their inheritance among their father's relatives; pass on to them their father's inheritance.⁶ Then say this to the

people of Israel. If a man dies without sons, his inheritance is to be given to his daughter.⁷ If he has no daughters, the inheritance is to go to his brothers.⁸ If he has no brothers, it is to go to his father's brothers.⁹ If his father has no brothers, it is to go to the member of his clan who is most nearly related: he is to hold it as his own property. This shall be a law for the people of Israel, as Yahweh has commanded Moses."

Joshua succeeds Moses

¹² Yahweh said to Moses, "Climb this mountain of the Abarim range, and look on the land I give to the Israelites.¹³ After you have seen it, you will die, as Aaron your brother did.¹⁴ For you both rebelled against my command in the desert of Zin when the community complained against me, when I commanded you to proclaim my holy power before their eyes in the matter of the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, in the desert of Zin).

¹⁵ Moses said to Yahweh,¹⁶ "May Yahweh, God of the spirits that give life to all living creatures, appoint a leader for this community,¹⁷ who shall go out and come in at their head, who shall lead them out and bring them in; so that the community of Yahweh may not be like sheep without a shepherd."¹⁸ Yahweh answered Moses, "Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man in whom the Spirit dwells, and lay your hands on him.¹⁹ Then bring him before Eleazar, the priest, and the whole community, to instruct him in their presence²⁰ and to give him a share of your authority, so that the whole community of the sons of Israel may obey him.²¹ Eleazar the priest shall consult me for him and tell him my decisions by means of the Urim and Thummin. Then Joshua will direct all the Israelites, the whole community, in all their affairs."

²² Moses did as Yahweh had commanded. He took Joshua and brought him before Eleazar the priest and the whole community,²³ laid his hands on him and instructed him, as Yahweh had directed through Moses.

28 Yahweh spoke to Moses and said,¹ "Give the sons of Israel this command: Take care to bring the food offerings, my sweet-smelling offerings at the times I have appointed.

² Say to them: These are the burnt offerings you must offer to Yahweh:

Daily sacrifices

Every day, two one-year-old lambs with-

54. Jos 14, 1

65. 14, 26

3. 16, 35

7. 36, 2

12. Dt 31, 1

13. Dt 3, 27

14. 20, 1

17. 1 K 22, 17; Est 34, 5

19. Mt 9, 36; Jn 10, 12

21. Ex 28, 30; 1 S 28, 6

23. Ex 28, 30; 1 S 28, 6

3. Ex 29, 38



out any defects. ⁴ The first lamb you must offer in the morning, the second in the evening, ⁵ together with a grain offering of two pounds of fine flour mixed with two pints of purest oil. ⁶ This is the everlasting burnt offering which was first offered at Mount Sinai as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh. ⁷ The accompanying wine offering to be poured out at the altar is two pints of wine for each lamb. ⁸ The second lamb you must offer in the evening; do this in the same way as the morning offering, together with the wine offering.

The sabbath sacrifice

⁹ On the sabbath day, you must offer two one-year-old lambs without any defect, and four pounds of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, as well as the accompanying wine offering. ¹⁰ This burnt offering is to be offered every sabbath in addition to the daily offering with its accompanying wine offering.

The new moon sacrifice

¹¹ At the beginning of each of your months you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram and seven one-year-old lambs without any defect; ¹² for each bull a grain offering of six pounds of fine flour mixed with oil; ¹³ for each lamb, four pounds of fine flour mixed with oil. These burnt offerings are sweet-smelling offerings to Yahweh. ¹⁴ The accompanying wine offering is four pints of wine for a bull, three pints for a ram, two pints for a lamb. This must be the monthly burnt offering, month after month, every month of the year. ¹⁵ In addition to the daily burnt offering, a he-goat must be offered to Yahweh, as a sacrifice for sin, with its accompanying wine offering.

The Feast of the Unleavened Bread

¹⁶ The fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of Yahweh, ¹⁷ and the fifteenth day of this month is a feast day. For seven days unleavened bread must be eaten. ¹⁸ On the first day you shall gather for worship and not to do work of a worker. ¹⁹ You shall offer to Yahweh a burnt offering: two young bulls, a ram, seven one-year-old sheep without any defect. ²⁰ The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for the bull, four pounds for the ram, ²¹ and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ²² There must also be a he-goat for the sacrifice for sin, for the atonement over you. ²³ This must be done in addition to the daily morning offering. ²⁴ You

must do this every day for seven days. It is a food, a burnt offering, a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh, it is to be offered in addition to the daily offering and its accompanying wine offering. ²⁵ On the seventh day you shall gather for worship and not do work of a worker.

The Feast of Weeks

²⁶ On the first day of the harvest, when you make your offering of new fruits to Yahweh at your Feast of Weeks, you are to gather for worship; you must do no work of workers. ²⁷ You must offer as a burnt offering; two young bulls, one ram, seven one-year-old lambs. ²⁸ The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for each bull, ²⁹ four pounds for the ram, and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ³⁰ There must also be a he-goat for the sacrifice for sin, for the atonement over you. ³¹ This must be done in addition to the daily offering and its accompanying wine offering.

The New Year Festival

29 ¹ In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall gather for worship and do no work of a worker. It shall be a day on which you sound the trumpets. ² You must offer as a burnt offering: one young bull, one ram, seven one-year-old lambs without any defect. ³ The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for the bull, four pounds for the ram, ⁴ and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ⁵ There must also be a he-goat for the sacrifice for sin, for the atonement over you. ⁶ All this must be done in addition to the monthly burnt offering with its grain offering, the daily offering with its grain offering, and the accompanying wine offering according to the law, as a burnt offering and sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh.

The Day of Atonement

⁷ On the tenth day of this seventh month, you shall gather for worship. You must fast and do no work of a worker. ⁸ You must offer a burnt offering and a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh: one young bull, one ram, and seven one-year-old lambs of your choice without any defect. ⁹ The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for the bull, four pounds for the ram, ¹⁰ and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ¹¹ A he-goat must be offered for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the sacrifice for the feast of Atonement, and to the daily burnt



offering with its accompanying grain offering and wine offerings.

The Feast of the Tent

¹²On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you are to gather for worship and do no work of a worker, and for the space of seven days you are to celebrate a feast for Yahweh. ¹³You must offer as a burnt offering and sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh: thirteen young bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect. ¹⁴The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for each of the thirteen bulls, four pounds for each of the two rams, ¹⁵two pounds for each of the fourteen lambs; ¹⁶also one he-goat as a sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering and its grain offering and wine offering.

¹⁷On the second day: twelve young bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ¹⁸the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ¹⁹also one he-goat for sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²⁰On the third day: eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ²¹the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ²²also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²³On the fourth day: ten bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ²⁴the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ²⁵also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²⁶On the fifth day: nine bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ²⁷the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ²⁸also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²⁹On the sixth day: eight bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ³⁰the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ³¹also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in

addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

³²On the seventh day: seven bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defects; ³³the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ³⁴also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

³⁵On the eighth day you shall all gather for worship and do no work of a worker. ³⁶You shall offer as a burnt offering and sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh: one bull, one ram, seven one-year-old lambs without any defect; ³⁷the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams ³⁸and lambs; also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

³⁹This is what you are to do for Yahweh at your solemn feasts, besides whatever burnt offerings, grain offerings and wine offerings you present as your free-will offerings."

Rules about vows

30 ¹Moses told the people of Israel exactly what Yahweh had commanded him.

²Moses spoke to the leaders of the tribes of Israel. He said, "This is what Yahweh has commanded:

³If a man makes a vow to give something to Yahweh or a solemn promise to abstain from something, he must not break his promise: whatever he promises by word of mouth he must do.

⁴If a woman makes a vow to give something to the Lord or a solemn promise to abstain from something while she is still young and lives in her father's house, ⁵and if he hears about this vow or promise made by her and says nothing to her about it, she must do whatever she has promised. ⁶But if the father on the day he learns of it expresses his disapproval of it, then she is not required to keep her promise. Yahweh will not hold her to her promise, since her father has expressed his disapproval.

⁷⁸If a woman makes a vow before being married or makes a solemn promise to abstain from something, either deliberately or without giving it much thought, she must do everything she vowed even after she marries if her husband learns of it and says nothing about it. ⁹But if on the day he learns of it he expresses



his disapproval to her, she is not required to keep her promise. Yahweh will not hold her to it. ¹⁰Any vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, or any pledge to which she binds herself is valid.

¹¹If she has made a vow or a solemn promise to abstain from something while in her husband's house, ¹²and if when the husband learns of it he says nothing to her and does not express disapproval to her, then she must do what ever she has vowed or solemnly promised to abstain from. ¹³But if the husband forbids it on the day he learns of it, she is not required to do whatever she has vowed or solemnly promised. Yahweh will not hold her to it.

¹⁴Any vow or solemn promise to abstain from something that the wife makes, must be allowed or forbidden by the husband. ¹⁵If by the following day the husband has said nothing to her, it means that he approves or allows her vow, whatever it may be, or her solemn promise, whatever it may be. He confirms the vows of his wife by saying nothing on the day he learns of them. ¹⁶But if he forbids them a long time after he learned of them, then he must suffer what results from the wife's failure to fulfill the vow or solemn promise."

¹⁷These are the laws given by Yahweh to Moses, concerning the relationship between man and wife, and between a father and his daughter while still young and living in her father's home.

The holy war against Midian

31 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²"Fully avenge the Israelites for what they have suffered from the Midianites. After that you will be joined to your people."

³Moses said to the people, "Let some of you go off to the war and attack the Midianites, for you have to carry out Yahweh's vengeance. ⁴Put a thousand men in the field from each of the tribes of Israel."

⁵In this way the Israelites provided twelve thousand men equipped for war, one thousand from each tribe. ⁶Moses put them in the field, one thousand from each tribe, with Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, to go with them carrying the sacred vessels and the trumpets for sounding the alarm.

⁷They attacked the Midianites, as Yahweh had commanded Moses, and they put every male to death. ⁸And further, they killed the kings of Midian, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba, the five Midianite kings; they also put Balaam son of Beor to the sword. ⁹The sons of Israel took the Midianite women captive with their young children, and took for themselves all their cattle, all their flocks and all their goods. ¹⁰They set fire to the towns where they lived and all their camps. ¹¹Then, taking all the spoils, all that they had captured, man and beast, ¹²they brought the captives and the spoils to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the community of the sons of Israel, at the camp in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan River opposite Jericho.

Laws regarding war

¹³Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the community went out of the camp to meet them. ¹⁴Moses was angry with the commanders of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come back from this battle. ¹⁵He said, "Why have you spared the lives of all the women?" ¹⁶These were the very ones who, on Balaam's advice, tempted the people of Israel and made them unfaithful to Yahweh at Peor: hence the epidemic which struck the community of Israel. ¹⁷So kill all the male children. Kill also all the women who have slept with a man. ¹⁸Spare the lives only of the young girls who have not slept with a man, and take them for yourselves. ¹⁹As for you, you must camp for seven days outside the camp, all of you who have killed a man or touched a corpse. Purify yourselves, you and your prisoners, on the third and seventh days; ²⁰purify also all clothing, everything made of skin, everything woven of goats' hair and everything made of wood."

²¹Eleazar, the priest, said to the soldiers who had come back from this battle, "These are the regulations given by Yahweh to Moses. ²²The gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin and lead, everything that is not melted by fire, must be passed through the fire to become clean, and also be purified by the water for purification. ²³But whatever would be melted by fire you must pass through water.

²⁴On the seventh day you will wash your

1. Dt 20, 1; 1 S 15, 7	2. 25, 16	16. 25, 1
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◆ The present chapter refers to the "holy war." It is important to remember that all of this was written in the 7th to the 6th century before Christ, when Israel no longer had the means of attacking any other people (see the commentary on Joshua 6 to that effect). The killing of women

is not described in this fictitious episode... The author of the story was not a cruel man and he only wanted to insist on how dangerous it was for the Israelites to marry or go near women of pagan nations.

clothes and then be clean. You may then come back to the camp."

²⁵Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ²⁶"With Eleazar, the priest, and the heads of families in the community, count the prizes of battle and the captives, man and beast." ²⁷Then share out the spoils, half and half, between those who fought the battle and the rest of the community. ²⁸As Yahweh's share you will set aside, from the share of the soldiers who took part in the battle, one out of every 500 persons, oxen, donkeys and sheep. ²⁹These are to be taken from the half share which is their due, and given to Eleazar, the priest, as an offering to Yahweh. ³⁰From the half which is due to the community of Israel, you will take one out of every fifty persons, oxen, donkeys, sheep, and all other animals, and give them to the Levites who have charge of the Holy Tent of Yahweh."

³¹Moses and Eleazar, the priest, did as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ³²The prizes of battle, the remainder of the spoil captured by the soldiers, came to 675,000 head of sheep and goats, ³³72,000 head of cattle, ³⁴61,000 donkeys, ³⁵and, in persons, women who had never slept with a man, 32,000 in all. ³⁶The half assigned to those who had taken part in the war amounted to 337,500 head of sheep and goats, ³⁷of which Yahweh's share was 675; ³⁸36,000 head of cattle, of which Yahweh's share was seventy-two; ³⁹30,500 donkeys, of which Yahweh's share was sixty-one, ⁴⁰and 16,000 persons, of which Yahweh's share was thirty-two. ⁴¹Moses gave Eleazar, the priest, the share set aside for Yahweh, in accordance with Yahweh's instructions to Moses.

⁴²As for the half due to the Israelite community, which Moses had separated from that of the soldiers, ⁴³this half, the community's share, came to 337,500 head of sheep and goats, ⁴⁴36,000 head of cattle, ⁴⁵30,500 donkeys ⁴⁶and 16,000 persons. ⁴⁷From this half, the share of the community of Israel, Moses took one out of every fifty, man and beast, and gave them to the Levites who had charge of the Holy Tent of Yahweh, according to what Yahweh said to Moses.

⁴⁸Then the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, came to Moses ⁴⁹and said, "Your ser-

vants have numbered the soldiers under their command; not one is missing. ⁵⁰And further, we bring as an offering for Yahweh the gold ornaments we have found, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before Yahweh." ⁵¹Moses and Eleazar, the priest, accepted this gold from them, all this jewelry. ⁵²This offering of gold given by them to Yahweh weighed over 400 pounds, all given by the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds.

⁵³Each of the soldiers took his own loot. ⁵⁴But Moses and Eleazar, the priest, received the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and carried it to the Tent of Meeting as a reminder to Yahweh of the people of Israel.

The Israelites settle in Transjordan

32 ¹The tribes of Reuben and Gad owned great herds of fine cattle. Now they saw that the country of Jazer and Gilead was a good land for raising livestock. ²Because of this they went to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the leaders of the community, and said to them, ³"The land around Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon, ⁴which Yahweh has conquered in the sight of the community of Israel, is good land for raising cattle, and we have livestock. ⁵If we have deserved your friendship, give us this land for our own; do not make us cross the Jordan River."

⁶Moses replied, "Shall you stay here while your brothers are off to the war? ⁷Why do you discourage the people of Israel from entering the land that Yahweh has given them?" ⁸This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to inspect the land. ⁹They went up as far as the Valley of Eshcol and inspected the land; but they kept the people of Israel from entering the land Yahweh had given them. ¹⁰Because of this Yahweh was angry that day and swore this oath, ¹¹"These men of twenty years and over, who came out from Egypt, will never see the land that I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For they have not followed me faithfully, ¹²except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, and Joshua son of

Dt 3, 12; Jos 1, 12; 21, 24

7. Jos 14, 6

11, 14, 26

o Not all the Israelites left Kadesh, the oasis in the desert where they stayed "forty years," as one people. The traditional image of the Israelites leaving as a united group to conquer the land of Canaan is more poetic than historical. These men were independent and each group wandered freely with their flocks except for the most difficult times when they gathered as happened

with Moses. Some left Kadesh before and after Moses: the most important group was the one who went to Gilead, on the other side of the Jordan. There they settled peacefully in the midst of other nations.

32:20-22 emphasizes solidarity among the Israelites.



Nun: these indeed have followed Yahweh faithfully.¹³ The anger of Yahweh blazed out against Israel and he made them wander in the desert for forty years, until the generation that offended Yahweh had all disappeared.¹⁴ And now, will you do as your fathers did? You, new generation of sinful people, will you add still more to the burning anger of Yahweh against Israel! ¹⁵If you turn away from him, he will make your roaming in the desert still longer, and all this people will perish because of you."

¹⁶But they explained their purpose to Moses. "We would like only to build sheepfolds here for our flocks and towns for our young children.¹⁷ Then we ourselves will take up arms to lead the people of Israel until we have brought them to the place appointed for them: only our young children will stay in the fortified towns, safe from the inhabitants of the country.¹⁸ As for us we will not return to our homes until every one of the Israelites has taken possession of his inheritance.¹⁹ For we shall have no inheritance with them on the other bank of the Jordan River or beyond, since our inheritance has fallen to us here, east of the Jordan."

²⁰Moses said to them, "If you mean what you have said, if you are prepared to go to battle in the presence of Yahweh,²¹ and if all your fighting men cross the Jordan River under the command of Yahweh, until he has defeated all his enemies,²² then, once Yahweh has taken possession of the land, you may go back; you shall be free of your obligation toward Yahweh and Israel, and this country shall be your inheritance before Yahweh.²³ But if you do not, you will sin against Yahweh, and you can be sure that your sin will follow you.²⁴ Build towns, then, for your young children and fenced places for your sheep; but do what you have promised."

²⁵The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben said to Moses, "Your servants will do as you order, sir.²⁶ Our children, our wives, our sheep and all our livestock will stay in the towns of Gilead,²⁷ but we, every man armed for war, will cross over the Jordan before Yahweh to fight as you have ordered."

²⁸Then Moses gave instructions about them to Eleazar, the priest, to Joshua, son of Nun, and to the other leaders of Israel.²⁹ Moses said to them, "If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben, all who are armed for battle, cross the Jordan before Yahweh to fight with you, then once you have conquered the land, you will give them the country of Gilead for their possession.³⁰ But if they do not cross over and go into battle with you, then they must have

their possessions among you in the land of Canaan."

³¹The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben replied, "What Yahweh has said to us, we will do.³² We will cross into the land of Canaan and go into battle under Yahweh's command; but our inheritance shall be beyond the Jordan."

³³Moses gave to the tribes of Gad and Reuben and to half the tribe of Manasseh, the territory of Sihon, king of the Amorites, as well as that of Og, king of Bashan, and all the land and towns surrounding them.

³⁴The sons of Gad built Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, ³⁵Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, ³⁶Beth-nimrah, Beth-haran, fortified towns, and fenced places for the sheep.

³⁷The sons of Reuben built Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriatihaim, ³⁸Nebo, Baal-meon (their names were changed), and Sibmah. They gave names to the towns they had built.

³⁹The sons of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead. They conquered it and drove out the Amorites who were there.⁴⁰ Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there.⁴¹ Jair son of Manasseh attacked and captured some villages and called them villages of Jair.⁴² Nobah attacked and captured Kenath with its outlying villages, and called it Nobah after himself.

The stages of the Exodus

33 ¹Here are the stages of the journey of the people of Israel when they left the land of Egypt by divisions, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.² Moses followed Yahweh's instructions and wrote down the starting place for each stage of the journey. Here are the stages or, better, the starting places.

³They left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year. On the day following the Passover the people of Israel set out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians,⁴ when they were burying their dead. For Yahweh had killed all their firstborn; he had also passed judgment on the gods of Egypt.

⁵The people of Israel left Rameses and camped at Succoth.⁶ Then they left Succoth and camped at Etham which is on the edge of the wilderness.⁷ They left Etham, turned back to Pi-hahiroth which faces Baal-zephon, and camped before Migdol.⁸ They left Pi-hahiroth, crossed over the sea into the wilderness, and after marching for three days in the desert of Etham, they camped at Marah.⁹ They left Marah and reached Elim. At Elim, there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; they camped there.

¹⁰ They left Elim and camped by the Sea of Reeds. ¹¹ They left the Sea of Reeds and camped in the wilderness of Sin. ¹² They left the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. ¹³ They left Dophkah and camped at Alush. ¹⁴ They left Alush and camped at Rephidim; the people found no drinking water there. ¹⁵ They left Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai. ¹⁶ They left the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. ¹⁷ They left Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. ¹⁸ They left Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. ¹⁹ They left Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez. ²⁰ They left Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. ²¹ They left Libnah and camped at Rissah. ²² They left Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. ²³ They left Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. ²⁴ They left Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. ²⁵ They left Haradah and camped at Makheloth.

²⁶ They left Makheloth and camped at Tahath. ²⁷ They left Tahath and camped at Terah. ²⁸ They left Terah and camped at Mithkah. ²⁹ They left Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. ³⁰ They left Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. ³¹ They left Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. ³² They left Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. ³³ They left Hor-haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. ³⁴ They left Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. ³⁵ They left Abronah and camped at Eziongaber.

³⁶ They left Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin; that is Kadesh. ³⁷ They left Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the borders of the land of Edom. ³⁸ There Aaron, the priest, went up Mount Hor at Yahweh's command and there he died, in the fortieth year of the journey of the Israelites from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first day of the month. ³⁹ Aaron was 123 years old when he died at Mount Hor.

⁴⁰ The king of Arad, a Canaanite who lived in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, was informed when the people of Israel arrived. ⁴¹ So they left Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. ⁴² They left Zalmonah and camped at Punon. ⁴³ They left Punon and camped at Oboth. ⁴⁴ They left Oboth and camped in Moabite territory at Iye-abarim. ⁴⁵ They left Iye-abarim and camped at Dibon-gad. ⁴⁶ They left Dibon-gad and camped at Almon-diblathaim. ⁴⁷ They left Almon-diblathaim and camped in the Abarim mountains facing Nebo. ⁴⁸ They left the Abarim mountains and camped in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan opposite Jericho. ⁴⁹ There they camped near the Jordan

between Bethha-jeshimoth and Abel-hash-shittim, in the plains of Moab.

⁵⁰ Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan River opposite Jericho. He said: ⁵¹ "Say this to the people of Israel: 'When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, ⁵² you must drive out all the inhabitants of the country. You must destroy their stones, and their idols and all their places of worship. ⁵³ You will take possession of this land and settle in it for I have given it to you for your own. ⁵⁴ You are to divide it by drawing lots among your clans. To a large clan you will give a larger piece of property, to a small clan a smaller one. Where the lot falls for each, that will be his. Make this division according to tribes.

⁵⁵ But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the country, then those you have allowed to remain will be as splinters in your eyes and thorns in your side; they will harass you in the land where you are to live ⁵⁶ and I will treat you as I meant to treat them."

The boundaries of Canaan

34 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ² "Give the people of Israel this order: 'When you go into the land of Canaan, this territory will be your inheritance. This is the land of Canaan with its boundaries:

³ The southern part of your country will stretch from the wilderness of Zin along the borders of Edom. It will start on the east at the southern end of the Salt Sea. ⁴ It will then turn south toward the Ascent of the Scorpions and go through Zin as far as Kadeshbarnea. Then it will go northwest toward Hazar-addar and pass through Azmon. ⁵ From Azmon the boundary will turn toward the valley at the border of Egypt and end at the Big Sea (the Mediterranean Sea).

⁶ The Big Sea will be your western boundary. ⁷ For your northern boundary you will draw a line from the Big Sea to Mount Hor, ⁸ then from Mount Hor you will draw a line to the Pass of Hamath, and the boundary will end at at Zedad. ⁹ From there it will go on to Ziphron and end at Hazar-enan. This will be your northern boundary.

¹⁰ You will then draw your eastern boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham. ¹¹ The boundary will go south from Shepham toward Riblah on the east side of Ain and on to the hills on the eastern shore of Lake Galilee. ¹² The boundary will then follow the Jordan and end at the Dead Sea. This will be your land with the boundaries surrounding it."



¹³ Moses then gave this instruction to the people of Israel: "This is the land you are to divide by lot, which Yahweh has commanded to be given to the remaining nine and a half tribes. ¹⁴ The tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Gad with its clans and also the half tribe of Manasseh have already been given their land ¹⁵ beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho, to the east, toward the sunrise."

¹⁶ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ¹⁷ "These are the names of those who will share out the land: Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun, ¹⁸ with one leader from each tribe. ¹⁹ Here are the names of these men:

For the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; ²⁰ for the tribe of Simeon, Shemuel son of Ammihud; ²¹ for the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad son of Chislon; ²² for the tribe of Dan, the leader of Bukki son of Jogli; ²³ for the tribe of Manasseh, the leader Hanniel son of Ephod; ²⁴ and for the tribe of Ephraim, the leader Kemuel son of Shipthan; ²⁵ for the tribe of Zebulun, the leader Elizaphan son of Parnach; ²⁶ for the tribe of Issachar, the leader Paltiel, son of Azzan; ²⁷ for the tribe of Asher, the leader Ahihud son of Shelomi; ²⁸ for the tribe of Naphtali, the leader Pedahel son of Ammihud." ²⁹ These are the men whom Yahweh commanded to divide the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel as their inheritance.

The share of the Levites

35 ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan opposite Jericho. He said:

² "Tell the people of Israel to give to the Levites, out of the property they possess, towns in which to live and pasture land around the towns. ³ They will live in the towns and the surrounding pasture land is to be for their cattle and all their animals. ⁴ The pasture land surrounding the towns that you give to the Levites shall extend from the walls of the towns 500 yards in each direction, ⁵ so that there is a square area measuring 1,000 yards on each side, with the town in the middle. ⁶ The towns you give to the Levites will be the six refuge towns to which a person can escape who causes another's death: and you are to give them forty-two more towns. ⁷ Altogether you will give forty-eight towns to the Levites, towns together with their pasture lands. ⁸ You will take these towns from the property of the sons of Israel, taking more towns from the tribes who own more, and less from tribes who own less. Every tribe will give towns to the

Levites in proportion to the land they themselves have received."

Cities of refuge

⁹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

¹⁰ "Say this to the people of Israel: When you cross the Jordan River and reach the land of Canaan, ¹¹ you are to select towns which you will make into towns of refuge to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may escape. ¹² In these towns they will be safe from the dead person's relative who wants revenge, so that the killer may not die without being brought to trial before the community. ¹³ The towns you give will serve you as six cities of refuge: ¹⁴ the three that you give beyond yond the Jordan and the three that you give in the land of Canaan are to be cities of refuge. ¹⁵ These six towns will be a refuge for the people of Israel as well as for the stranger and the foreigner among you, where anyone who has killed accidentally may find safety.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ But if the killer has struck someone with an iron object, or with a stone or wooden instrument and has killed that person, he is a murderer and must be put to death. ¹⁹ The dead person's nearest relative must put the murderer to death. When he finds him he must kill him.

²⁰ If a person hates someone and causes his death by pushing him down or by throwing something at him ²¹ or by hitting him with his fist, he is a murderer and is to be put to death. The dead person's nearest relative must put him to death when he finds him. ²² If, however, a person has accidentally killed someone whom he does not hate, either by pushing him down or throwing him down or throwing something at him ²³ or, without looking, has thrown a stone that kills someone, ²⁴ then the community shall judge in favor of the one who caused death rather than in favor of the dead person's relative who seeks revenge. ²⁵ They will send the person who killed someone accidentally back to the city of refuge where he went for safety, and there he must stay until the death of the high priest. ²⁶ If the killer should leave the city of refuge to which he had gone for safety ²⁷ and the dead person's nearest relative meets him outside the city of refuge, the relative may kill him without fear of punishment ²⁸ since the killer should stay in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. Only after the death of the high priest is he free to go back to his own home. ²⁹ These regula-

18, 20; Jos 21; Ezk 48, 13 9. Dt 4, 41; 19, 1; Jos 20, 1 30. Dt 17, 6 33. Gen 9, 5

o These laws concerning the cities of refuge are similar to those which are commented in Dt 19: 1.



tions are for you and your descendants whenever you may be.

³⁰In case of murder, the accused may be found guilty and put to death only on the evidence of two or more witnesses; the evidence of only one witness is not enough to uphold an accusation of murder. ³¹You shall not accept payment to save the life of a murderer condemned to death; he must die. ³²Nor are you to accept payment from anyone who wishes to leave his city of refuge to return and live in his own home before the death of the high priest. ³³You must not defile the land you live in. Murder defiles the land and there is no other atonement for the land where blood has been shed than through the blood of the murderer. ³⁴You must not defile the land you live in, the land in which I live; for I, Yahweh, live among the people of Israel."

A wife's inheritance

36 ¹Then the heads of families in the clan of Gilead, son of Machir, grandson of Manasseh, one of the clans of Joseph, came forward. They spoke before Moses and the heads of the families of Israel ² and said:

"Yahweh has commanded you to give the land to the people of Israel, sharing it out by drawing lots; and Yahweh has commanded you to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. ³Now, if they marry someone from another tribe in Israel, their property will be taken away from the inheritance of our fathers. The property of the tribe to which they will belong will be in-

creased, while the property given to us will be decreased. ⁴And when the jubilee year comes, the property of these women will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they then belong, and lost to the inheritance of our own tribe."

⁵Moses, at Yahweh's command, gave the following ruling to the people of Israel. He said:

"The tribe of Joseph is right. ⁶This is Yahweh's decision for the daughters of Zelophehad: They may marry whom they please, but they must marry into a clan of their father's tribe. ⁷The property of the people of Israel is not to be transferred from tribe to tribe; the property of every Israelite is to remain attached to his own tribe. ⁸Every woman who has inherited property in one of the tribes of Israel must marry into a clan of her own tribe, so that each Israelite may inherit the property of his ancestors. ⁹No property may be transferred from one tribe to another: every tribe of Israel will always keep its own property."

¹⁰The daughters of Zelophehad did as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ¹¹Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah, daughters of Zelophehad, married the sons of their father's brothers. ¹²Since they married into the clans of Manasseh, son of Joseph, their property remained with the tribe of their father's clan.

¹³These are the commandments and laws that Yahweh gave to the people of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab near the Jordan opposite Jericho.



INTRODUCTION

Deuteronomy means *second law*. It was so named because this law is recorded in the Bible after all the laws found in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. Nevertheless, it was written before those books. It was the first attempt at unifying commands and customs to give Israel the Law in which it would find life.

Deuteronomy was welcomed by the people of Israel and their shepherds as the word of God and the teaching of Moses, but the authors were priests and prophets who summarized in these pages the experience they had acquired throughout their history.

When *Deuteronomy* was edited in the 7th century before Christ, more than five hundred years had passed since Moses' encounter with God. The land of Canaan had been conquered, the Kingdom of David and Solomon had been established, then, divided. The largest and most prosperous area, to the north, called the Kingdom of Israel, had ceased to exist and the same destiny was, at that time, threatening the Kingdom of Judah, the southern province.

It was then that this Law of Yahweh became known, a law which revealed to the people the cause of their defeats and which offered them an opportunity for salvation. Forgotten in the Temple during the persecution of Manasseh, its discovery in 622 (2 Kgs 22) was at the root of Josiah's reform.

Moses and Deuteronomy

As happens in other books of the Bible, the authors of *Deuteronomy* placed on the lips of Moses the very discourses they wanted to address to their people. In a fictitious way, they imagine that before his death, Moses foresaw the tragic fate of his people after him. They attribute to Moses the warnings and the laws which could still save Israel. *Deuteronomy*, in fact, uses the preaching of the prophets concerning justice and love: it is the first effort ever made in the world to establish a responsible and fraternal society.

Love of God and the Promised Land

Moses had ordered the conquest of the land of Canaan. *Deuteronomy* says that since this land is a gift from God, Israel must obey the Law in order to keep the land.

Moses had spoken only of serving God. *Deuteronomy* now makes known the great laws of the love of God.

God is the one who loves first. God does not give his love indiscriminately to everyone, but loves especially those whom he chooses to serve him (Dt 7:6-8). And the proof that he has chosen Israel is found in the supernatural interventions of God in their favor, when he took them out of Egypt (Dt 4:32-40).

Israel must respond to God with love from the heart (which was not found in the ten commandments). See Dt 6:1-9.

The Israelites must preserve solidarity; they must be able to love and forgive each other (Dt 15). They must also be united around the only Temple in Jerusalem (Dt 12).

The way to love God is to love him faithfully: Dt 13.

1 ¹These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, at the other side of the Jordan River, in the Arabah desert. They were facing Suf, between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab. ²From Mount Horeb to Kadesh-Barnaa they had had a journey of eleven days through the mountains of Seir. ³But now it was the first day of the tenth month of the fortieth year after they left Egypt, when Moses told the children of Israel all that Yahweh had commanded him regarding them.

⁴After defeating Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan who ruled in Ashtaroth and in Edrei, ⁵Moses began to establish this law. They were in the land of Moab, at the other side of the Jordan.

First discourse of Moses: the judges

⁶Moses said: "Yahweh, our God, spoke to me at Mount Horeb: 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. ⁷Leave this place and go into the territory of the Amorites and to its neighbouring peoples in the Arabah, the Mountains, the Lowlands, the Negeb and the seacoast, into the land of Canaan and Lebanon up to the great Euphrates River.

⁸Look at the land which I have set apart for you: you will take possession of it and live in the land which Yahweh swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to all their descendants.'

⁹I said to you at that time: 'I alone cannot be responsible for all of you.' ¹⁰Yahweh, your God, has multiplied you, and now, you are as numerous as the stars in heaven. ¹¹Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has increased you a thousand times more and has blessed you just as he promised.

¹²But how can I alone resolve all your problems and disputes? ¹³Look for intelligent, keen-sighted and experienced men from each

of your tribes, and I will place them over the people.

¹⁴And you answered: 'What you ask us to do is right.' ¹⁵Thus, I chose from among the heads of your tribes wise and experienced men and placed them over you as leaders of the thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and also as secretaries for each tribe. ¹⁶And I gave this order to the judges: 'Attend to the complaints of your brothers, and decide the lawsuit between an Israelite and his brother, or between an Israelite and the foreigners who live in your midst.

¹⁷Do not be influenced by anyone when you judge, but listen to the poor and the rich alike, to the powerful as well as the weak, and do not be afraid of anyone because you act in place of God. And if there arises a very difficult case for you, refer this to me and I will attend to it.'

¹⁸At that time, I established what you had to do.

Rebellion at Kadesh

¹⁹Finally, having left Horeb, we passed through that wide and terrible desert that we saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, as Yahweh had commanded us, and arriving at Kadesh-Barnaa, ²⁰I said to you:

'We have come to the mountain of the Amorites which Yahweh, our God, gives us. ²¹Look, Israel, at the land which Yahweh gives you; take possession of that which was promised to your fathers. Do not be afraid or discouraged.'

²²Then all of you gathered around me and said to me: 'Better send some men before us to explore the land and map out the roads leading to the cities where we are to go.'

²³That was a good suggestion, so I took twelve men from among you, one from each tribe, ²⁴who set out and climbed the mountains on foot until they came to the Valley of the

4. Num 21, 21 8. Gen 12, 7 9. Ex 18, 13; Num 11, 11 17. Pro 24, 23; James 2, 9 19. Num 13, 14

Each nation has its laws, the fruit of a long experience of the people and of the reflection of their leaders. The laws of Israel were formed in the same way, but the experience of Israel was different from that of any other nation.

From the beginning, Israel experienced both the pride of being a free people and the responsibility of living as the people of God. As can be seen in Exodus, God liberated them so that they could serve him.

Thus, as an introduction to the laws of Israel, the authors of Deuteronomy place on Moses' lips a long speech in which Israel is reminded of its first experience. These first chapters do not repeat the departure from Egypt itself, but deal

with the events in the desert and especially with what happened in Kadesh, the oasis in the southern part of Palestine, where the Israelites remained for "forty years."

The first chapter recalls the establishment of judges: Moses being the first legislator of his people, those who came after him always referred to his authority. This chapter also deals with the rebellion at Kadesh: at the outset of their history Israel found out how costly it was to oppose God's wise guidance.

Chapters three and four tell about the arrival in the Promised Land: Yahweh is the one who brought them there and they must pay attention to him if they wish to continue to live freely in their nation.

Grapevines. ²⁵ And once there, they took with them the fruits of the valley, and upon their return recounted to us what they had seen. They told us: 'The land which Yahweh gives us is a good land.'

²⁶ Nevertheless, you did not want to go up into the mountains but rebelled against the commands of Yahweh. ²⁷ And you began to murmur in your tents: 'Yahweh does not like us; he made us leave Egypt to turn us over to the Amorites who in turn will kill us all. ²⁸ Where shall we go? The messengers have frightened us with what they told us: The people who live in the land are greater and taller than us. The cities are great and are fortified with high walls. We have seen giants there as in times past.'

²⁹ Then I said to you: 'Have no fear and do not be afraid of them. ³⁰ Yahweh who leads you will likewise fight for you as he did in Egypt. ³¹ You have also seen what he did in the desert where he carried you all the way just as a father carries his son, until we came to this place.'

³² But still you would not believe Yahweh, our God, ³³ who went before you in all your journeys, and has instructed you where to set up camp; by night he has shown you the way with fire and by day with a cloud.

³⁴ And when Yahweh heard the rumblings of your complaints, he was angry and he swore: ³⁵ Not one from this perverse generation will see the beautiful land which I swore to give to your fathers ³⁶ except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh. He shall see it and I will give him and his children the land upon which he trod because he has faithfully followed Yahweh.

³⁷ Yahweh was angry with me as well because of your fault, and he said to me: 'Neither will you enter there; ³⁸ but your assistant, Joshua, the son of Nun, will enter. Encourage him because he will be the one to give Israel its inheritance. ³⁹ Your children will enter there; to them will I give the land, and they will possess it although you feared they would become the prey of your enemies. ⁴⁰ But as for you, go back into the desert by the Red Sea.'

⁴¹ And you answered me: 'We have sinned against Yahweh, our God. Now, we will go and fight as he has commanded us.' So each one took his weapons and thought it easy to climb the mountains. ⁴² But Yahweh told me: 'Tell them not to go and fight because I am not with them, or else they will be defeated by the enemy.'

⁴³ I told you about this but you did not listen. You disobeyed the order of Yahweh and went up to the mountains instead. ⁴⁴ Then the Amorites who live on those mountains came

out to meet you; they pursued you like bees from Seir to Hormah, and killed you by the sword. ⁴⁵ And you returned with much weeping in the presence of Yahweh who did not want to hear you nor to listen to your voice. ⁴⁶ So you were to remain at Kadesh for many days; and you know how long it was.

Through the desert

2 ¹ We, therefore, turned back and set out towards the desert by the way leading to the Red Sea, as Yahweh had commanded me, and we walked around the mountains of Seir for a long time.

² Then, Yahweh said to me: ³ 'You have been going around these mountains for a long time; now, go north. ⁴ Give this command to the people: You are to pass through the territory of your brothers, the children of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, ⁵ but be very careful that you do not attack them because I will not give you even the parcel of land on which you stand. Know that I have given to Esau the mountains of Seir as a possession. ⁶ You shall buy food and water from them with your silver. ⁷ Think of all the blessings that Yahweh has bestowed on us in all our work and how he has protected us in our journey through the desert. Yahweh has been with you for forty years, and never have you been in want.

⁸ So we passed through the land of our brothers, the children of Esau who live in Seir. We went away from the road of the Arabah that led to Elath and Ezion-geber, and we took the road going into the desert of Moab.

⁹ Then Yahweh said to me: 'Do not attack Moab or provoke them to fight since I will not give you any of their land. Know that I have given Ar to the children of Lot as a possession.'

¹⁰ (The Emim formerly lived there – a great and numerous people, and tall as the Anakim. ¹¹ And just like the Anakim, they were also known as giants, but the Moabites called them Emim. ¹² And the Horites also used to live in Seir but the children of Esau drove them out, killed them and settled in their place, as Israel did in the land they possess and which Yahweh gave them.)

¹³ And now rise up and pass through the brook of Zered.'

We then went to the brook of Zered. ¹⁴ We walked for thirty-eight years from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the brook, until the entire generation of the men old enough to fight had perished just as Yahweh said. ¹⁵ Even

the hand of Yahweh was against them, dealing them their death in the camps until all of them perished.

¹⁶ When finally all those who were old enough to fight died, ¹⁷ Yahweh said to me: ¹⁸ "Today you will pass through the frontiers of Moab, facing the city of Ar, ¹⁹ and you will meet these people. Do not attack or defy them, since I will not give you any of the land of the Ammonites. Know that I have given that land to the children of Lot."

²⁰ (This land was also considered the land of the giants who formerly lived there and whom the Ammonites called Zummim.

²¹ They were a great and numerous people, tall and of enormous stature, similar to the Anakim. But Yahweh destroyed them through the hand of the Ammonites, and in their place ²² he made the Ammonites to dwell in the land, just as he had done with the people of Esau who dwell in Seir, destroying the Horites and giving their land to the Ammonites who possess it up to this very day. ²³ He dealt in the same manner with the Avvim who lived in the camps as far as Gaza. They were expelled by the Caphtorim who killed them and occupied their place.)

²⁴ Rise up and go to the brook of Arnon. Look, I give into your hands Sihon the Amorite, the king of Heshbon, and all his land. ²⁵ Begin, right at this moment, to occupy his land and fight. And I, on my part, will begin to instill among all the peoples under heaven the dread and fear of you. They will tremble when they hear your name: they will tremble like a woman in childbirth and they will lose courage when they face you.

Victory over Sihon and Og

²⁶ From the desert of Kedemoth, I sent messengers to Sihon, the king of Heshbon, with these words of peace: ²⁷ "I wish to pass through your land but I will go only by the road without turning aside either to the right or to the left. ²⁸ We ask you to sell us food for money that we may eat, and water that we may drink. And let us only pass through as the children of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who dwell in Ar did for us, ²⁹ until we come to the Jordan and enter the land which Yahweh, our God, gives to us."

³⁰ But Sihon, the king of Heshbon, would not let us pass through his land, and Yahweh made him stubborn so that our God might give him into our hands.

³¹ And Yahweh said to me: "You have to know that I have begun to give Sihon and his

land over to you; begin conquering his land."

³² Then, Sihon came out with all his men to meet us in battle at Jahaz. ³³ And Yahweh, our God, gave him over to us and we defeated him together with his sons and all his men. ³⁴ At that time we captured all their cities and pronounced an anathema over them, killing all their inhabitants, men, women and children without sparing anyone, ³⁵ except the animals which were part of the plunder of the cities you have occupied.

³⁶ From Aroer, the city at the edge of the brook Arnon, up to Galaad, there was neither a village nor a city which we did not capture. Yahweh, our God, gave everything over to us, ³⁷ except the land of the Ammonites which we did not touch, the banks of the river Jabbok and the cities in the mountains, that is, all the places which Yahweh, our God, forbade us to take.

3 ¹ On turning back, we went the other way to Bashan. Og, the king of Bashan, and all his people came out to fight us in Edrei. ² Then Yahweh said to me: "Do not be afraid because I am giving him into your hands together with his people and his land, that you may do to him what you did to Sihon, the Amorite king who lived in Heshbon." ³ And Yahweh gave Og, the king of Bashan, and all his people into our hands; and sparing no one, we killed everyone by the sword.

⁴ We took possession of all their cities, there was not one of them which escaped us. We captured the seventy cities: the whole of the Argob region – the kingdom of Og, in Bashan. ⁵ All these were cities fortified with high walls, with gates and bars, besides the innumerable villages in the open fields.

⁶ We completely destroyed them for the honor of Yahweh, killing all the people, as we had done with Sihon, the king of Heshbon: we wiped out all the cities, men, women and children. ⁷ The only things that we spared and kept for ourselves were the livestock and the plunder from the cities. ⁸ We took possession of the land occupied by the two Amorite kings, the land beyond the Jordan, from the brook of Arnon up to the Mount of Hermon ⁹ (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion while the Amorites call it Senir.) ¹⁰ And we captured all the cities on the plateau and all the land of Galaad and Bashan as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities in the kingdom of Og, in Bashan.

¹¹ (Og, the king of Bashan, was the last survivor in the race of the giants. His iron bed, which is four and a half meters long and two meters wide, can be seen in Rabbah, a city of the Ammonites.)

¹² Then, we took possession of that land. I gave to the tribes of Reuben and Gad half of the mountains of Galaad with their cities, from Arnon. ¹³ And I gave to half of Manasseh's tribe the other half of the kingdom of Galaad and the whole kingdom of Og, or Bashan with the whole of the Argob region. The whole land of Bashan was called the land of the giants.

¹⁴ Jair, a son of Manasseh, took all the territories of Argob up to the boundaries of Gesuri and Maacati. And he gave his name to these cities which until today are called villages of Jair.

¹⁵ I gave part of Galaad to Makhir. ¹⁶ And to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, I gave the territory from Galaad up to the brook of Arnon (the boundary lies halfway along the brook) and up to the river Jabbok, the boundary of the territory of the sons of Ammon. ¹⁷ It is bounded by the Arabah in the west, and in the east by the Jordan, from Kinnereth up to the sea in the desert, known as the Salt Sea, at the foot of Mount Pisgah.

¹⁸ Then I gave you these orders: "Yahweh, our God, has given you this land to own. ¹⁹ But only your women, your children and your livestock, your numerous livestock, will remain in the cities which I have given you. ²⁰ All the strong men will be in charge of their Israelite brothers until Yahweh gives them a place where they can rest as he has given you, and they too possess the land which I will give you at the other side of the Jordan. Then each one of you will return to his own inheritance which I have given you."

²¹ I also gave the following order to Joshua: "You have seen with your own eyes what Yahweh has done with those two kings, and you will do the same to the kingdoms

where you shall go. ²² Do not be afraid because Yahweh will fight for you."

²³ Then I asked Yahweh: ²⁴ "Yahweh, my Lord, you have begun to manifest your greatness and the power of your hand. For what god, in the heavens and on the earth can do such works and deeds as you have done? ²⁵ Do let me go and see that splendid land at the other side of the Jordan, those mountains without comparison and Lebanon, too."

²⁶ But because of your fault, Yahweh was angry with me and did not hear me. And Yahweh said to me: "It is enough, speak no more of this to me, ²⁷ but climb to the top of Mount Pisgah and from there look to the west and to the north, to the south, and to the east. You shall see the land, but you shall not cross over the Jordan. ²⁸ Give your orders to Joshua, encourage him and strengthen him because he will be the one to bring this people across and distribute to them the land which you see."

²⁹ We, then, remained in the valley opposite Bethpeor.

The Law: true wisdom

4 ¹ And now, Israel, listen to the norms and laws which I teach that you may put them into practice. And you will live and enter and take possession of the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, gives you.

² Do not add anything to what I command you nor take anything away from it. But keep the commandments of Yahweh, your God, as I

12. Num 32; Jos 13, 15

18. Num 21, 30

21. Jos 1, 1

1. 6, 4; Lev 18, 5

+ Moses draws a lesson from past experience and to convince us to observe God's law, he invites us to keep our eyes open: *You who were faithful to Yahweh are still alive today while the others are dead. In the midst of the many "dead" who fret and fight among themselves in the world, the believer is alive. And also: Is there a nation whose laws are as just as this law?*

Yet, there are times in life in which temptations afflict us and it appears to us that, if we were to abandon the divine order, we would find happiness; but happiness is found through God's law and it does not require our approval: *Do not add anything nor take anything away.*

Is there a nation whose gods are as near as Yahweh? The gods are false friends and projections of our imagination: we play with them and try to win them over so that our plans may be

achieved. God, on the other hand, is present in all of his mystery, so present and yet beyond reach. Despite the fact that we do not see him, we recognize him with all certitude and whenever he comes close to us, he leaves us secure.

The whole Bible insists on the reality, and the historical value of such interventions. *Do not forget these things which your eyes have seen* (verse 9). It is true that the story of Moses was written centuries later and many episodes of the Israelites wandering through the desert were made into legends. But legends about the manna, the cloud and the crossing of the sea would not have arisen if the Israelite community had not experienced God's providence and his strong hand on these occasions.

Many times, we ourselves discover that God has intervened in very ordinary things but, even though we cannot doubt it, we do not know how

command you.³ You have seen with your own eyes what Yahweh has done with Baal-peor and with those who served him. Yahweh has destroyed them.⁴ But you who have been faithful to Yahweh, your God, are all alive today.

⁵ See, as Yahweh, my God, ordered me, I am teaching you the norms and the laws that you may put them into practice in the land you are going to enter and have as your own. If you observe and practise them, other peoples will regard you as wise and intelligent. When they come to know of all these laws, they will say, "There is no people as wise and as intelligent as this great nation."⁶ For in truth, is there a nation as great as ours, whose gods are as near to it as Yahweh, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him? And is there a nation as great as ours whose norms and laws are as just as this Law which I give you today?

⁹ But be careful and pay great attention. Do not forget these things which your very eyes have seen nor let them depart from your heart. But on the contrary, teach them to your children and to your children's children.

■ ¹⁰ You were in the presence of

Yahweh at Mount Horeb when he spoke to me, "Gather the people before me that they may hear my words. So they will fear me as long as they live in that land¹¹ and will teach these words to their children."

Then you came nearer and stood at the foot of the mountain. It was burning in flames reaching up to heaven amid the dense fog and the dark clouds.¹² And Yahweh spoke to you from the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words but did not see any figure; you only heard a voice.¹³ And Yahweh spoke to you that you might know his Covenant in which he commanded you to keep his ten commandments, which he had written on two slabs of stone.¹⁴ And as for me, he commanded me to teach you the norms and laws that you might put them into practice in the land which is going to be yours.

¹⁵ Think well about what you are to do. You did not see any form on that day when Yahweh spoke to you at Mount Horeb from the midst of the fire.¹⁶ Therefore, do not become corrupted; do not make an idol or a god carved in the form of a man or a woman,¹⁷ or in the form of any animal that lives on the earth, or of any kind of bird that flies in the sky,¹⁸ or of any

2. Rev 22, 18	3. Num 25	6. Job 28, 28; Bar 4, 3	7. Ps 145, 18; 147, 19; 148, 14
10. Ex 19; Jos 24, 1	12. Ex 20, 21; Heb 12, 18	13. Ex 20, 1	16. Ex 20, 4; 32, 1; Rom 1, 23

to express what happened in such a way that others might see it as we do. This is what happened with Israel: they related things in a more marvelous way than they actually occurred, because they could not recall all the details of an event, perhaps very ordinary, in which God had clearly manifested himself.

A person who reads the Bible without sharing the faith which gives it life, thinks reports of the supernatural things are pure imagination and come from a primitive mentality. On the contrary, the person who has known the presence of God in the world, understands that Israel had more than enough reasons to believe that God had chosen it.

Finally, if there had not been real interventions of God, the Bible would only be expressing

the beliefs of a people who "recognized" the hand of God in ordinary events and considered to be "words of God" what the prophets wrote thinking that such should be God's thoughts. It would be very strange that such illusions could have given rise to the religious, spiritual and cultural movement which has made the greatest impact on human history from a liberating perspective.

■ Moses remembers the experience of Sinai (also called Mount Horeb) because faith is rooted in an experience. When Paul tries to confirm in their faith Christians who are tempted to lose their way, he will remind them of the mystical experience they had when they entered the Church (Gal 3:1; Heb 12:18).

reptile that crawls on the earth, or of any fish that lives in the water under the earth. ¹⁹ When you look at the heavens and you see the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the heavenly bodies, do not prostrate yourselves to adore and serve them as gods. ²⁰ Yahweh, your God, has left those for the rest of the peoples, but he has chosen you and has brought you from the fiery crucible, that is Egypt, to be his own people as you are now.

²¹ Through your fault, Yahweh became angry with me and he swore that I would not cross the Jordan nor enter into the beautiful land which he gives you as an inheritance. ²² I will die in this land and not be able to cross the Jordan. You, in turn, will cross over and possess that beautiful land. ²³ So, be careful not to forget the Covenant which Yahweh has made with you and do not make any kind of idols, as Yahweh, your God, has commanded you. ²⁴ Know that Yahweh, your God, is a devouring fire, Yahweh is a jealous God.

♦ ²⁵ When you have children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, do not be corrupted by having idols and doing that which offends Yahweh. If you irritate him, you will perish from the land which is going to be yours after crossing the Jordan. ²⁶ Heaven and earth are witness to my warning: you will all be destroyed.

²⁷ Yahweh will scatter you among the peoples and only a few of you will remain among the nations where Yahweh will bring you. ²⁸ There you will be obliged to serve their gods, gods made by human hands, gods of wood and stone, which do not see nor hear, nor eat or feel. ²⁹ There you will look for Yahweh, your God, and you will encounter him if you search for him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ When this happens in the last days, you will return to Yahweh, and you will hear his voice in the midst of your anguish. ³¹ Because Yahweh, your God, is a merciful God who does not reject you, nor destroy

19. Wis 13, 2
27. Lev 26, 14

20. Jer 4, 20
28. Ps 115, 4; Jer 2, 27; Is 44, 9

21. Num 20, 12
29. Hos 5, 15; Is 55, 6; Jer 29, 13

24. Ex 20, 5; Is 33, 14; So 1, 18; Heb 12, 29

25. Ex 20, 5; Is 33, 14; So 1, 18; Heb 12, 29

31. Ex 33, 19

You did not see any figure; you only heard a voice (verse 12). Note the contrast between *seeing* and *hearing*: here we have the contrast between false worship and authentic faith.

In false cults men create their own gods (ancient or modern gods, such as a leader or an ideology) in accordance with their *own way of seeing* and understanding the meaning of existence. People paint their own gods and fabricate their own truth according to their own mind which notices only what is visible, immediately effective, what can be enjoyed and used.

On the contrary, true faith is rooted in the *word heard*: see Rom 10:14-17. Happy are those who believe though they have not seen! We believe in a truth which the people of God, the Church transmits to us. And even if we have personal visions and revelations, no Christian can depend on them unless he has been assured by authorized people, that these really come from God.

Do not make idols, that is, a god carved... (verse 16). We are back to the ban on making any image of God. See the commentary on Ex 20:4. Whether it be the image of some created force

(like the sun) or the picture of some leader or the symbol of some group (homeland, party... nothing that is created can be considered divine. It is also forbidden to make images of God because he is Holy, that is, he is not like anything that men can think of or imagine.

Do not prostrate yourselves to adore and serve them as gods. Obviously, today, less speak of adoring anything or anyone. Yet adoring is the same as surrendering oneself. Many persons serve political gods or the alienating idols of consumerism.

♦ These lines remind us of the story of the prodigal son (Lk 15). Because Israel was the chosen people, they had a greater responsibility. Their land was a gift from God and they would lose it if they abandoned him. Then, the Israelites were living according to the First Covenant on Sinai. They expected material gifts, prosperity, lands and peace from God. Yahweh did not show them any other punishment than an eventual exile: leaving this marvelous land. But there was also the promise: *there you will look for Yahweh, your God.*

to you all, nor forget the Covenant he swore to your fathers.

Chosen by God

o ³² Ask of the times past. Inquire from the day when God created man on earth. Ask from one end of the world to the other: Has there ever been a thing as extraordinary as this? ³³ Has a thing like this been heard of before? Has there ever been a people who remained alive after having heard the voice of the living God as you did after hearing him speak from the midst of the fire?

³⁴ Never has there been a God who went out to look for a people and take them out from among the other people by the strength of trials and signs, by wonders and by war, with a firm hand and an outstretched arm. Never has there been any deed as tremendous as those done for you by Yahweh in Egypt, which you saw with your own eyes.

³⁵ You saw this that you might know that Yahweh is God and that there is no other besides him. ³⁶ He made you hear his voice from heaven that you might fear him. And you have seen on the earth a great fire, and from the midst of the fire, you heard his words. ³⁷ Because of the love he had for your fathers, he chose their descendants after them, and he has made you leave Egypt with his help and power. ³⁸ He expelled before you

peoples more numerous and stronger than you, and he has made you occupy their land: today he has given this to you as an inheritance.³⁹ Know, therefore, today and try to be convinced that Yahweh is the only God of heaven and earth, and that there is no other.

⁴⁰ Observe the laws and the commandments that I command you today, and everything will be well with you and your children after you. So you will live long in the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you forever."

Second discourse of Moses

+ ⁴¹ *Moses designated three cities at the other side of the Jordan, ⁴² on the east, where one who involuntarily kills his neighbor may find refuge, one who has never been his enemy before. He should flee into one of those cities and so save himself.*

⁴³ *These are the cities: Bezer on the desert plateau for the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead for the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan for the tribe of Manasseh.*

⁴⁴ This is the Law which Moses gave to the children of Israel. ⁴⁵ These are the precepts, decrees, and laws which Moses made known to the children of Israel after their departure from Egypt. ⁴⁶ at the other side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon, the king of the Amorites. This Sihon, who lived in Heshbon, was defeated by Moses and the children of Israel after their departure from Egypt ⁴⁷ and they took possession of his land, as they had done with Og, the king of Bashan. The two Amorite kings ruled at the east of the Jordan, ⁴⁸ from Aroer at the boundary of the brook of Arnon, up to Mount Sirion, also called Hermon ⁴⁹ that is, the whole plain to

33. Ex 33, 20	35. Ex 20, 3; Is 43, 10; Mk 12, 32	40. Is 65, 20; Zac 8, 4	41. 19, 1; Ex 21, 13
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o *Never were there such great deeds (34). See the commentary on 4:9.*

There are many people who think that what the Bible mainly teaches is "to believe in God." This expression lends itself to a lot of confusion. Biblical faith is not in believing that God exists, or that God is powerful, or that God can help us. Instead, what is important is that God chose Israel for a unique mission in the world, that God is the only God and that Israel was different from all the other nations.

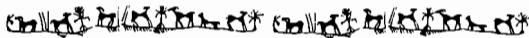
+ *Here begins the second "discourse of*

Moses."

In chapter 5:1-22, the Decalogue (the ten commandments) is presented for a second time and in a way very similar to what is in Exodus 20:2.

5:23-31 emphasizes God's will to find a man who could appear before him in the name of all the people. The glory of Moses consisted in his being a sort of mediator, or representative of Israel.

5:29: the purpose of God's Law is to make us happy. In that God's fatherly love is revealed.



the east of the Jordan up to the Dead Sea at the foot of Mount Pisgah.

The Ten Commandments

5 ¹ Moses gathered the whole of Israel and said to them: "Listen, Israel, to the laws and norms which I teach you this day. Learn them and be careful to put them into practice. ² Yahweh, our God, has made a covenant with us in Horeb, and his covenant ³ was not only with our fathers, but with us as well who are all alive here today. ⁴ Yahweh spoke with us face to face from the midst of the fire in the mountain. ⁵ And I stood between Yahweh and you to transmit his word to you, since you could not go up the mountain for fear of the great fire. These were his words:

⁶ I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery. ⁷ Do not have other gods before me. ⁸ Do not have idols, do not make any figure of things in the heaven or here below on the earth, or in the waters under the earth. ⁹ Do not kneel before them or worship them, because I, Yahweh, am your God, a jealous God who punishes the children until the third and fourth generation for the wickedness of their fathers who hate me. ¹⁰ But I am merciful to the thousandth generation to those who love me and obey my commandments.

¹¹ Do not take the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain because Yahweh will not leave unpunished him who takes his name in vain.

¹² Take care to keep holy the sabbath day, as Yahweh, your God, commands you. ¹³ You have six days to work and do your tasks. ¹⁴ But the seventh day is the Day of Rest in honour of Yahweh, your God. Do not do any work, you or your child, or your servant, or your ox, or your donkey, or any of your animals. Neither will the foreigner who lives in your land work. Your servant will rest just like you. ¹⁵ Remember that you were once enslaved in the land of Egypt from where Yahweh, your God, brought you out with his powerful hand and outstretched arm. For that reason, Yahweh, your God, commands you to observe the sabbath.

¹⁶ Honour your father and your mother as Yahweh, your God, has commanded, and you will live long and it will be well with you in the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you.

¹⁷ Do not kill.

¹⁸ Do not commit adultery.

¹⁹ Do not steal.

²⁰ Do not give false testimony against your neighbour.

²¹ Do not desire the wife of your neighbor.

Do not covet the house of your neighbor, or his field, or his servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is his. ²² These are the words that Yahweh said to the whole assembly on the mountain when he spoke from the midst of the fire and the thick cloud. When he finished speaking, he wrote them on the two slabs of stone which he gave to me. ²³ You heard that voice in the midst of darkness, while the mountain was becoming resplendent. Then all the heads of the tribes together with the elders gathered around me ²⁴ and said: 'See, Yahweh has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice from the midst of the fire. We now know that the word of Yahweh is life for man. ²⁵ We are, nevertheless, going to die devoured by this terrible fire if we do not keep listening to the voice of Yahweh, our God.

²⁶ What man can remain alive after listening to the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as he has now done for us?'

²⁷ Better that you go nearer to hear all the things that Yahweh, our God, will say to you. Then tell these to us that we may put them into practice."

²⁸ Yahweh heard your words and said to me, "I have heard what this people said and they have spoken well. ²⁹ May they always have the same spirit, fear me and observe all my precepts that all may go well with you and with your children for all time. ³⁰ Rise up and tell them to return to their tents in the fields.

³¹ But as for you, remain here with me that I may teach you all the commandments, precepts and laws which you have to teach that they may put them into practice in the land that I will give them as a possession."

³² Observe and carry out the things that Yahweh has commanded us. Do not turn aside from them either to the right or to the left.

³³ Follow all the way which Yahweh has marked out for you, and you will live and be happy and you will live long in the land you are going to conquer.

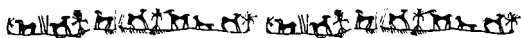
Listen Israel: Yahweh is the Only One

6 ¹ These are the commandments, the norms and the laws that Yahweh, your God, has commanded me to teach you so that you

Ex 20, 2 14. Ex 22, 20; 23, 9; Lev 19, 34 23. Ex 20, 19 25. Ex 33, 20 28. Ex 19, 8 31. 1 Tim 2, 1

■ Listen Israel: Yahweh, our God, is One Yahweh. These verses are the creed of the

Jews: what they recite every day. Jesus alludes to this text when they question him about the



may observe them in the land which is going to be yours. ² Fear Yahweh, observe his commandments all the days of your life and his norms that I teach you today. So also for your children and your children's children that they may live long.

³ Listen, then, Israel, observe these commandments and put them into practice. If you do this, you will be well and you will multiply in this land flowing with milk and honey, as Yahweh, the God of your fathers, promised you.

⁴ Listen, Israel: Yahweh, our God, is One Yahweh. ⁵ And you shall love Yahweh, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ Engrave in your heart the commandments that I pass on to you today. ⁷ Repeat them over and over to your children, speak of them when you are at home and when you travel, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸ Brand them on your hand as a sign, and keep them always before your eyes. ⁹ Engrave them on your doorposts and on your city gates.

¹⁰ Do not forget Yahweh when he has led you into the land which he promised to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; for he will give you great and prosperous cities which you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with

everything good which you did not provide, wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant. So when you have eaten and have been satisfied, ¹² do not forget Yahweh who took you out from Egypt where you were enslaved. ¹³ Fear Yahweh, your God, serve him and call on his Name when you have to swear an oath.

¹⁴ Do not go after other gods; do not serve any of the gods of the nations around you, ¹⁵ because your God, who is in your midst, is a jealous God. And when he burns in anger, you shall disappear from the face of the earth. ¹⁶ You shall not put Yahweh, your God, to the test, as you did in the desert.

¹⁷ Observe the precepts, the commandments and the norms that Yahweh has commanded you. ¹⁸ You shall do what is right and good in the eyes of Yahweh that you may be happy and may come to possess the splendid land which he swore to your fathers ¹⁹ he would give you after having destroyed all your enemies before you.

◆ ²⁰ And when your child asks you one day: What are these precepts, these commandments and these norms which Yahweh has commanded us? ²¹ You shall answer your child: We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but Yahweh led us out of Egypt with prodigious

2. Ex 15, 26 5. Jer 31, 33; 1 Cor 8, 4; Mk 12, 29
15. Ex 34, 14 16. Ex 17, 1; Num 20, 2; Mt 4, 7

9. Ex 13, 9 11. Pro 20, 8 13. Mt 4, 10
21. Ex 12, 26

most important command. See Mk 12:28 and its commentary.

You shall love Yahweh with all your heart. In those remote times the love of God was not totally unselfish. Israel knew that by responding to the love of God who chose them, they were on the right path and God would reward the people with peace and material prosperity.

Engrave these commandments in your heart: keep them present in your mind in order to organize your thinking and to be able to judge everything according to these standards.

Repeat them to your children: knowing that you are responsible for their faith.

Write them on your hands or, let them guide your actions.

Keep them before your eyes so that you will not remember them when it is too late, when all you can do is moan over your mistakes.

Engrave them on your city gates, or let them guide your economic and social life.

Yahweh is a jealous God: see Ex 20:5.

Do not forget Yahweh after you get your fill. All of modern civilization seems to have forgotten this. Men feel in charge of science, technology and the world. Still more serious: many are resigned to losing themselves in their attempt to control the universe.

◆ The Israelites celebrated Passover every year. Every family observed the rites of that feast in a religious banquet. When they were gathered

deeds. ²² And we have seen the great and wonderful things, the awesome marvels he has done against Pharaoh and all his people. ²³ And he took us out from there to lead us into the land which he promised to our fathers. ²⁴ Yahweh has commanded us to put into practice all these precepts and to fear him, our God. ²⁵ Because of this, we are happy and alive today, and we shall be perfect in his eyes if we observe and practise these commandments as he has told us to do.

7 ¹ When Yahweh, your God, has brought you into the land where you are going and which you will conquer; when he drives away before you many peoples – the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites and the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites – seven nations that are much more numerous and more powerful than you; ² when he has given them into your hand and you defeat them, you will destroy them all according to the law of anathema.

³ Do not make any covenant with them or have compassion on them, ⁴ Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons, or taking their daughters for your sons, because they will seduce your children to abandon me and adore strange gods for which the anger of Yahweh will burn against you, and then he would destroy you. ⁵ On the contrary, this is what you must do: destroy their altars and break their images into pieces, demolish their sacred pillars and burn their idols.

How God rewards his faithful ones

⁶ You are a people consecrated to Yahweh, your God. Yahweh has chosen you from among all the peoples on the face of the earth, that you may be his own people. ⁷ Yahweh has bound himself to you and has chosen you, not because you are the most numerous among all the peoples (on

the contrary, you are the least). ⁸ Rather, he has chosen you because of his love for you and to fulfill the oath he made to your fathers. Therefore, with a firm hand Yahweh brought you out from slavery in Egypt, from the power of Pharaoh.

⁹ So know that Yahweh, your God, is the true and faithful God. He keeps his Covenant, and his mercy reaches to the thousandth generation for those who love him and fulfill his commandments, ¹⁰ but he punishes in their own persons those who hate him and he strikes them without delay.

¹¹ So keep the commandments, the norms and the laws that today I command you to practise. ¹² If you observe these norms, if you keep and practise them, Yahweh will be faithful to his Covenant and will show you the love he promised to your fathers. ¹³ He will love you, bless you and multiply you.

He will bless you with many children and abundant harvests: wheat, wine and oil; he will multiply the young of your cattle and of your sheep in the land he promised your fathers he would give you.

¹⁴ You shall be more favored than all the peoples; there will be no sterile male or female among your people or in your livestock. ¹⁵ Yahweh will remove from you all infirmities, he will not let any of the plagues of Egypt which you have known fall upon you. But he will inflict them upon those who hate you.

5. Ex 34, 13	6. Ex 19, 5; Rom 9, 4; Tit 2, 14; 1 P 2, 9	7. 1 Cor 1, 26	8. 1 Jn 4, 10
9. Ex 20, 5; 34, 7	10. 2 K 14, 6; Ezk 14, 12	12. Jn 14, 21; Lk 1, 72	15. Ex 15, 26

around the table one of the children would ask the father: "Father, what are we about to do?" Then, the father would answer: "Our ancestors were in Egypt as the Pharaoh's slaves ...". We find this creed, the proclamation of the faith of Israel in the following lines. It is not enough for the Israelites to "believe that there is a God," they have to recall God's favors in the past in order to thank him.

So, too, Christians always look to the past to

recall God's favors toward them and toward all humankind. The heart of prayer in the Church is the Mass wherein we thank God for the salvation of the world through the death and resurrection of Christ.

The material promises made to Israel are an image of God's promises to the Church which no longer hopes for crops and sheep, but instead for more believers and for the growth of Christ in them.



¹⁶ So, destroy all the peoples which Yahweh, your God, will put in your power. Do not have pity on them or serve their gods that they may not be the cause of your ruin.

¹⁷ Perhaps you will say in your heart: "These nations are more numerous than I am, how then am I going to drive them away?"

¹⁸ Do not be afraid, remember what Yahweh, your God, has done with Pharaoh and with the Egyptians, ¹⁹ those terrible plagues which you saw with your eyes and the marvels and signs, the strong hand and outstretched arm with which Yahweh, your God, has freed you. ²⁰ He will do the same with all the people whom you fear. Yahweh will even send wasps to destroy those who remain and hide themselves to escape from you.

²¹ Do not be afraid of them because Yahweh, your God, is in your midst. He is a great and terrible God.

²² It is he who will destroy these nations little by little before your eyes. If you destroyed them all at once, the wild beasts would multiply and harass you.

²³ Yahweh, your God, will give these people over to you and he will fill them with fear until they all perish. ²⁴ Yahweh will give their kings into your hands that you may strike out their name from under heaven, and nothing will stand before you until you have destroyed them. ²⁵ Burn the images of their gods and do not covet the gold or silver that covers them. ²⁶ None of these shall enter your house, for as they are accursed, the curse might return to you. Regard these as abominable because they are indeed "anathema" or accursed.

Do not forget God when you have everything

8 Be careful to fulfill all the commandments which I give you today, that you may live and increase, and conquer the land which Yahweh promised on oath to your fathers.

² Remember the way that Yahweh, your God, brought you through the desert for forty years. He made you experience want, to test you and know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

³ He made you experience want, he made you experience hunger, but he gave you manna to eat which neither you nor your fathers had known, to show you that man lives not on bread alone, but that all that proceeds from the mouth of God is life for man. ⁴ Your garment did not even fray, or your foot swell all these forty years. ⁵ Understand, then, that Yahweh has taught you in the same way that a father teaches his child.

⁶ Observe the commandments of Yahweh, your God; follow his ways and revere him. ⁷ For Yahweh, your God, will bring you into that good land, a land of streams and rivers, of subterranean waters that gush forth in the valleys and mountains, ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of grapes and figs, of pomegranates and olives, a land of oil and honey. ⁹ A land where the bread you eat is not rationed and where you will lack nothing, a land with iron in stones and copper mines in the mountains.

¹⁰ You shall eat until you are satisfied, and you shall bless Yahweh for the good land he has given you.

¹¹ So take care that you do not forget Yahweh, your God, by neglecting the commandments, norms and laws that I give you today. ¹² And when you have eaten and have been satisfied, when you have built comfortable homes and live in them, ¹³ when your livestock have multiplied, when you have silver and gold in abundance, and an increase of good things of every kind, ¹⁴ then do not let your heart become proud and do not forget Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery. ¹⁵ It is he who has led you across this great and terrible desert, full of fiery serpents and scorpions, an arid land where there is no water. But for you he made water gush forth from the hardest rock. ¹⁶ And he fed you in the desert with manna which your fathers did not know.

He made you experience want and put you to the test, so that it would be for your good later on. ¹⁷ lest you say, "With my own strength I have attained all these good things." ¹⁸ Remember Yahweh, your God, the one who gave you power to become prosperous, as you are today, in fulfillment of the Covenant he promised under oath to your fathers.

¹⁹ But if you forget Yahweh and follow other gods, if you put them homage and bow

20. Ex 23, 28; Jos 24, 12

22. Jdg 2, 21

25. Lev 27, 28

3. Ex 16, 14; Wis 11, 9; Mt 4, 4

5. Hos 11, 3; 1 Cor 11, 32

14. Sir 10, 12; Jer 26

15. Num 21, 6

16. Num 20, 1

17. Is 10, 13

18. Hos 2, 10

5. 1-6 shows the meaning of the wandering in the desert: a time of testing for Israel. Israel was poor and yet God's help was never lacking.

He gave you manna to eat, to show you that man lives not on bread alone, but that every-

thing coming from the mouth of God is life for men. The manna they were given was the sign of another food needed by men and which comes from the mouth of God: his Word (see commentary on Ex 16:16).



before them, I warn you right now that you will surely perish.²⁰ In the same way that Yahweh destroyed the nations that stood in your way, so will he destroy you if you disobey Yahweh, your God.

9 ¹ Listen, Israel: you are to cross the Jordan today to drive away greater and stronger nations than yourself, nations with grand cities whose walls reach up to heaven.² They are a great people, they are tall – the Anakites whom you have seen and of whom you heard it said that nothing can overcome them.³ But today you will see Yahweh, your God, crossing the Jordan before you. He will destroy them all and he will subject them to you. Then, you will seize the land from them and make them perish, as Yahweh promised you.

⁴ When Yahweh, your God, has destroyed them in your presence, do not think that "Yahweh brought me to this land and gave it to me because of my own goodness." Yahweh drove those nations out because of their wickedness.⁵ It is not by your merits nor because you are good that you will conquer the land: Yahweh will deprive them of the land because they have done evil, and also to fulfill the promise he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

You are a stiff-necked people

o ⁶ Know, therefore, that Yahweh has given you your inheritance, this excellent land, not by any merit of yours since you are a rebellious people.⁷ Remember and do not forget that it was because of your fault that Yahweh became angry with you in the desert, for you have been rebellious towards Yahweh from the day you left Egypt until you arrived here.

⁸ Then at Horeb, you provoked his anger and he wished to destroy you.⁹ When I went up the mountain to receive the slabs of stone, the tables of the Covenant that Yahweh made with you, I stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking.¹⁰ And Yahweh gave me the two slabs of stone written with his finger, containing all the words that he told you on the mountain, from the midst of the fire, on the day of the Assembly.

¹¹ And when Yahweh gave me the two slabs of stone, the tables of the Covenant, at the end of the forty days and forty nights,¹² he said to me: "Go down from this mountain at once because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt, they have suddenly abandoned the way that you taught them and they have made an idol for themselves."

¹³ And Yahweh also said to me: "I see this people; it is a rebellious people.¹⁴ Let me alone and I will destroy them and wipe out their name from under heaven. And out of you, I will make another people more numerous and greater than they."¹⁵ I, therefore, went down from the mountain, from the summit which was burning, holding in my hands the two tables of the Covenant.¹⁶ And I saw that you had sinned against Yahweh, your God, and that you had made a molten calf.¹⁷ How suddenly had you turned aside from the way which Yahweh had taught you! Holding the two slabs with both hands, I hurled them down and broke them into pieces in the sight of all.

¹⁸ Then I fell prostrate before Yahweh and, as before, I passed forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking, for the sin which you had committed by doing evil in the sight of Yahweh and arousing his anger.¹⁹ I was afraid that the wrath and anger of Yahweh against you had reached the point that he wanted to destroy you. And Yahweh listened to me, once more.

²⁰ Yahweh was also very angry with Aaron and he was ready to destroy him. In the same way, I interceded for Aaron also.²¹ Regarding the sin, that calf which you had made – I threw it in the fire, broke it into pieces and ground it until it was fine as dust. Then I threw the dust into the brook that flows down from the mountain.

²² At Taberah and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattavah, you provoked the wrath of Yahweh.²³ And when he wanted you to leave Kadesh-barnea saying, "Go up and take possession of the land that I have given you," you rebelled again. You did not believe Yahweh nor did you want to listen to his voice.²⁴ You have been rebellious against Yahweh since the day that I have known you.

²⁵ So, I lay prostrate before Yahweh for forty days and forty nights because he said he

5. Rom 11, 32; Eph 2, 6; Tit 3, 5
19. Heb 12, 21

21. Ex 32, 20

7. Ex 32

9. Mt 4, 2
24. Ex 23; Ps 78, 8; Acts 7, 51

11. 9, 6; 31, 27; 2 K 17, 14; Jer 7, 26

o Israel is a rebellious people. This is the way we translate the biblical expression: "stiff-necked people," or difficult to lead. Is this only a reproach? From the very beginning Israel was an independent people, with a passion for freedom; they never worshipped their leaders but

were always arguing and fighting with everyone, including their God. Those of us who know the parable of the prodigal son, know why God so loved these people, and why, even now, they continue to be the "firstborn son" of God among all the nations of the earth.



would destroy you. ²⁶ I prayed to Yahweh and said to him: "O Lord God, do not destroy your people and your inheritance, whom you redeemed with your might, whom you brought out of Egypt with the strength of your hand. ²⁷ Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; do not look on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness, or on their sins, ²⁸ that it may not be said in the land from which you brought them out: 'Yahweh was not able to bring them to the land which he had promised them. He does not like them, so he brought them out of Egypt to slay them in the desert.' ²⁹ Do not forget that they are your people and your possession whom you brought out of Egypt with your great power and outstretched arm."

10 ¹ At that time, Yahweh said to me, "Make two slabs of stone like the first ones and come up to me. And make an ark of wood also. ² I shall write on the slabs the words that were on the first slabs which you broke. Then you shall put them in the ark."

³ So I made an ark of acacia wood, and made two slabs of stone like the first. And I climbed up the mountain carrying these. ⁴ He wrote on the slabs, just as he had done with the first, the ten sayings that he spoke to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire, on the day of the Assembly; and Yahweh gave them to me. ⁵ Upon my return, coming down from the mountain, I placed the tables in the ark which I made, and there they are as Yahweh commanded me.

⁶ The children of Israel left for the wells of Bene-jaakan, going through Moserah. Aaron died and was buried there, and his son Eleazar succeeded him. ⁷ From there, they went to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land of brooks and springs. ⁸ It was then that Yahweh set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the Covenant, to become his servants, to stand before the Lord, and to give blessings

by calling on his name, as they do until this day. ⁹ For that reason, Levi has no share in the inheritance with his brothers; Yahweh is his inheritance, as Yahweh, your God, said to him.

¹⁰ I therefore stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights as the first time. Yahweh again listened to my prayer and gave up his plan to destroy you. ¹¹ And Yahweh said to me: "Rise up and lead this people that they may go and take possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance."

Serve and Love God

¹² So now, Israel, what is it that Yahweh, your God, asks of you but to fear him and follow all his ways? Love him and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹³ Observe the commandments of Yahweh and his laws which I command you today, and all will be well with you.

¹⁴ See: the heavens, those that are seen and those that are unseen, the earth and all that is in it, everything belongs to Yahweh, your God. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, it was on your fathers that Yahweh set his heart. He loved them, and after them, he chose their descendants – you – preferring you to all the peoples, as you can see this day.

¹⁶ Purify your hearts, then, and do not be defiant towards Yahweh because ¹⁷ Yahweh is the God of gods and the Lord of lords. He is the great God, the strong and terrible God. When he judges, he treats everyone

28. Num 14, 16; Ps 115, 2
Ex 19, 5

16. Jer 4, 4

1. Ex 34, 1
17. 1 Tim 6, 15; Rev 17, 11; 19, 16

3. Ex 25, 10

6. Num 33, 38
Rom 2, 11; Acts 10, 34; Job 34, 9

14. Ps 24, 1; Is 66, 1;

+ Here, the two commandments, which Jesus combined into one, are related.

Love God and serve him with all your heart and all your soul. A love which is the response to God's love: "Because the Lord bound himself to your fathers. He loved them, and then, he loved you." Pay attention to the sequence: God loves first and chooses; then we respond to his love and try to express it by our obedience. God's mercy comes first and as Paul will remind us, no one can boast of merits and rights before God (Rom 3:20).

Purify your hearts. This text says more precisely: "Circumcise your hearts" (see Gen 17).

The widow, the orphan, the stranger. Responding to God's love means loving those who are helpless. In that period, the needy were individuals in a society without well-defined social classes. But, in today's world, there are entire classes and nations in the situation of the widow, the orphan and the alien of those days.

Today, this love for the forsaken often means to be committed to the lower classes of society. God will render justice to them. If we do not know spontaneously how to achieve this justice with the means taught in the Gospel, God will bring justice in a more radical way.



equally; he does not let himself be bought by gifts. ¹⁸ He renders justice to the orphan and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him bread and clothing. ¹⁹ Love the stranger then, because you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ Fear Yahweh, your God, serve him, follow him and call on his name when you have to make an oath. ²¹ Praise him because he is your God, who has done those amazing things for you. ²² When you went down to Egypt, your ancestors were no more than seventy persons, but now, Yahweh, your God, has made you as many as the stars of heaven.

11 ¹ So, love Yahweh, your God, and observe all that he has commanded you: his laws, norms and commandments. ² You, with whom I am speaking, understand all this. Perhaps this may be more difficult for your children who have not known the teaching of Yahweh or seen his greatness and strength. ³ But you saw the signs and the marvels he did in Egypt against Pharaoh and all his land, ⁴ and what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and chariots, when he buried them in the waters of the Red Sea, destroying them as they pursued us.

⁵ Remember, too, all that Yahweh did for you in the desert, until you came to this place, ⁶ what he did to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, from the tribe of Reuben, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them with all their families, their tents and their followers, in the midst of all Israel. ⁷ You have

seen with your eyes all these great wonders that Yahweh has done. ⁸ Therefore, observe all these commandments that I give you, that you may gather strength and take possession of the land which you are going over to possess. ⁹ And you will live long in the land which Yahweh swore to give to your fathers and to their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.

¹⁰ For the land you are to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt which you left, where after having sown your seeds, you had to water them with your feet on the water wheel like a vegetable garden, ¹¹ but a land of mountains and valleys, which drinks water from the rain that comes from the heavens. ¹² Yahweh, your God, cares for this land and his eyes are constantly fixed on it from the beginning of the year until its end.

¹³ If you surely obey the commandments that I give you today, if you love Yahweh and serve me with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹⁴ I will give rain to your land in season, both in autumn and in spring, that you may harvest your wheat, wine and oil. ¹⁵ Your field will give you grass for your cattle, and you will eat until you are satisfied. ¹⁶ But if you turn aside, if you serve other gods and bow before them, ¹⁷ the anger of Yahweh will break out against you. He will close up the heavens and it will cease to rain; the land will not yield its fruit and you will suddenly perish in that beautiful land which Yahweh gives you.

¹⁸ Engrave these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, brand them on your hand as a sign, and keep them always before your eyes. ¹⁹ Teach them to your children. Speak of them when you are at home and when you travel, when you lie down and when you rise. ²⁰ Engrave them on your doorposts and on your city gates. ²¹ Then your days and the days of your children will be multiplied in the land which Yahweh swore to give to your fathers, and you will dwell in that land as long as the heavens are above the earth.

²² For if you observe the commandments that I command you to practise, if you love Yahweh and follow his ways, clinging to him.

18. Ps 146, 7 19. Ex 22, 21; 23, 9 22. Ex 1, 5 6. Num 16 13. Jer 5, 24; James 5, 7 18. Mt 23, 5 21. Jer 33, 2

■ "To you who saw the miracles, I say: Remember." The same lessons are repeated. Israel will continue safely in the land if future generations do not forget what the Lord did for their fathers. Thus, those who saw God's marvelous deeds have the obligation to teach them to their children.

Faith is not a doctrine, but rather the understanding of something experienced. The be-

liever has been freed through his faith: some have been freed from alcoholism, others from selfishness, others see how their Christian community has transformed the people around them.

At whatever time, the way for parents to educate their children in the faith is to share their own religious experience with them and to show them how they found the living God. Faith is passed on from one person to another.

²³ Yahweh will destroy all those nations before you and you will seize the land from greater and more powerful nations.

²⁴ Every place where you set foot will be yours; your territory will be from the desert up to Lebanon and from the Euphrates River up to the Western Sea. ²⁵ No one will be able to stand against you. In all the land that you shall tread, Yahweh will make the peoples fear and be afraid when they hear of you, as he himself has said.

There will be one sanctuary

◆ ²⁶ See that on this day, I set before you a blessing and a curse. ²⁷ A blessing if you obey the commandments of Yahweh that I command you today; ²⁸ a curse if you disobey these commandments and turn aside from the way that I show you now, to follow strange gods which are not yours. ²⁹ When Yahweh, your God, has brought you into the land you are going to conquer, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim, and the curse on Mount Ebal. ³⁰ (Those mountains are at the other side of the Jordan, behind the western road, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, near the oak of Moreh.) ³¹ Now you are going to cross the Jordan to take possession of the land which Yahweh gives you. You are to possess it and live in it, ³² and be careful to carry out all the laws and precepts which I now set before you.

12 ¹ These are the precepts, the norms and the laws that you shall endeavour to put into practice all the days of your life in the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has given you.

² Totally destroy all the places where the peoples you are going to

drive away had worshipped their gods. Do this in the high mountains as well as in the hills and under every green tree. ³ Destroy their altars, smash their pedestals, burn their sacred pillars, and break into pieces the images of their gods. Wipe out in those places even the name of their gods.

⁴ Do not build similar sanctuaries for Yahweh, ⁵ for he himself has already chosen a place among all the tribes to put his Name there and dwell in it. There you will go and look for Yahweh.

⁶ To that place you will bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, tithes and offerings. There you will present the offerings that you promised to God and those which you voluntarily offer, as well as the firstlings of your cattle and sheep.

⁷ There you shall eat in the presence of Yahweh and shall feast together with your families, enjoying everything you have reaped through the blessing of Yahweh. ⁸ You shall not do there as we do here. For now everyone does what seems best for him, ⁹ because we have not yet come to the place of rest, that is, the land which Yahweh is giving you as your inheritance.

¹⁰ When you cross the Jordan and settle in the land which Yahweh will give you, when he

24. Jos 1, 35 26. 27, 28; 30, 15 29. Job 8, 33 2. 1 K 14, 23; 2 K 16, 4; Is 57, 5; Jer 2, 20
3. Eek 6, 13; Ex 23, 24 5. 1 K 8, 29; Jn 4, 20 8. Jdg 17, 6; 21, 25

◆ Here we have a reference to the Covenant held by Joshua (Joshua 8:30).

○ In chapter 12 we have the beginning of the laws which must govern Israel if they are to really become God's people.

The first law directs them to destroy the pagans' sacred places. These were places set on hilltops in the middle of woods. There a pole was placed between vertical stones.

The second prescription deals with having no other temple than the one in Jerusalem. Attempting to counter abuses coming from the multiplication of cultic places, the Jewish priests managed to achieve religious unity around the

Jerusalem Temple. Without authority and control, it was impossible to prevent Yahweh's sanctuaries from becoming subject to many abuses and influences from pagan cults.

Why did God want only one Temple? Apparently for the same reasons that he wanted to make his promises to only one family of kings, David's family. This is because, first Israel and then the Church, must be a sign of unity in the world. If it is a fact that people can address God at any time and in any way their faith dictates to them, they do, nevertheless, have to respect God's will that one people alone serve him in his only House, his Church.

has delivered you from all your enemies, you will at last find rest. ¹¹ Then you shall bring to the place chosen by Yahweh as a dwelling place for his Name, everything which I commanded: the burnt offerings, the sacrifices, the tithes and the first-fruits of the work of your hand, and the selected offerings which you promised by vow to Yahweh: ¹² There you shall celebrate your banquets before Yahweh: you and your children, your servants as well as the Levites who live among you, since they have no portion or inheritance as you have.

+ ¹³ Be careful not to offer your holocaust in any place. ¹⁴ Only in the place chosen by Yahweh in the land of one of your tribes are you to offer your holocaust, and only there will you do all that I command you. ¹⁵ However, in all your cities you may slaughter and eat meat, as much as you like of the animals Yahweh has blessed you with. Both the clean and the unclean may eat of it, just as you would eat gazelle or deer. ¹⁶ Only you must not eat the blood but pour it out upon the earth like water.

¹⁷ You may not eat in your cities the tithes of your wheat, wine and oil, or the firstlings of your herd or your flock, or any of the things which you have offered to Yahweh either freely or by vow. ¹⁸ These you are to eat before Yahweh in the place Yahweh has chosen together with your children and your servants, and you will feast before Yahweh, your God, enjoying the fruit of your labor. ¹⁹ Be careful not to forget the Levite as long as you live.

²⁰ When Yahweh has extended your boundaries as he promised you, and you would like to eat meat, you may do so whenever you like. ²¹ If the place chosen by Yahweh for his dwelling is too far, then you may kill any of your herd or your flock, which Yahweh has given you, in the manner that I have prescribed for you. ²² You may eat it within your cities as much as you like, but you shall eat it just as the gazelle or the deer is eaten: all may equally eat of it – the clean and the unclean. ²³ Only take

care not to eat the blood because the blood contains the life and you must not eat the life with the blood. ²⁴ Do not eat it but pour it as water is poured upon the land ²⁵ that all may go well with you and with your children after you, doing what is pleasing in the eyes of Yahweh.

²⁶ In turn, you shall bring with you the things you have consecrated and offered by vow to Yahweh and go to the place chosen by Yahweh. ²⁷ There you will sacrifice your holocausts, the flesh as well as the blood, on the altar of Yahweh, your God. Pour out the blood on the altar, and then, eat the flesh.

²⁸ Be careful to obey all that I command you, and all shall always be well with you and with your children after you, for doing what is right and good in the eyes of Yahweh.

²⁹ Yahweh, your God, will destroy before you the nations you drive away. When you have destroyed them and dwell in their land, be careful that after having destroyed them, ³⁰ you are not ensnared into following their example. Do not look at their gods or ask about them by saying: "How did this nation serve their gods? We will do the same."

³¹ Neither shall you honor Yahweh, your God, with the same religious practices as those nations have, since in order to honor their gods, ³² they have done everything that Yahweh abhors, including burning their children in honor of their gods.

Do not be led astray

13 ¹ Do everything that I command you without adding or taking anything away from it.

² A prophet may perhaps appear among your people or someone who claims to have seen a vision in his sleep and foretells signs or marvelous things. ³ If these signs or these marvels happen, and he takes advantage of them to say: "Come and let us follow other gods (gods which are not ours), and let us serve them," ⁴ do not pay attention to the words

15. Lev 3, 17

23. Gen 9, 4; Lev 1, 5

31. Lev 18, 26; 2 K 16, 3; Ezk 16, 21

2. Jer 23, Mt 24, 24; Rev 13, 14

3. 1 Cor 11, 19

+ Chapter 12:13-19 establishes the distinction between killing animals to offer them in sacrifice, which was only allowed in the Jerusalem Temple, and killing them to use the meat, which can be done in any place.

From 12:29 to 13:19: a new warning against the danger of idolatry. *You will expel the wicked from your midst* (1:6). In 1 Cor 5:13, Paul will recall these words when he asks the Christian community to expel those who give bad example and who refuse to transform their lives. As was mentioned about Joshua 3, this

command to kill those who cause idolatry comes from the certainty that the faith of Israel is the most precious in the world: God's chosen people cannot allow their faith to be contaminated by men's errors for any price or under any circumstance.

o A prophet may perform wonders: if it is to bring about separation from the Lord, he is a fraud. Does God want us to change our membership from one church to another in order to go where we think miracles are happening?

of this prophet or dreamer; because Yahweh, your God, is testing you to know if you really love him with all your heart and with all your soul.⁵ It is Yahweh, your God, you will follow and him will you fear. Obey his commandments and listen to his voice. Serve him and cling to him.

⁶ As for the prophet or dreamer, he must lie because he has spoken to draw you away from Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery. This prophet must die because he wanted you to stray from the path that Yahweh has commanded you to follow. In this way you will purge the evil from your midst.

⁷ If your brother, the child of your father, or if your son or daughter, or the woman you love or your close friend secretly tries to lure you, saying: "Come, let us serve other gods, gods whom neither you nor your fathers have known," the gods of either the neighboring nations that surround you along the boundaries of your land or those far away, do not pay attention to him or listen to him.⁸ Do not pity him, or pardon him or cover up for him,⁹ but denounce him. You shall deal him his death and your hand shall be the first raised against him, and then the hand of all the people.¹⁰ You shall kill him by stoning because he tried to draw you away from Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from that house of slavery.¹¹ All in Israel will hear of this and they will fear, and never dare to do the same thing.

¹² You may hear that in some of the cities that Yahweh will give you to dwell in,¹³ some evil people have appeared. You will perhaps hear that they have perverted their fellow residents and have invited them to serve new and strange gods.¹⁴ Then carefully inquire about them and try to discover the truth of the matter. If it is certain and you have confirmed that such a shameful thing has indeed been done,¹⁵ you shall kill by the sword all the inhabitants of that city. You shall curse the city and all that is in it, even the animals.¹⁶ Then you shall pile up in the center of the square all the plunder and set the city on fire with all the plunder so as to fulfill the curse of Yahweh. This city will forever be a heap of ruins, and will never be rebuilt again.

¹⁷ You shall not take hold of anything from this city, not even the smallest thing, in order to appease the wrath of Yahweh, and that he may have mercy on you. Then he will bless

you and fulfill the promise he has sworn to your fathers¹⁸ if you listen to the voice of Yahweh, observing all his commandments that I command you today, and doing what is right in the sight of Yahweh, your God.

14¹ Yahweh holds you as his sons, so you will not cut yourselves or cut the hair on your forehead for the dead.² You are a people, holy and consecrated to Yahweh, your God. Yahweh has chosen you from among all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his very own people.

Animals "clean" and "unclean"

■³ Do not eat anything that is unclean.⁴ These are the animals that you may eat: ox, sheep, goat,⁵ deer, gazelle, roebuck, wild goat, ibex, antelope, and mountain sheep.⁶ You may eat any animal that chews the cud and has a split hoof.

⁷ But of those that chew the cud or have a split hoof, you may not eat the following: camel, hare, and rock badger, because they do chew the cud but do not have a divided hoof—these are unclean for you. Neither shall you eat the meat⁸ of the pig because although it has a split hoof, it does not chew the cud. Regard it as unclean: do not eat their meat or touch their carcass.

⁹ Of all the animals that live in the water, you may eat the following: all that has fins and scales,¹⁰ but not those that do not have fins and scales. Consider them as unclean.¹¹ You may eat all clean birds.¹² But do not eat the following: eagle, vulture, osprey,¹³ buzzard, kite, the different kinds of falcons,¹⁴ all kinds of ravens, —¹⁵ ostrich, nighthawk, sea gull, and all the different kinds of hawk.¹⁶ eagle, owl and ibis, swan.¹⁷ pelican, purple gallinule, cormorant,¹⁸ stork, the different kinds of heron, hoopoe, and bat.¹⁹ Consider as unclean all winged insects. Do not eat them.²⁰ But you may eat all clean birds.

²¹ Do not eat any animal that you find dead. You may give it to the foreigner who lives in your city, or sell it to the stranger, for you are a people consecrated to Yahweh, your God.

Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

Tithes

○²² Every year separate the tenth part from all that you have sown and have grown in your fields.²³ In the presence of Yahweh, in the place he has chosen as the dwelling place for

5. 1 Cor 5, 13 7. Lev 19, 18 1. Lev 19, 27; Is 1, 2

7. Lev 11, 1 21. Lev 17, 15; 22, 8 Ex 23, 19

■ Another list of "clean" and "unclean", animals (see Lv 11).

○ In 14:22-29, we have the *tithes*, that is the tenth part of the crops to be offered to God. Deu-



his Name, you shall eat the tithe of your wheat, your oil and your wine, and the firstlings of your herd and flock that you may learn to honor Yahweh, your God, all the days of your life.

²⁴ The journey may be too long for you to bring those tithes to the place Yahweh has chosen as a dwelling place for his Name. In that case, when Yahweh your God, blesses you, exchange them all for money. ²⁵ Take the money in your hand and go to the place chosen by Yahweh. ²⁶ There you shall buy whatever you like – oxen or sheep, or wine or strong drink – anything you like. And there you shall eat in the presence of Yahweh, and shall rejoice – you and your household. ²⁷ And do not forget the Levite who dwells in your cities, since he has nothing of his own and no inheritance as you have.

²⁸ Every three years, separate the tithes of all the year's harvest but store them in the city. ²⁹ Then the Levite among you who has no inheritance of his own, and the foreigner, the orphan and the widow who live in your cities may come and eat, and be satisfied. So Yahweh will bless all the works of your hands, all that you undertake.

The year of forgiveness

15 ¹ Every seven years you shall pardon debts. ² You shall do this in the following manner: the creditor shall pardon any debt of his neighbor or brother, and shall stop exacting it of him because Yahweh's pardon has been proclaimed. ³ You may demand that a foreigner pay back his debts but you shall pardon the debt of your brother. ⁴ However you should have no poor in your midst for Yahweh will give you prosperity in the land that you have conquered. ⁵ If you listen to the voice of Yahweh, your God, and obey all that he has commanded you, which I now remind you of, he will bless you as he promised. ⁶ You shall lend to many nations but you shall not borrow; you shall drive away many nations and they shall not have dominion over you.

The poor and enslaved

◆ ⁷ If there is anybody poor among your brothers, who lives in your cities in the land that Yahweh gives you, do not harden your heart or close your hand, ⁸ but be open-handed and lend him all that he needs.

⁹ Be careful that you do not harbor in your heart these perverse thoughts: "The seventh year, the year of pardon, is near," so you look coldly at your poor brother and lend him nothing. He may cry to Yahweh against you, and you will be guilty. ¹⁰ When you give anything, give willingly, and Yahweh, your God, will bless you for this in all your work and in all that you undertake.

¹¹ The poor will certainly never be absent from this land. Therefore I give you this commandment: you must be open-handed to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land.

¹² If your fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you as a slave, he shall serve you for six years, and in the seventh, you shall set him free. ¹³ When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed, ¹⁴ but give him something from your flock, from your store of wheat and wine, something from the good things that Yahweh has blessed you with.

¹⁵ Remember that you too were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh, your God, has given you free-

Lev 25, 1 - 7. Ex 22, 2; 1 Jn 3, 17

11. Mk 14, 7; Jn 12, 8

12. Ex 21, 2; Jn 8, 35

teronomy makes this offering the foundation of a believer's faith. Elsewhere in the Bible, the author will emphasize that "the just man has compassion, he gives and lends; and in the end, he owns the land" while "the unjust man borrows and does not repay and in the end, he is thrown out of the land" (Psalm 37). The man who knows how to give does not squander: he is content with what he has and lacks nothing, while the man who refuses to give never has enough and never feels happy (Prv 11:24). See also 2 Cor 9:6.

The same spirit inspires chapter 15 concerning the sabbatical year (see Lv 25:1).

◆ It is painful for the author of the book to find that there are poor people on the land God gave to his children: did not God give all that was necessary for everyone? Yet, there are poor people and he asks believers to help them break out of this subhuman situation. It is not a question of giving them a piece of bread for today, but of loaning them what they need to re-establish themselves, to work the land of their fathers and



dom. Because of this, I give you this commandment.

¹⁶ But if your slave says: "I do not want to leave," because he loves you and your household and knows that he will be well off with you, ¹⁷ you shall then take an awl and thrust it through his ear into the door of your house, and he will serve you forever. You shall do likewise with your maidservant.

¹⁸ Do not think it hard on you to give him freedom because for six years, you have gained from him twice as much as from a hired servant.

¹⁹ You shall consecrate to Yahweh all the male firstlings that are born of your cattle or sheep. You shall not do work with the firstling of your cattle, nor shear the firstling of your sheep.

²⁰ You shall eat these every three years in the presence of Yahweh with all your family in the place Yahweh has chosen. ²¹ You shall not sacrifice an animal to Yahweh if it has any defect, if it is lame or blind. ²² but shall eat it in your house; the clean as well as the unclean may eat of it, as you would eat a gazelle or a deer. ²³ Only take care that you do not eat the blood, you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

Israel's three feasts

16 ¹ Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover in honor of Yahweh since it was in this month that Yahweh, your God, brought you out of Egypt by night. ² On the Passover, you shall sacrifice oxen and sheep to Yahweh in the place he has chosen for his Name to dwell. ³ For the Passover supper, you are not to eat leavened bread, but for six days, you shall eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt hastily. So you shall remember all the

days of your life the day on which you left Egypt.

⁴ For seven days, no leaven shall be seen in your house or throughout your territory; nor shall any of the flesh you sacrificed on the evening of the first day be left for the following day.

⁵ You may not offer the Passover sacrifice in any city which Yahweh gives you, ⁶ but only in the place chosen by Yahweh as the dwelling place for his Name.

Sacrifice the Passover in the evening, at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt. ⁷ You shall roast it and eat it in the place chosen by Yahweh, your God. And then, in the morning you shall return to your house. ⁸ You shall eat unleavened bread for six days, and on the seventh, you shall celebrate a solemn assembly in honor of Yahweh and you shall not work.

⁹ You shall count seven weeks, beginning from the day you start cutting the standing wheat. ¹⁰ Then you shall celebrate the Feast of the Seven Weeks for Yahweh, your God, making a voluntary offering from your harvest in proportion to the way Yahweh, your God, blesses you.

¹¹ At the place Yahweh has chosen as the dwelling place for his Name, you shall feast, you and your children, your servants, the Levite who lives in your cities, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow who live among you. ¹² Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and be careful to put these precepts into practice.

¹³ Celebrate too the Feast of the Tents for seven days, after gathering the produce of your threshing floor and of your winepress. ¹⁴ Rejoice during this feast – you and your children, your servants, the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow who live in your city. ¹⁵ You shall feast for seven days in honor of Yahweh at the place chosen by him; because Yahweh will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that your joy may be complete.

¹⁶ Three times a year all your men shall

16. Ex 21, 5 19: Ex 13, 1 23: Ex 23, 14 1: Ex 12, 1 3: Ex 12, 34; 1 Cor 5, 8 9: Ex 23, 14; Lev 23, 5 16: Ex 34, 20

to earn a living with dignity. The Israelites know that debts are cancelled every seven years. Even with that, they will loan what is necessary. We have to think that the factories which, today, build houses, and schools or spend money for the human promotion of their most marginalized personnel, are only fulfilling the requirements of the Bible.

- What refers to the feasts is very similar to

what is read in Lv 23. Notice the insistence on the obligation of celebrating this feast "at the place which Yahweh has chosen," that is to say, in Jerusalem. Hence the pilgrimage of the Jews to Jerusalem, at least on the occasion of the Passover feast. Jesus himself will observe this law which applies to all males, from twelve years of age on (see Lk 2:41). In several passages of the Gospel we read: "Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Feast" (John 2:13; 5:1).

present themselves before Yahweh, your God, in the place chosen by him: on the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of the Weeks, and on the Feast of the Tents. And you shall not present yourselves empty-handed¹⁷ but each one will offer in proportion to what he has, according to the blessing that Yahweh has bestowed upon you.

Regarding justice

¹⁸ Appoint judges and secretaries for your tribes in every city which Yahweh gives you, that they may judge the people according to justice.

¹⁹ You shall not bend the law or show partiality according to the person's condition. Do not accept gifts because gifts blind the eyes of the wise and subvert the cause of the righteous.

²⁰ Justice! Seek justice if you want to live and inherit the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you.

²¹ Do not plant any tree or sacred pillar near the altar of your God.²² Do not put up there the sacred stones that Yahweh hates.

17 ¹ You shall not sacrifice to Yahweh, your God, an ox or a sheep that has any blemish or defect because Yahweh abhors this.

² If there is among you, in any of the cities which Yahweh will give you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of Yahweh to the point of breaking his covenant,³ if they go to serve other gods and bow before them – to the sun, or the moon, or the stars of heaven – which I have forbidden,⁴ and this has been reported to you or you learn of it, you shall begin to investigate the matter well. If you have proved that this abomination has indeed been committed in Israel,⁵ you shall bring to the gates of the city that man or woman who committed the misdeed, and you shall stone him or her to death.⁶ But you will need the testimony of two or three witnesses to condemn a person to death. No one will be condemned by the accusation of only one witness.⁷ The hands of the witnesses shall throw the first stones to kill him or her. Afterwards all the people shall stone him. In this way, you will make the evil disappear from your midst.

⁸ If a very difficult case is presented to you which you cannot resolve in the city tribunal, inasmuch as it is a case of murder, legal dispute or a quarrel because of injuries, you shall go up to the place chosen by Yahweh, your God:⁹ you shall approach the Levite priests and the judge in office at that time. You shall consult them and they will point out to you the decision on the case.¹⁰ You shall agree with the decision that they have pointed out to you in that place chosen by Yahweh, and you shall try to act in accordance with what they have instructed you.¹¹ You shall follow the instructions they have given you and their verdict without turning aside either to the right or to the left from the decision they made for you.

¹² He who dares to act in another way and does not listen to the priest whom he meets there in the service of Yahweh, or to the judge, that man will die. You shall banish evil from Israel.¹³ So all the people upon knowing this shall fear and not act arrogantly again.

The kings

+ ¹⁴ When you come to the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you, when you have conquered it and live in it, you shall perhaps say: "I would like to have a king like all the neighboring nations."¹⁵ Then you have to appoint a king chosen by Yahweh from among your brothers. You shall not appoint a foreign king who is not a brother Israelite.

¹⁶ Ensure that your king does not acquire many horses, lest he again send his people to Egypt to get more horses. For Yahweh commanded you never to go back that way.

¹⁷ Neither shall he have many women lest they pervert his heart. And neither let him pile up gold and silver.

¹⁸ When he ascends the throne, let him copy for his use this Law from the book of the Levite priests.¹⁹ He shall bring it with him, and read it every day of his life that he may learn to fear Yahweh, keeping all the sayings of the Law and putting his precepts into practice.

²⁰ So let him not become conceited nor look down on his brothers, nor turn aside from this commandment either to the right or to the left, so that he and his children may lengthen the days of their reign in the midst of Israel.

19. Ex 23, 8; Pro 17, 23 7. Jn 8, 7 8. 21, 5 14. 1 S 8, 5 16. Is 31, 1; 17, 15; 1 K 10-11 19. 2 K 23; 3

+ Here we have references to the three institutions acknowledged by the Jews: kings, priests and prophets.

17:14-20. The kings of Israel were negotiating with Egypt. In exchange for the horses they

wished to purchase, they sent young Israelites there, who had to serve in the Pharaoh's armies.

The sons of Levi shall have no share in the inheritance. About the priests of the tribe of Levi, see the commentary on Nm 3 and 4.



The Priests of the tribe of Levi

18 ¹ The Levite priests, the whole tribe of Levi, will have no share or inheritance like the rest of the children of Israel do, but they shall live on the burnt offerings in honor of Yahweh, and on the things consecrated to him. ² The Levite shall have no share in the inheritance received by his brother because Yahweh is his inheritance as he has promised.

³ This will be the right of the priests from what is offered, whether ox or sheep: to the priest shall be given the shoulder, the jaws and the stomach. ⁴ You shall also give him the firstfruits of your wheat, your wine and your oil, as well as the first wool from the shearing of your sheep. ⁵ For Yahweh chose him from among all the tribes to be the servant of his Name, he and his children forever.

⁶ If a Levite comes from one of the cities of the territory of Israel where he resides, and he wishes to enter into the place chosen by Yahweh, ⁷ he shall officiate in the Name of Yahweh, his God, like all his Levite brothers who stand there with him in the presence of Yahweh. ⁸ He shall eat a portion equal to that of the others, besides what he has obtained from the sale of his family goods.

Prophets and "the" Prophet

■ ⁹ When you have entered into the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you, do not imitate the evil deeds of those people. ¹⁰ You must not have in your midst anyone who makes his child pass through the fire, or one who practises divination, or anyone who consults the stars, who is a sorcerer, ¹¹ or one who practises enchantments

or who consults the spirits, no diviner or one who asks questions of the dead.

¹² For Yahweh abhors those who do these things, and it is precisely for this reason that he drives them away before you. ¹³ You must be entirely faithful to Yahweh, your God.

¹⁴ Those people that you are to drive away listened to sorcerers and diviners, but Yahweh, your God, has provided you with something different. ¹⁵ He will raise up for you a prophet like myself from among the people, from your brothers, to whom you shall listen. ¹⁶ Remember that in Horeb, on the day of the Assembly, you said: "I am afraid to die and I do not want to hear the voice of Yahweh again or see again that great fire." ¹⁷ So Yahweh listened to your petition and said to me: "They have spoken well.

¹⁸ I shall raise up a prophet from their midst, one of their brothers, who will be like you. I will put my words into his mouth and he will tell them all that I command. ¹⁹ If someone does not listen to my words when the prophet speaks on my behalf, I myself will call him to account for it. ²⁰ But any prophet who tells in my name anything that I did not command, or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.

Num 18	1. 1 Cor 9, 13	6. 2 K 23, 8	10. 2 K 21, 6	11. Lev 19, 31; Is 8, 19	13. Mt 5, 48
Ex 15, 15; Jer 1, 9; Ezk 3, 1	15. Num 12, 6; Mk 9, 4; Jn 1, 21	16. 6, 14; Acts 3, 2, 7, 37	18. Jn 1, 21; 12, 49		
		20. Dt 13, 5; Jer 28, 15			

■ This text condemns magicians and fortune-tellers and then praises the true prophets.

God's people live by the word of God, but not only by the word found written in a book, but by what God says today through those people whom we call prophets. There are some who receive a special gift from the Spirit to guide people and nations toward the real goals which God proposes to us.

You must have no fortune-tellers among you. Human sacrifices are condemned and so are magic and spiritualism. We find fortune-tellers only among the pagans who do not trust in God: men try to know about their destiny through them; they want to snatch the secrets of the future from the hands of a God whom they

consider to have evil intentions. On the contrary, the mission of the prophets is not to tell what will happen, but to indicate with courage what is the will of God and what we must reform (see Jer 28:1 and Ez 13:1).

I shall raise a prophet from their midst. This "prophet" means the whole series of prophets who will continue to address Israel, as can be seen at the end of the paragraph (20:22). Yet, for the future, Israel was expecting a prophet greater than all others, a prophet who would lead the entire people as well as Moses had done. When John the Baptist appeared, some asked: "Are you the prophet?" (John 1:21), and Christians understood that Christ was "the Prophet" (see Acts 3:22).

²¹ You will perhaps ask: "How are we going to know that a word does not come from Yahweh?" ²² If any prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh and if that which he says does not happen, you shall know that the word does not come from Yahweh. The prophet has spoken to boast and you shall not pay any attention to him.

Cities of refuge

◆ 19 ¹ When Yahweh, your God, has destroyed the nations whose land he will give you, when you have driven them away and you occupy their houses, ² you shall set aside three cities in the midst of the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you in possession. ³ You shall keep the way of entry into them free and open, and divide in three parts the territory that Yahweh, your God, gives you in possession: so that anyone who has killed someone may find refuge in those cities.

⁴ But who may find refuge there to save himself? The person who has accidentally wounded and killed his brother with whom he had had no quarrel before. ⁵ For example, if someone goes to the forest with a companion to cut firewood and as he wields the axe to cut a tree, the blade comes out of its handle, mortally wounding his companion, he can flee into one of those cities and so save himself. ⁶ It must not be allowed that the avenger of blood, because of his rage, should hunt the killer and overtake him and catch up with him because the road is very long, and kill him in turn, when in reality the latter is not guilty of murder, since he had had no previous quarrel with his companion.

⁷ For this reason, I command you to separate these three cities. ⁸ But perhaps Yahweh will extend your frontiers as he has sworn to your fathers, and give you all the land that he promised you, ⁹ on condition that you keep his commandments and do what I tell you today, that is, that you love Yahweh, your God, and follow his ways at all times. Then you shall add

three more to these three cities, doubling the number of cities of refuge.

¹⁰ In that way, innocent blood shall not be shed in the midst of the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you as your inheritance, and you will not be guilty of this shedding of blood.

¹¹ But if a man, because of a feud with his neighbor, ambushes him and falls on him and wounds him to death, and if afterwards the aggressor flees into one of these cities, ¹² the heads of this city shall order that he be arrested there in the place of asylum. And he shall be put in the hands of the relatives of the victim that they may kill him. ¹³ Do not show pity to him, but purge the guilt of shedding innocent blood from the midst of Israel so that you may have prosperity.

¹⁴ In the inheritance you receive in the land which Yahweh, your God, will give as your possession, do not move the boundaries of your neighbour set by your ancestors.

¹⁵ A sole witness is not enough to condemn anyone, whatever be the crime or offence of which he is accused. Only by the testimony of two or three witnesses can a case be resolved.

¹⁶ If only one witness rises against anyone and accuses him of an offence, ¹⁷ both parties involved shall appear before Yahweh in the presence of the priests and judges then in office, that they may deal with it.

¹⁸ The judges will examine the case in detail, and if it turns out that the witness had lied in falsely accusing his brother, ¹⁹ they shall impose on him the punishment which the lying witness tried to impose on his brother. So shall you uproot evil from your midst, ²⁰ because others, upon knowing it, shall fear and not do the same.

²¹ Do not feel sorry for him, but make him pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

War

20 ¹ When you go to war against your enemies and you see horses, chariots and an army more numerous than yours, then have no fear because Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, is with you.

² When the hour of battle draws near, the

Ex 21, 13 15, Mt 18, 16; Jn 8, 17; 2 Cor 13, 1

21, Ex 21, 23; Mt 5, 38

◆ The Israelites had a very strong sense of family solidarity and of revenge. When a person had killed another person, even unintentionally, the family of the dead person had to kill the killer.

Here we see how God acts to educate his people. He could not directly attack such a deeply-rooted mentality. By designating cities of refuge

for the person who killed unintentionally, the right to take justice in one's own hands was at first limited, and with time it was going to disappear.

15: A single witness is not enough to condemn anyone. This principle is recalled in various parts of the New Testament as, for example, in the condemnation of Jesus.

priest shall advance to the head of the army and shall speak to the people saying: ³ "Listen, Israel, today you are to enter into battle against your enemies. Do not let your heart be discouraged, or afraid or troubled, and do not tremble before them. ⁴ for Yahweh, your God, is with you, to fight in your favour against your enemies and save you." ⁵ So the secretaries shall say to the people: "Is there anyone of you who has just built a new house and has not yet lived in it? Let him go and return home; lest he die in battle and another be the first to live in it. ⁶ Is there anyone among you who has planted a new vineyard and has not yet enjoyed its fruits? Let him go and return home, lest he die in the war and another enjoy its fruit. ⁷ Is there anyone who has made a promise to marry and has not yet been married? Let him go back to his home at once, lest he die in combat and another take the woman as his wife."

⁸ They shall also say: "Is there anyone who is afraid or weakhearted? Let him go home immediately, lest his fear discourage others." When they have finished speaking, commanders shall be put at the head of the people.

¹⁰ When you draw near to a city to lay siege to it, you shall first offer it peace. ¹¹ If it accepts your proposal and opens the gates to you, all the people found in it shall save their lives. They shall pay taxes to you and serve you.

¹² If they do not accept the peace that you offer them and declare war against you, you shall lay siege to the city. ¹³ And when Yahweh, your God, gives it into your hands you shall kill by the sword all the men, ¹⁴ but the women and children, the livestock and all the other things which you find there shall be divided as booty among the soldiers, and you shall eat from the plunder of your enemies which Yahweh has given over to you.

¹⁵ This you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you and which are not in those countries which you will possess. ¹⁶ But in the cities which Yahweh gives you as an inheritance, you shall not leave anything that lives. ¹⁷ You must destroy them all according to the law of anathema—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as Yahweh, your God, has commanded you. ¹⁸ that they may not teach you all those evil things which they have done to honor their gods, for by imitating them you shall sin against Yahweh, your God.

¹⁹ If, on attacking a city, you have to lay siege to it for a long time before capturing it, you shall not destroy the fruit trees around it nor cut them with your axe, that you may eat

their fruit. Do not cut them, then. Are the trees of the field men that they should also be stricken? ²⁰ If there are trees in the field which are not fruit-bearing, but are for other uses, cut them down and make ladders and instruments out of them with which you may seize the city that offers you resistance.

Laws and rights

21 ¹ If the corpse of a slain man is found in the land which Yahweh, your God, will give you, and it is not known who killed him, ² your judges and leaders shall go out to measure the distance between the victim and the surrounding cities to ³ determine which city is nearest to the dead man.

⁴ And the leaders of that city shall take a calf that has never been used for work or borne a yoke. And they shall bring it down to a brook which flows the whole year round, to a place which has never been plowed or sown, and there they shall cut its throat. ⁵ The priests, descendants of Levi, shall be present for they were chosen by Yahweh to minister and give the blessings in his name, and they are those who decide on all lawsuits or criminal cases.

⁶ Then all the elders of the city nearest to the man found dead shall wash their hands in the brook over the calf whose throat was cut. ⁷ And they shall pronounce these words, "Our hands did not shed this blood, and our eyes did not see it. ⁸ Forgive, O Yahweh, your people of Israel whom you rescued, and do not charge them with the shedding of innocent blood." ⁹ So they shall be absolved from this blood, and you shall remove the guilt of innocent blood from your midst and do what is right in the eyes of Yahweh.

¹⁰ When you go to war against your enemies, and Yahweh, your God, delivers them over to you, ¹¹ if you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you fall in love with her and desire to have her as your wife, ¹² you shall bring her to your house. First, she shall shave her head and clip her nails. ¹³ She shall take off the dress of a captive and stay in your house. And she will mourn for her father and mother for a month, after which you may have relations with her. So you shall be her husband and she your wife. ¹⁴ If in time she does not please you anymore, you shall set her free. You shall not sell her for money, nor make her your slave, since you have taken her by force.

¹⁵ When a man has two wives and prefers one to the other, supposing that both of them bear him children, and the firstborn is the child

of the wife he loves less, ¹⁶ then on the day he divides the inheritance among his children, he cannot give the birthright of the firstborn to the child of the woman he prefers, at the expense of the true firstborn who is the child of the woman he loves less. ¹⁷ On the contrary, he should recognize the child of the woman he loves less as the firstborn and give him a double share of all his property. He is his firstborn, and to him belongs the right of the firstborn.

¹⁸ If a man has a stubborn and rebellious child who does not pay attention to what his father or mother commands, and does not listen to them when they call him, ¹⁹ his parents shall seize him and bring him before the leaders of the city, to the gate of judgment, ²⁰ and shall say to them: "This child of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he does not pay any attention to us; he is spoiled and a drunkard."

²¹ Then all the people shall stone him to death. In this way shall you banish evil from your midst, and all Israel upon knowing this shall fear.

²² If a man, guilty of any crime that deserves death, has been put to death by hanging him on a tree, ²³ his body must not remain hanging there through the night. But you shall bury him on the same day because the hanged man is a curse of God. So you shall not defile the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you as an inheritance.

Give back what you find

22 ¹ If you find the lost ox or sheep of your brother, do not pretend that you did not see it, but bring it back to its owner. ² If your brother does not live near you, or you do not know to whom the animal belongs, you shall keep it in your house until its owner comes looking for it. Then you shall return it to him.

³ Do the same with his ass, his clothes, or with anything lost by your brother that you happen to find. Do not pretend not to notice them. ⁴ If you see the ass of your brother or his ox fall down by the way, do not pretend not to notice it, but help your brother lift the animal up.

⁵ A woman must not wear a man's clothing, nor a man the clothing of a woman, because whoever does such thing deserves the reprobation of Yahweh.

⁶ If you find along your way a bird's nest in a tree or on the ground, and the mother-bird is sitting upon the birdlings or upon the eggs, you shall not bring with you the mother-bird together with the young, ⁷ but you shall let the mother go and take only the young. Then you shall prosper and live long.

⁸ When you build a new house, you shall construct a small wall around the roof, lest someone should fall from it, and your house become stained with blood.

⁹ Do not sow any other seed in your vineyard because when you do this, you can neither eat from the produce of the grapes nor from the produce of the other plants.

¹⁰ Do not plow with an ox and an ass together.

¹¹ Do not wear a garment woven from wool and linen together.

¹² Make for yourself tassels on the four corners of your cloak with which you cover yourself.

¹³ It may happen that a man takes a wife and afterwards does not like her, ¹⁴ so he reproaches her for her behaviour, and publicly defames her by saying: "I married this woman, but when I went to bed with her, I found out that she was not a virgin." ¹⁵ In this case, the father and mother of the young woman shall take the sheet of the wedding night which proves that she was a virgin, and will show this to the judges of the city. ¹⁶ The father of the young woman shall then say to the judges: "I have given my daughter as wife to this man, but now that he no longer likes her, ¹⁷ he pretends that when he married her she was not a virgin. And yet, see, here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." ¹⁸ They shall spread the sheet before the judges of the city. If the man is guilty, the judges shall arrest him and have him whipped.

¹⁹ They shall also fine him a hundred silver coins which they shall give to the father of the young woman because the man publicly defamed a virgin of Israel. The husband shall have her as his wife and cannot repudiate her as long as he lives.

²⁰ But if what the man says is true, and the proof of her virginity is not found, ²¹ then you shall bring her to the door of her father's house and the people shall stone her to death for having committed an evil deed in Israel -- becom-

ing a prostitute while still in her father's house. So shall you banish evil from your midst.

²² If a man is caught lying with a married woman, the two shall die; the adulterer and the adulteress. So shall you banish evil from Israel.

²³ If a young woman has been promised in marriage to a man, and another man meets her in the city and lies with her, ²⁴ they shall bring the two and stone them to death: the young woman because she did not cry out and ask for help when she was in the city, and the man because he dishonored the future wife of his neighbor. So shall you banish evil from your midst.

²⁵ But if in the fields, a man meets a young woman promised in marriage, and violates her by force, then only the man shall die ²⁶ and the young woman shall not suffer the punishment. She does not deserve death for this case is similar to a highwayman who falls upon a man and murders him: in the same manner, the young woman was assaulted. ²⁷ She was alone in the fields, she cried for help but no one came to help her.

²⁸ If a man meets a young virgin who is not promised in marriage to another man, and that man violates her by force, and they are caught by surprise, ²⁹ the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty pieces of silver, and take her as his wife, because he has dishonored her, and he cannot send her away all his life.

Act worthily as a consecrated people

23 ¹ No man shall take for his wife the wife of his father or the woman with whom his father has lain.

² The man whose testicles are crushed and whose penis is cut shall not be admitted into the assembly of Yahweh. ³ Nor shall the half-breed be admitted into the assembly of Yahweh, even to the tenth generation. ⁴ The Ammonite or Moabite shall never be admitted into the assembly of Yahweh even after the tenth generation, ⁵ because when you came forth from Egypt, they did not go out to meet you with bread and water, but instead they hired against you Balaam, the son of Beor, from Pethor in Mesopotamia, to curse you. ⁶ But Yahweh, your God, did not listen to Balaam and turned the curse into a blessing because Yahweh loves you. ⁷ You shall never share your prosperity or happiness with these peoples.

⁸ You shall not regard the Edomite as abominable for he is your brother, or the Egyptian because you were a pilgrim in his land.

⁹ From the third generation, their descendants can be admitted into the assembly of Yahweh.

¹⁰ When you set out against your enemies, you shall keep yourselves from every evil act. ¹¹ If there is among you a man who is not clean by reason of nocturnal emission, he shall go outside the camp and not return. ¹² When evening comes, he shall bathe himself and when the sun sets, he may enter the camp.

¹³ You shall have a place outside the camp for your natural necessities. ¹⁴ You shall bring a stick with your equipment with which you shall dig a hole, and then cover up the excrement with the unearthed soil. ¹⁵ Because Yahweh, your God, walks in the midst of the camp to protect you and give your enemy into your hands; therefore, your camp must be a thing clean and sacred, in which Yahweh will not see anything indecent; otherwise, he will turn away from you.

¹⁶ You shall not turn over to his master the slave who ran away from his house and sought refuge with you. ¹⁷ He shall stay with you among your household, in the place that he chooses in one of your cities, where it seems best for him. You shall not oppress him.

¹⁸ You shall not have among the daughters of Israel a consecrated prostitute, or a consecrated homosexual among the sons of Israel.

¹⁹ You shall not bring into the house of Yahweh, your God, a gift for prostitutes, or the wages of a dog, that is, a homosexual, to pay for the vow that you have made, for both of these are abominable in the eyes of Yahweh.

²⁰ You shall not lend with interest to your brothers, either in money or food, or in any other thing. ²¹ You can lend with interest to a foreigner, but not to your brother, so that Yahweh, your God, may bless you in all your undertakings in the land you are going to possess. ²² If you make any vow to Yahweh, you shall not be late in fulfilling it for Yahweh will surely require it of you and it would be charged as sin against you. ²³ If you abstain from making vows, you do not commit any sin. ²⁴ Fulfill your promises and, if you make any vow, you shall offer what you have promised to Yahweh.

²⁵ If you go into the vineyard of your neighbor, you may eat as many grapes as you wish, but you may not bring any away. ²⁶ If you pass through the wheat fields of your neighbor, you may pluck the ears with your

hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing wheat.

24 ¹If a man marries a woman, and then dislikes her because of some notable defect he discovers in her, he may write a certificate of divorce, give it to the woman, and send her out of his house.

²If afterwards she becomes the wife of another man ³and he also dislikes her and sends her out with a certificate of divorce; or, if this second man who took her to be his wife dies, ⁴the first husband who sent her away cannot take her back as wife, since she has been defiled. It is an abomination in the eyes of Yahweh for him to take her back. You shall not defile the land which Yahweh will give you for an inheritance.

+ ⁵If a man is newly married, he shall not go to war or be charged with other services. He shall be exempt from everything throughout the year, that he may stay in his house and be happy with his wife.

⁶Mill and grindstone shall not be taken as a pledge. Can life be taken as a pledge?

⁷If a man is caught kidnapping an Israelite, that is to say, one of his brothers, to sell him as a slave, the kidnapper must die. So shall you banish evil from the midst of your people.

⁸Be careful of contagious leprosy. Obey and put into practice what the Levite priests tell you to do; fulfill what I commanded them. ⁹Remember what Yahweh, your God, did to Miriam, when the people were on the way coming forth from Egypt.

¹⁰When you lend anything to your neighbor, you shall not go into his house to take anything as pledge.

¹¹Wait outside, and he shall come out of the house to give you the pledge.

¹²If you have taken as pledge the cloak of a poor man, you shall not keep it overnight, ¹³but shall return it to him when the sun goes down that he may sleep in his cloak. Then the poor shall bless you and you shall be righteous in the eyes of Yahweh, your God.

¹⁴Do not exploit the lowly and the poor daily-wage earner, whether he be one of your brothers or a foreigner whom you find in your land in any of your cities. ¹⁵Pay him daily before the sun goes down, because he is poor and he depends on his earnings, lest he cry to Yahweh against you, and you shall be guilty.

¹⁶The fathers shall not be put to death for the sin of their children, nor the children for the sin of their fathers. Everyone must pay for his own sin.

¹⁷Do not violate the right of the foreigner, or of the orphan, or take as pledge the clothing of a widow.

¹⁸Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Yahweh, your God, rescued you. Therefore, I command you to do this.

¹⁹When you harvest the wheat in your fields, if you drop a sheaf, do not return to pick it up, but let it be there

1. Is 50, 1; Jer 3, 8; Mt 5, 31; 19, 3

4. Hos 3, 1; Jer 3, 1

5. Lk 14, 20

7. Ex 21, 16

8. Lev 13-14

9. Num 12, 10

12. Job 22, 6; Am 2, 8

13. Ex 22, 26

14. Jer 22, 13; Mal 3, 5

15. Lev 19, 13; James 5, 4

16. Gen 18, 24; 2 K 14, 6; Jer 31, 29; Eek 14, 12

19. Lev 19, 9; Rut 2, 15

+ We have here a series of laws promoting more human relations. This is the extent of the prophets' preaching: in all aspects of social life to create among men an attitude of cooperation and kindness similar to the merciful attitude of God himself.

All of this was meant for a nation of farmers with a rather primitive economy and it would have to be adapted for our more organized society. To each of these prescriptions correspond, in the same order, many other aspects of a truly human legislation:

- Help to the newly married.

- Security in employment.
- The fight against prostitution and the exploitation of immigrants.
- The provision of a minimum recompense for those fired and for the families of strikers.
- Wages paid in due time.
- Suppression of measures of collective repression.

Then comes care for the abandoned. We cannot consider what we earn as exclusively ours. We have an obligation to observe the laws of social solidarity and to pay faithfully what they require.

for the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. So Yahweh will bless you in all your work.

²⁰ When you harvest your olives, do not go back to beat the trees another time, what is left shall be for the foreigner, the orphan and the widow.

²¹ When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, do not return to look for what has been left. This will be the share of the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. ²² Remember that you were a slave in Egypt. Therefore, I command you to do this.

25 ¹ When there is a dispute or contest between two men, they shall have recourse to the judges, that they may decide on the matter. They shall declare righteous he who is righteous, and condemn the guilty. ² If he deserves flogging, the judge shall make him fall down on the ground in his presence and shall have him flogged with the number of stripes in proportion to his sin. ³ You may give him forty stripes – not more – otherwise, when he is struck more than this, the punishment may be too much and your brother become dishonored in your eyes.

⁴ Do not muzzle an ox when it threshes the grain.

⁵ If two brothers live together and one of them dies without any child, the wife of the dead man shall not marry anyone other than the brother of her husband. He shall take her as his wife and shall give offspring to his brother. ⁶ The first son that she bears shall be given the name of his brother and shall be considered his son. In this way his name shall not be wiped out of Israel.

⁷ If the brother-in-law refuses to take her for his wife, she shall present herself at the city gates and say to the elders, "My brother-in-law refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel. He does not want to perform his duty as brother-in-law in my favour."

⁸ Then the judges shall call this man and speak to him. If he persists and says: "I do not want to take her for my wife," his sister-in-law shall go up to him and in the presence of the

judges remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face and say these words, "So shall it be done to the man who does not revive the name of his brother." ¹⁰ His house shall be called in Israel "the house of the barefooted one."

¹¹ If two men fight with each other and the wife of one draws near to save her husband from the blows of the other, extends her hand and grasps him by the testicles, ¹² you shall cut off the woman's hand without pity.

¹³ You shall not keep in your bag different weights, some large and others small, ¹⁴ nor shall you have in your house a large measure and a small one. ¹⁵ You shall have a full and exact weight, and an equally just and exact measure, that you may lengthen your days in the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you. ¹⁶ Because Yahweh hates him who does such things and all kinds of injustice.

¹⁷ Remember what Amalek did to you when you were on the road, coming out of Egypt. ¹⁸ He went out to meet you on the way and when you were weak and tired attacked from behind, all who were exhausted. He had no fear of God. ¹⁹ Therefore, when Yahweh, your God, after subduing all your enemies around you, has given you rest in the land which he gives you, you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.

The Israelite proclaims his faith

26 ¹ When you come into the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you as an inheritance, when you possess it and dwell in it, ² you shall take the firstfruits of all your harvests, place them in a large basket and bring it to the place chosen by Yahweh, your God, as the dwelling place for his Name.

³ Present these to the priest who is in office, and say to him, "On this day, I give thanks to Yahweh, my God, because I have entered into the land he promised our fathers that he would give us." ⁴ Then the priest shall take

1. Is 5, 20; Am 2, 6	3. 2 Cor 11, 24; 1 Cor 9, 9; 1 Tim 5, 18	5. Rut 4; Mk 12, 18	15. Lev 19, 35;
Am 8, 5; Hos 12, 8; Mt 6, 10	18. Ex 17, 8; Num 24, 20; 1 S 15, 2	19. Ex 17, 14	2. Ex 13, 12

■ *My father was an Aramean.* This paragraph is like a profession of faith for the Israelites. They know they were chosen from among pagan Arameans and that God, after liberating them, had given them the prosperity they were

enjoying. Likewise, the various formulations of the 'Creed' which the Church now uses, place at the very center the liberating work that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, realizes for our benefit.

from your hands the large basket and place it before the altar of Yahweh, your God,⁵ and you shall say these words before Yahweh, "My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt to find refuge there, though few in number; but in that country, he became a great and powerful nation.⁶ The Egyptians maltreated us, oppressed us and subjected us to harsh slavery.⁷ So we called to Yahweh, the God of our fathers, and Yahweh listened to us. He saw our humiliation, our hard labor and the oppression to which we were subjected.⁸ He brought us out of Egypt with a firm hand, manifesting his power with signs and awesome wonders.⁹ And he brought us here to give us this land flowing with milk and honey.¹⁰ So now I bring and offer the first fruits of the land which you, Yahweh, have given me."

¹¹ You shall place these before Yahweh, bow before him and worship Yahweh, your God. Afterwards, you and your household shall feast on all the good things Yahweh has given you and your family. The Levite and the foreigner who lives among you shall also feast with you.

¹² On the third year, the year of tithing, when you have finished separating the tithes from all your harvests and have given them to the Levite, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan, that they may eat within your very city until they are satisfied,¹³ you shall say in the presence of Yahweh,

"I have brought out of my house what belongs to Yahweh. I have given it to the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow according to the commandments that you have given me, without going against any of them or forgetting them.¹⁴ Of that tithe I have not eaten anything during my mourning. There is nothing unclean in it, I have offered nothing to

idols. I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh, my God, and have done as he has commanded me.

¹⁵ From your sanctuary, from on high in the heavens, look down and bless your people Israel, as you bless the land which you have given us just as you had promised to our fathers, the land flowing with milk and honey."

¹⁶ On this day, Yahweh, your God, commands you to fulfill these norms and these commandments. Obey them now and put them into practice with all your heart and with all your soul.

¹⁷ Today you have called upon Yahweh so that he may be your God, and so you shall follow his ways, observing his norms, his commandments and his laws, and listening to his voice.

¹⁸ Today Yahweh has made this promise that you will be his very own people even as he had said to you, and you must obey all his commandments.¹⁹ He, for his part, shall give you honor, renown and glory, and set you high above all the nations he has made, and you will become a nation consecrated to Yahweh, your God, as he has told you.

Renewal of the Covenant

27 ¹ Moses and the elders of Israel gave this order to the people: "Observe all the commandments that I give you today.² When you cross the Jordan to go to the land which Yahweh, your God, will give you, set up large stones and plaster them with lime.³ Then you shall write upon them all the words of this Law at the time that you cross over, that you may enter the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, will give you as he has promised, a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴ When you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal as I command you today, and plaster them with lime.⁵ Set up there an altar in honor of Yahweh, built with unhewn stones.⁶ Build the altar to Yahweh with uncut stones and on this altar, offer burnt offerings to Yahweh, your God.⁷ There you shall also sacrifice peace offerings, and shall feast in the presence of Yahweh, your God.⁸ Write plainly upon these stones all the words of this Law."

⁹ Then Moses and the priests from the tribe of Levi said to the people of Israel: "Pay atten-

6. Ps 105, 12

12. 14, 28

15. 1 K 8, 43

3. Jos 8, 32; 1 K 12, 1

♦ In chapters 27-28 we have the conclusion of "the discourse of Moses" which was found in chapters 5-11.

Notice the ceremony of the renewal of the

Covenant 27:4-36. It took place in Schechem, in the days of Joshua (Jos 8:32). The whole people promised to observe the ten commandments expressed in the form of curses.

tion and listen, Israel. Today you have become the people of Yahweh, your God: ¹⁶ Listen, therefore, to his voice and put into practice the commandments and the norms that I give you today."

¹¹ On that day, Moses gave this command to the people: ¹² "When you have crossed the Jordan River, the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin shall stand on Mount Gerizim to repeat the blessings over the people, ¹³ while those of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali shall stand on Mount Ebal to repeat the curses.

¹⁴ The Levites shall declare to all the Israelites with a loud voice:

¹⁵ Cursed be the man who makes a graven idol, a thing hateful to Yahweh, a work made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in a hidden place! All the people shall answer: Amen!

¹⁶ Cursed be he who despises his father or mother! And the people shall respond: Amen!

¹⁷ Cursed be he who moves the boundaries of his neighbor's inheritance. All the people shall respond: Amen!

¹⁸ Cursed be he who leads the blind astray from the way! All the people shall respond: Amen!

¹⁹ Cursed be he who does not respect the rights of the foreigner, the orphan and the widow! All the people shall respond: Amen!

²⁰ Cursed be he who lies with the wife of his father and dishonors his father's bed! All the people shall respond: Amen!

²¹ Cursed be he who sins with any kind of animal! The people shall respond: Amen!

²² Cursed be he who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or mother! All the people shall respond: Amen!

²³ Cursed be he who lies with his mother-in-law! All the people shall say: Amen!

²⁴ Cursed be he who treacherously murders his neighbor! All the people shall say: Amen!

²⁵ Cursed be he who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person! All the people shall say: Amen!

²⁶ Cursed be he who does not obey the words of this Law and does not put them into practice! And all the people shall say: Amen!

Blessings and curses

28 ¹ Well now, if you obey in truth the voice of Yahweh, your God, practising and observing all the commandments which I give you today, Yahweh, your God, shall raise you high above all the nations of the earth. ² Then all these blessings shall come upon you for having obeyed the voice of Yahweh, your God:

³ Blessed shall you be in the city and in the field. ⁴ Blessed shall be the fruit of your body and the fruit of your land, the young of your asses, the offspring of your cattle and sheep. ⁵ Blessed shall be your granaries and the place where you keep your produce. ⁶ Blessed shall you be in whatever you set out to do. ⁷ Yahweh will bring down your enemies who rise against you, and put them at your feet. By one way they shall come out against you but by seven ways they shall flee from you.

⁸ Yahweh will order his blessing to be with you in your granaries and in your undertakings. He shall bless you in the land which Yahweh, your God, gives you.

⁹ Yahweh shall make you a holy people, as he has sworn, if you keep his commandments and follow in his ways. ¹⁰ All the people of this land shall see that in truth you are called people of God and they will respect you.

¹¹ Yahweh shall fill you with all kinds of good things, increasing the fruit of your

13. Lk 6, 20 15. Jdg 18, 31 16. Ex 21, 17 21. Ex 22, 18 22. Lev 18 26. Gal 3, 10 Ex 23, 20; Lev 26

We know that this "discourse of Moses" was, in fact, written during the last days of the kingdom of Judah. At that time, it was enough to recall history to see the many misfortunes which had taken place because the people had not lived according to the way the Lord had required. The blessings had not been many, nor had they lasted long. On the contrary, the most cruel situations described in this chapter, had been happening.

If you obey the voice of Yahweh, he will raise you above all the nations (28:1). The author is convinced that the people could follow all this and thus, find happiness. Yet, the conclusion is negative: in fact, Israel did not listen and will disobey to the extent of being lost. At the time when these pages were written, the prophet Jeremiah was much more pessimistic in

saying that the First Covenant, with its promise of material happiness, was no longer valid. According to him it is as difficult for people to stop sinning as it is to change the color of their skin (Jer 13:23).

Thus, the actual law was very good, but Israel could not observe it until God had given believers a new heart (see Jer 31:31).

• We often ask a priest to bless or "baptize" a house, a boat, a piece of machinery, some new equipment. The word "to bless," that is to say good things, combines different meanings:

- To say thanks to God from whom everything comes.
- To refer to the good that God thinks about this or that new acquisition or sign of progress; to describe all the benefits that can be derived from this house, this sewing



womb, the fruit of your livestock and the fruit of your land which Yahweh promised on oath to your fathers that he would give you.

¹² Yahweh shall open the heavens for you, his rich treasury, to give rain in its season which your fields need, and he shall bless all that you undertake. You shall lend to many nations but it shall not be necessary for you to borrow anything from them.

¹³ Yahweh will set you at the head of the nations and not at the tail; you shall always be on top and never below, if you fulfill the commandments of Yahweh, your God, which I command you today. ¹⁴ observing them and putting them into practice, without turning aside either to the right or to the left to follow and worship other gods.

¹⁵ But if you do not obey the voice of Yahweh, your God, and do not take care to practise all his commandments and norms which I command you today, all these curses shall come upon you:

¹⁶ Cursed shall you be in the city and in the field. ¹⁷ Cursed shall your granary be, and cursed shall your storage houses be. ¹⁸ Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the fruit of your land, the offspring of your cattle and the young of your sheep. ¹⁹ Cursed shall you be in everything you do, from beginning to end.

²⁰ Yahweh will send misfortune, destruction and fear upon everything that your hand touches until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil deeds you have done in forsaking Yahweh. ²¹ He shall make pestilence cling to you until you disappear from the land which you are entering today to make it yours.

²² Yahweh will punish you with tuberculosis, fever, inflammation, fiery heat, wheat-smug and mildew that shall pursue you until you die.

²³ The heavens above you shall be brass and the earth under you shall be iron. ²⁴ Instead of rain, Yahweh shall make ashes and powder fall from heaven until you are destroyed.

²⁵ Yahweh shall make you be defeated before your enemies. By one way you shall go out to fight them but by seven ways you shall flee from them. All the nations of the earth shall be horrified to see you.

²⁶ Your dead bodies shall serve as food for all the birds of the air, and no one shall chase them away. ²⁷ Yahweh shall strike you with the

boils and plagues of Egypt, with tumors, scurvy and itch, from which you cannot be healed.

²⁸ Yahweh shall punish you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind. ²⁹ In the same way that the blind grope in darkness, so shall you grope in broad daylight, and you shall not find your way. You shall always be oppressed and robbed, with no one to defend you.

³⁰ You shall be engaged to marry a woman, but another man shall lie with her. You shall build a house but not live in it. You shall plant a vineyard but not eat its grapes. ³¹ Your ox shall be slaughtered before you but you shall not eat of it. Before your very eyes, you shall be robbed of your ass, which will never be recovered. Your sheep shall be turned over to your enemies, but no one shall come to defend you.

³² Your sons and daughters shall be handed over to foreign nations and you shall yearn for them continually but you will be unable to do anything.

³³ A people unknown to you shall eat the fruit of your fields, the fruit of all your toil. And you shall never cease to be exploited and oppressed all your life. ³⁴ You shall be driven mad by what you see.

³⁵ Yahweh will strike you with the most malignant boils on the knees and legs, from which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

³⁶ Yahweh will bring you and the king you have chosen to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods made of wood and stone.

³⁷ You shall stray and be the plaything and the butt of jokes of all the nations to which Yahweh shall bring you.

³⁸ You shall sow many seeds in your fields but shall harvest very little because the locusts shall devour them. ³⁹ You shall plant and cultivate a vineyard but shall not drink wine or eat grapes because the worms shall devour them.

⁴⁰ You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but they shall not give you even a drop of oil to anoint yourself, for the olives shall drop off and rot. ⁴¹ You shall have sons and daughters but they shall not be yours for they shall be taken into captivity. ⁴² All your trees and all the produce of your land shall be infested with insects.

15. Lev 26, 14

27. Ex 9, 8; Rev 16, 2

30. Am 5, 11; Mi 6, 15

38. Ag 1, 6

machine, etc ... for the human and spiritual development of a person or a group.

- To ask the Lord that we may use things according to his will; since it is the only way for us to obtain the good that may be expected from them.

Yahweh will build you up ... Yahweh will fill you ... Yahweh will open up for you ... Naturally, all of this is realized through the good use we make of things: we do not expect miracles. But we do know that wonders can come through the poorest instruments.



⁴³ The foreigner who lives with you shall grow richer every day at your expense as you become poorer. ⁴⁴ He shall lend to you and you shall have to borrow; he shall always be the head and you the tail.

⁴⁵ All these curses shall fall upon you, pursue you and oppress you until all of you perish, for you did not listen to the voice of Yahweh, your God, or obey the commandments and the norms which he gave you. ⁴⁶ These shall be forever upon you and your descendants and shall be an awesome sign for all to see.

⁴⁷ For having not served Yahweh, your God, with joy and gladness of heart when you lacked nothing, you shall be enslaved by your enemies. ⁴⁸ Yahweh shall send them against you and you shall serve them while you go hungry, thirsty, naked and suffer all kinds of misery. They shall put a yoke of iron upon your neck until they have destroyed you all.

⁴⁹ Yahweh shall make a nation from afar come against you, as swift as the eagle flies, ⁵⁰ a nation whose language you do not understand, a cruel nation that does not show respect to the old or compassion to the young. ⁵¹ They shall consume the offspring of your livestock and the produce of your land so that you perish, leaving you with no wheat or wine or oil or the young of your cattle and sheep until they finish you off.

⁵² They shall besiege you in all your cities until the highest and most fortified walls in which you placed your trust fall down throughout your land. You shall remain besieged within your cities throughout the land which Yahweh, your God, will give you.

⁵³ You shall eat the fruit of your body, the flesh of your sons and daughters which Yahweh has given you, in the siege and anguish to which your enemy shall reduce you.

⁵⁴ The most refined man among your people shall look at his brother with distrust including his wife and the rest of his children who remain. ⁵⁵ Refusing to share with any of them the flesh of his children that he is eating, because nothing shall be left to him during the siege and the anguish to which your enemy shall reduce you in your cities.

⁵⁶ The most tender and delicate woman among your people, so delicate and tender that she will not dare go barefoot, shall look with distrust at the husband of her heart, and also at her son and daughter. ⁵⁷ She shall hide from them to eat the placenta from her womb and the children to whom she gave birth, for lack of any other food, when your enemy lays siege to your cities and reduces you to the most extreme misery.

⁵⁸ If you do not observe or put into practice the words of this Law which are written in this book and do not fear that glorious and terrible Name, Yahweh, your God, ⁵⁹ he will punish you, you and your descendants, with fearful plagues, severe and lasting plagues, malignant sicknesses and incurable diseases.

⁶⁰ He will make all the plagues of Egypt fall upon you, which you were afraid of, and these shall cling to you. ⁶¹ Even more, Yahweh shall order all the diseases and plagues which are not recorded in this book of the Law to be with you until you are wiped out. ⁶² For not having obeyed the voice of Yahweh, your God, only a few of you will remain although before you were as numerous as the stars of the heaven.

⁶³ So it shall happen, that in the same manner that it pleased Yahweh to do you good and to multiply you, it shall also please him to pursue and destroy you. You shall be plucked off the land you are entering to conquer.

⁶⁴ Yahweh shall scatter you among all the nations, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

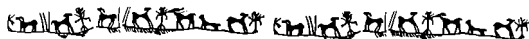
⁶⁵ In those nations, you shall not have peace or rest for the sole of your foot. There Yahweh shall give you a cowardly heart, afraid and restless by day and by night. ⁶⁶ Your life shall be before you as a pendant that hangs on a thread, and you shall be in dread night and day. ⁶⁷ In the morning you shall say: "Would it were evening!" but in the evening you shall say: "Would it were morning!" because of the fear that makes your heart tremble when you behold what your eyes see.

⁶⁸ Yahweh shall bring you back to Egypt by land and by sea, in spite of what he said to you: "You shall not see it again." There you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves, but no man will buy you."

⁶⁹ These are the words of the Covenant which Yahweh commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the Covenant he made with them at Horeb.

Another conclusion

29 ¹ Moses summoned all the people of Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that Yahweh did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, to his servants and to all his land, ² the great plagues which you yourselves witnessed, the signs and the marvels. ³ But to this very day, Yahweh has not



given you a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.

⁴Yahweh has made you wander in the desert for forty years, but your clothes did not wear out and neither did your sandals from so much journeying. ⁵You did not have bread to eat, or wine or fermented liquor to drink, so that with the manna I provided, you might know that I, Yahweh, am your God. ⁶And when we came to this place, Sihon, the king of Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, set out to fight against us, but we defeated them ⁷and seized their lands, which we then gave as an inheritance and a possession to Reuben, Gad and to half of the tribe of Manasseh.

⁸So observe the conditions of this Covenant and put them into practice, that you may succeed in whatever you do. ⁹You are all here today in the presence of Yahweh, your God: your leaders, your elders, your secretaries, all the men of Israel, ¹⁰with your sons and daughters, and with your wives, together with the foreigner who lives in your field, who cuts the firewood or fetches water for you. ¹¹You are here in this place to enter into a sworn Covenant with Yahweh, your God. ¹²He makes this covenant with you to establish you as his people and to be your God, as he promised and swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

¹³And not only with you do I make this covenant and this oath today, ¹⁴but I make it both with those who are here with you today in the presence of Yahweh as well as with those who are not here.

¹⁵You know very well how we lived in the land of Egypt and how we crossed through other lands. ¹⁶You have seen the abominations and the loathsome idols they kept: of stone, wood, gold and silver.

¹⁷So may there be no man or woman, family or tribe among you whose heart turns away from Yahweh to go and serve the gods of those nations. May no poisonous and bitter plants sprout among you.

¹⁸If anyone, upon hearing the words of this sworn covenant, refuses to take them seriously and says to himself, "I shall have peace though I do whatever I want. The dry season comes but afterwards, it rains." ¹⁹Yahweh shall not pardon him. His rage and jealousy shall burn against this man, and all the curses written in this book await him. Yahweh shall wipe out his name from under the heavens, ²⁰and shall

separate him from the tribes of Israel to his misfortune, according to all the curses expressed in this book of the Law and the Covenant.

²¹The future generations that shall be born after you and the foreigner who comes from a far land shall see the plagues of this land and the infirmities with which Yahweh has punished it, and they shall say: ²²"A land of sulphur, salt and burnt-out waste – unsown, with nothing growing on it, not even grass, like the destruction in Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, that Yahweh laid waste in his anger and rage."

²³All the nations shall ask: "Why has Yahweh dealt so with this nation? What is the cause of such anger?" ²⁴And they shall answer: "This happened because they abandoned the Covenant which Yahweh, the God of their fathers, made with them when he brought them out of Egypt, ²⁵because they went to serve other gods and worshipped them, gods that were not theirs and to whom Yahweh had not entrusted them.

²⁶Therefore Yahweh was angry with that land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book. ²⁷Yahweh has pulled them out of their land with anger, rage and great indignation, and cast them into another land, as you can see today.

²⁸The secret things belong to Yahweh, our God, but we and our children forever are responsible for what he has made known to us, so we have to put into practice all the provisions of this Law!

30 ¹When these things come upon you according to this blessing and this curse that I have set before you, you will recall them among the nations where Yahweh, your God, has driven you. ²Then you will return to him, you and your children: you will listen to his voice with all your heart and with all your soul, obeying all that I command you today.

³So Yahweh, your God, will bring back the captives of your people, he will have pity on you, and will gather you again from all the nations where Yahweh has scattered you. ⁴Though you wandered without land at the other end of the earth, ⁵Yahweh will gather you even from there, and will take you once again to the land which your fathers possessed so that it may also be yours. He will make you happy and make you more numerous than your fathers.

3. Is 29, 10; Lk 24, 31; Rom 11, 8

8. Jos 1, 7

10. Jos 9, 21

17. Heb 12, 15

19. Rev 22, 18

22. Gen 19; Hos 11, 8

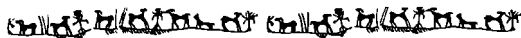
3. Mt 2, 12; Am 9, 14;

Jer 31, 10; Jn 11, 52

5. Mt 24, 31

■ This new discourse was written upon returning from the Exile when, determined to

be faithful to the Law of the Lord, the Jews were beginning to rebuild their nation.



My commands are not beyond your reach

◆ ⁶ Yahweh, your God, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants that you may love Yahweh with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. ⁷ So Yahweh, your God, will inflict all these curses upon your enemies who persecuted you.

⁸ You shall again listen to Yahweh and put into practice all his commandments that I give you today. ⁹ Yahweh, your God, will make you abundantly prosperous in everything you do. He shall multiply your children and the offspring of your livestock: your land shall be fruitful and you shall have everything in abundance, for Yahweh will again be pleased to treat you well, as he did your fathers. ¹⁰ So shall you turn to Yahweh, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and observe his commandments and norms, in a word, everything written in this book of the Law.

¹¹ These commandments that I give you today are not beyond your strength nor are they beyond your reach. ¹² They are not in heaven that

you should say: "Who will go up to heaven to get these commandments that we may hear them and put them into practice." ¹³ Neither are they at the other side of the sea for you to say: "Who will cross to the other side and bring them to us, that we may hear them and put them into practice."

¹⁴ On the contrary, my word is very near you; it is already in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can put it into practice.

Choose life

¹⁵ See, I set before you on this day life and good, evil and death. ¹⁶ I command you to love Yahweh, your God and follow his ways. Observe his commandments, his norms and his laws, and you will live and increase, and Yahweh will give you his blessing in the land you are going to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and does not listen, if you are drawn away and bow before other gods to serve, ¹⁸ I declare on this day that you shall perish. You shall not last in the land you are going to occupy on the other side of the Jordan.

¹⁹ May the heavens and the earth listen and record what I have just said.

6. 10, 16; Jer 4, 4
21, 8; Sir 15, 15

11. Job 28; Mt 11, 30; 1 Jn 5, 3
19. 31, 28

12. Rom 10, 6

15. 11, 26; Ps 1, 1;

◆ *These commands are not beyond your strength* (11): obedience to the will of God is the most natural way for sincere men. *The word is close to you so you may put it into practice* (30: 14): yet, no one will put it into practice until he has received the "circumcision of the heart."

Yahweh will circumcise your hearts (verse 6), that is, he will make you pure and holy. See Ez 36:26-27.

Few pages in the Bible emphasize so much and in such a persuasive way, the love of the Lord, a jealous love coming from his desire to make men happy: *Yahweh, your God, will circumcise your heart so that you may love him and live happily. Yahweh will again be pleased to treat you well.*

◆ This text about the two ways is very famous, recalling the importance of our free deci-

sions and God's respect for man's freedom (see also Sir 15:11).

Throughout Deuteronomy faithfulness to God is stated with the remembrance of his promises and his rewards here on earth. This should not surprise us. In those distant times the people of God had no understanding of another life nor of the authentic reward which rising and enjoying the vision of God after death can be for every one of us. They only focused on the present life and their national destiny which, to their eyes, were more important than the destiny of the individual. For them, God's justice had to be seen on earth in the present.

Later, the Gospel will not promise lands or houses, except in a figurative way (Mk 10:28). Prosperity will not be mentioned except for the final day when God will create the world anew (Acts 3:21 and Rv 21:3).

I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ loving Yahweh, listening to his voice, and being one with him. In this is your life and length of days in the land which Yahweh swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Joshua succeeds Moses

+31 ¹ Moses added these words which he spoke to all Israel, ² "I am now a hundred and twenty years old. I am no longer strong and Yahweh has told me that I shall not cross the Jordan River. ³ But Joshua shall be at your head, as Yahweh has said. He, your God, will go before you to destroy these nations before you, and you will drive them away.

⁴ Yahweh shall deal with these cities as he dealt with Sihon and Og, the Amorite kings, and their land, which he destroyed. ⁵ So when he has given over these nations to you, you shall do the same, according to what I have commanded you.

⁶ Be valiant and strong, do not fear or tremble before them for Yahweh, your God, is with you; he will not leave you or abandon you."

⁷ After this, Moses called Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel: "Be valiant and strong, you shall go with this people into the land which Yahweh swore to give to your fathers and you shall give it to them as their possession. ⁸ Yahweh shall go before you. He shall be with you; he shall not leave you or abandon you. Do not fear, then, or be discouraged."

⁹ Moses put this Law in writing and entrusted it to the priests, descendants of Levi, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of Yah-

weh, as well as to all the leaders of Israel, ¹⁰ giving this order to them: "Every seven years, at the time fixed for the Year of Pardon, on the Feast of the Tents, ¹¹ when all Israel assembles to present themselves before Yahweh in the place chosen by him, you shall read this Law in the hearing of all Israel.

¹² Assemble the people – men, women and children, and the foreigner who lives in your cities – that they may listen to it, learn to fear Yahweh and take care to put into practice all the words of this Law. ¹³ Your children who do not know it yet shall hear it and learn to fear Yahweh, your God, all the days that they live in the land which you are going to conquer after crossing the Jordan."

¹⁴ Yahweh said to Moses: "The day of your death is already near. Call Joshua that the two of you may present yourselves to me in the Tent of Meeting, that I may give you my orders."

So Moses and Joshua went to present themselves in the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁵ Yahweh appeared to them in the Tent in a column of cloud; the column was at the entrance of the Tent. ¹⁶ And Yahweh said to Moses:

"Now you are going to rest with your fathers. Then, this people shall rebel and prostitute themselves to strange gods, the gods of the land which they are going to enter. They shall abandon me and break the Covenant I have made with them: ¹⁷ On that day, I shall be angry with them, I shall abandon them and hide my face from them. They will be devoured, and many evils and adversities will come upon them so that they will say: "Have not these evils come upon me because my God is not in our midst anymore?" ¹⁸ But on that day I shall hide my face from them on account of all the evil which they have done in going after the gods.

¹⁹ So, write this song and teach it to the children of Israel that they may remember it, for this song shall be my witness against the

3. Jos 14, 11; 1 K 3, 7 6. Gen 28, 15; Jos 1, 5; Heb 13, 5 7. Num 27, 18 10. Jos 8, 32; 2 K 23, 1
11. Ne 8 15. Ex 33, 9 16. Ex 34, 15; Eak 16, 15 Jos 24, 33; 1 S 7, 3; Jer 31, 31

+ The last chapters include several memories of Moses.

The hymn of chapter 32 is a song to the constant love of the Lord who guides all of Israel's history.

- Yahweh chooses Israel (v. 7-9).
- He leads Israel through the desert to the Promised Land (v. 10-14).
- Yahweh becomes Israel's enemy (22-30).
- The people, humbled and exiled, must rely on the compassion of Yahweh who, in the end, will liberate them and make them victorious over the wicked (v. 31-43).

He set up the boundaries for the people: after the number of the sons of God. The sons of God are the angels. They are in charge of the nations, since Israel alone belongs to Yahweh.

Like an eagle: This is an image of God looking after his people: no one will snatch them away from his protection.

Verse 15 summarizes Israel's rebellious attitude.

Israel grew up well-nourished. The prodigal son, after having received everything from his father, thinks that he will be freer by rebelling



children of Israel. ²⁰For I shall bring them to the land which I swore to their fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey, but after they have eaten and are satisfied and have grown fat, they shall turn to other gods and pay homage to them while despising me and breaking my Covenant.

²¹And when these evils and calamities without number come upon them, this song shall bear witness against them, since their descendants will not forget it. I know very well the plans they are already making even before they have entered the land which I promised them. ²²On that day, Moses wrote this song and taught it to the children of Israel. ²³Then Moses told Joshua, son of Nun, "Be valiant and strong for you shall bring the children of Israel to the land which Yahweh promised to them. He shall be with you."

²⁴When he finished writing in a book all the words of this Law, ²⁵Moses gave this order to the Levites who carried the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh. ²⁶"Take the book of this Law. Place it by the side of the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh, your God. There it shall remain as a witness against you. ²⁷because I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. If today, as I live among you, you are rebellious against Yahweh, how much more shall you be after my death?"

²⁸Gather together around me all the leaders and secretaries of all the tribes. I am going to say these words in their hearing, and I shall ask heaven and earth to witness against you.

²⁹For I know that after my death, you shall do perverse things and shall stray from the way that I have pointed out to you. And misfortune shall come upon you in the future for doing what is evil in the eyes of Yahweh, provoking his anger with the work of your hands."

³⁰Then, before the whole assembly of Israel, Moses recited this song until the end.

Song of Moses

[32] ¹Listen, O heavens, as I speak; hear, earth, the words of my mouth.

²May my teaching come drenching as the rain, and my words, permeate gently as the dew: like abundant rain upon the grass, like a gentle shower on the tender crops.

³For I will proclaim the name of the Lord and declare the greatness of our God.

⁴He is the Rock,

and perfect are all his works,
just are all his ways.

A faithful God he is,

upright and just and unerring.

⁵Yet he has been treated perversely by his degenerate children – a deceitful and crooked generation.

⁶Is this how you repay the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? He is your father, your creator, who formed you and set you up.

⁷Recall the days of old,

think of the years gone by:

your fathers will teach you about them, your elders will have you enlightened.

⁸When the Most High divided mankind and gave the nations their inheritance, he set up boundaries for the peoples after the number of the sons of God. ⁹But the Lord keeps for himself his portion

Jacob, his chosen one.

¹⁰In the wilderness he found them, in a barren, howling wasteland; he shielded them and cared for them as the apple of his eye.

¹¹Like an eagle watching its nest, hovering over its young,

supporting them on its spread wings and carrying them on its pinions,

¹²the Lord alone led them, without the aid of a foreign god.

¹³He made them ride on the heights and live on the produce of the earth.

He gave them honey to suck from the rock,

olive oil from the hard stony crag.

¹⁴curds from the herd, milk from the flock,

fattened lambs and goats and Bashan bulls,

the finest wheat and the best grape wine.

¹⁵Israel grew up well nourished; the favored people developed and flourished.

But they abandoned God, their creator; they rejected the rock, their savior.

¹⁶They made him jealous with their strange gods; they angered him with their abominable deeds.

¹⁷They sacrificed to the demon, to gods they had not known,

to newly arrived gods they feared but which their fathers never revered.

¹⁸They have disowned the Rock who fathered them;

28. Acts 20, 29

2. Is 55, 11; Ps 72, 6

4. 2 S 23, 3; Is 26, 4; Acts 1, 12

5. Mt 7, 24; 16, 18

6. Is 1, 2; Mt 17, 17

8. Gen 10; Acts 17, 26

10. Jer 2, 2; Ezk 16, 6; Hos 13, 5

11. Ex 13, 21

Is 63, 14

12. Is 43, 11

13. Ps 81, 17

14. Ps 147

15. Hos 13, 6

17. 1 Cor 10, 20; Rev 9, 20



they have forgotten the God who gave them birth.

¹⁹ The Lord saw this, and in his anger rejected his sons and daughters.

²⁰ He said, "I will hide my face from them

and see what will become of them.

They are so perverse, so unfaithful!

²¹ They have made me jealous with their false gods and angered me with their idols.

I will, therefore, make them envious of a people which is not worthy of the soul.

I will provoke them to anger with an empty-headed nation.

²² For my wrath has kindled a fire burning the world of death to its depths, devouring the earth and its harvests, setting ablaze the roots of the mountains.

²³ I will send them trouble upon trouble and spend all my arrows upon them;

²⁴ I will afflict them with famine, deadly diseases and pestilence.

I will send them wild beasts and venomous snakes.

²⁵ Their children will fall by the sword; terror shall reign within,

destroying both young man and virgin, both the sucking child and the old man.

²⁶ I said I would scatter them afar and blot out their memory among mankind,

²⁷ but I feared the enemy's provocation, lest the adversary misunderstand and say: 'We have triumphed; the Lord has brought this about.'

²⁸ They are a senseless and undiscerning nation.

Had they wisdom, they would have known

²⁹ the meaning of this and the end awaiting them.

³⁰ For how could one or two men put to flight a thousand or ten thousand, unless their Rock had abandoned them, unless their Lord had given them up?

³¹ Our enemies must understand this. Their rock indeed is not like our Rock.

³² They are an offshoot of Sodom's vinestock,

an outgrowth from the fields of Gomorrah;

their grapes are poison, their clusters bitter,

³³ their wine containing venom from the cruel fangs of deadly vipers.

³⁴ I have kept this in reserve and sealed up in my storehouse.

³⁵ Vengeance and recompense is mine. Their feet will slip in due time, their day of calamity is at hand, and swiftly their doom will come.

³⁶ The Lord will give justice to his people

and have mercy on his servants, when he sees their strength failing and both slave and free are disappearing.

³⁷ He will say, "Where are their gods, the rock they thought could be their refuge,

³⁸ who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their libations?"

Let them rise up now and help you, let them give you protection!

³⁹ Learn this now – that I alone am He; there is no god beside me.

It is I who give both death and life; it is I who wound and heal as well and out of my hand no one can deliver.

⁴⁰ I raise my hand to heaven and swear: as truly as I live forever,

⁴¹ when I sharpen my glittering sword and my hand takes hold of it in judgment, I will deal out vengeance upon my foes and retribution upon those who hate me.

⁴² My arrows will drip with blood, my sword will sink deep into the flesh – blood of the wounded and slain captives, flesh of beheaded enemy leaders.

⁴³ Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge his servants' blood, take vengeance on his adversaries, and perform the rite of expiation for his people and his land.

⁴⁴ Moses recited the words of this song in the hearing of the people, and Joshua, son of Nun, was with him.

⁴⁵ When Moses had finished reciting these words to all Israel, ⁴⁶ he said to them, "Be attentive to all these words which I command you today. Repeat them to your children so that they may take care to put all these laws into practice. ⁴⁷ It is no slight matter: on this depends your life, and by this, you shall lengthen your days in the land you are going to conquer after crossing the Jordan.

⁴⁸ *Yahweh spoke to Moses on that same day and he said: "Go up to the mountains of Abarim in the land of Moab and climb Mount Nebo facing Jericho. From there you shall see the land of Canaan which I give to the children*

21. Is 45, 5; 2, 11 Rom 10, 19; 11, 11; 1 Cor 10, 22 23. Ezk 5, 16 27. 2 K 18, 35 30. Is 30, 17
31. Jdg 2, 14; Is 50, 1 32. Is 5, 2; Jer 2, 21 35. Rom 12, 19; Heb 10, 30 36. 2 Ma 7, 6
39. Is 43, 11; Hos 13, 4; Acts 4, 12 40. Rev 10, 5 43. 2 Ma 7, 6; Rev 6, 10; 19, 2 48. Num 27, 12

of Israel. ⁵⁰Then you shall die on Mount Nebo and join your fathers as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and went to join them. ⁵¹Remember that you have not trusted me at the waters of Meribah in the desert of Zion, when you did not proclaim me before the people. ⁵²Therefore you shall not enter the Land, but shall only see it from afar."

Blessings of Moses

33 ¹This is the blessing that Moses gave to the children of Israel before he died. He said:

²"Yahweh has come from Sinai; he rises above the horizon of Seir for his people. He has come from Mount Paran; he has come to Meribah of Kadesh for them; his midday radiance has reached Ashdot.

³Yahweh loved those tribes and his hand protected his holy ones who lay prostrate at his feet, waiting for his instruction.

^{4,5}He came to Israel as king, and made himself the inheritance of the children of Israel when the leaders assembled and the tribes of Israel gathered together.

⁶Let Reuben live and not die, nor let his men be few.

⁷This is the blessing for Judah: "Listen, Yahweh, to the voice of Judah, and let him be with his people. Your hands will fight for him and will help him against his opponents."

⁸He said of Levi: "You have given, Oh Yahweh, your Thummim and Urim to him who loves you, whom you tested at Massah and reproached at Meribah. ⁹He who said to his parents 'I do not know you,' and disowned his brothers and sisters and children, they have observed your words and kept your Covenant.

¹⁰They teach Jacob your decrees, to Israel your Law. They offer you incense and make sacrifices on your altar. ¹¹Bless, O Yahweh, his generosity and accept his service. Strike the

back of those who pursue him, that his enemies may not rise against him anymore."

¹²He said of Benjamin: "Beloved of Yahweh, put your trust in him who protects you from the hills on which is his sanctuary."

¹³He said to Joseph: "Your land has received the blessings of Yahweh, the dew from heaven and the waters that gush forth from the deep. ¹⁴the sun-ripened fruits and the liberal produce of the months, ¹⁵the best of the ancient mountains and the everlasting hills, the generous land and the abundant harvest. ¹⁶May the blessing of him who arose in the bush descend upon the head of Joseph, for he is the chosen one among his brothers. ¹⁷Joseph is his firstling bull, glory to him! His horns are those of a wild ox, with which he strikes all the people at the same time. See the multitudes of Ephraim, and the thousands of Manassah!"

¹⁸He said to Zebulun: "Rejoice, Zebulun, when you journey. Rejoice, Issachar, in your tents. ¹⁹They call the peoples to the sacred mountains, there they offer sacrifices together and enjoy the riches of the sea and the treasures of the sand."

²⁰He said of Gad: "Blessed be he who enlarges Gad. Like a lioness, he couches and tears the arm and head. ²¹He chose the best part, the part reserved for the leader. He led the people, for he has fulfilled the justice of Yahweh and his commandments to Israel."

²²He said of Dan: "Dan is a lion's cub that leaps forth from Bashan."

²³He said of Naphtali: "Naphtali is filled with favors, filled with the blessing of Yahweh. May your land reach to the south and to the sea!"

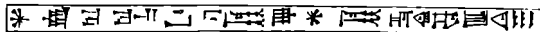
²⁴He said of Asher: "May Asher be blessed among the children. May he be preferred to his brothers and let him put his feet in oil. ²⁵May his fastening bars be iron and bronze. May you be strong as long as you live.

50. Gen 25, 8; Num 20, 24	51. Num 20, 13; Gen 49	2. Ps 68, 18; Jdg 5, 4; Acts 3, 1
5. Jos 24	9. Ex 17, 1; Ex 32, 25	13. Gen 49, 25
		16. Ex 3, 1
		17. Ps 92, 11

■ Moses' blessings resemble Jacob's in Gen 49. It is a poetic way of announcing the future destiny of the twelve tribes. It was written before David, when the tribe of Judah lived apart from the others (verse 7). The tribe of Joseph is the most important tribe.

• The book concludes with the death of Moses. There is something grandiose in this solitary end of the leader and founder of Israel. God had separated him from his brothers, when he shared his secrets with him and gave him his town authority. Moses alone had to bear the responsibility and the burden of Israel before God, to the point of becoming identified with Israel.

No prophet like Moses has appeared again (v. 10). All our faith is affirmed in the revelation of the only God to Moses and in the election of Israel under his leadership. However, this does not mean that revelation ceased nor that religion became static after Moses: *no prophet has appeared* though they continue to expect *a prophet like him* (18:18). This means that faith is not locked in the faithfulness to a book, even if such a book is the Bible. God's people continued to discover the ways of God and the contemporaries of Jesus had to see in him the expected 'Prophet.' But, our faith is also rooted in the feeling of the Church and, with the Church, we always discover the teaching of the Spirit.



²⁶ There is none like our God, O Israel, who walks above the heavens, riding above the clouds, and comes to help you in his zeal.

²⁷ The eternal God is a refuge; from eternity he frees you with his arm. He drives your enemy away before you and says to you: "Destroy him."

²⁸ Israel dwells in safety. The fountain of Jacob flows in the land of wheat and wine, and dew comes from heaven.

²⁹ Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people under the protection of Yahweh? He is the shield that protects you, the sword that gives you victory! Your enemies shall flee from you, but you, in the end, shall tread on their necks."

Moses' death

34 ¹ From the barren plains of Moab, Moses went up to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho. And Yahweh showed him all the Land: from Gilead to Dan, ² the whole of Naphtali, the land of Ephraim, and of Manasseh, the whole land of Judah, as far as the Western Sea, ³ the Negeb, the Plains, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. ⁴ And Yahweh said to him: "This is the land about which I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, promising it to their descen-

dants. I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not enter it."

⁵ Moses, the servant of God, died there in the land of Moab, according to what Yahweh had determined.

⁶ They buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but to this very day, no one knows where his tomb is.

⁷ *Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died. He did not lose his vigor and his eyes still saw clearly.* ⁸ *The children of Israel mourned for him in the plains of Moab for thirty days.* ⁹ *But Joshua, son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him. The children of Israel obeyed him and did as Yahweh had commanded Moses.*

¹⁰ No prophet like Moses has appeared again. Yahweh conversed with him face to face. ¹¹ What signs and wonders he worked in Egypt against Pharaoh, against his people and all his land! ¹² What a powerful hand was his that worked these wonders in the sight of all Israel!

26. Ex 15, 11; Ps 18, 1

28. Jer 23, 6; Is 8, 6

1. 3, 27; Num 22, 1

6. Jud 9

7. Ps 93, 13

9. 2 K 2, 15; Is 11, 2; Num 27, 18

10. Ex 33, 11; Jn 1, 17; 1 Cor 13, 13

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA

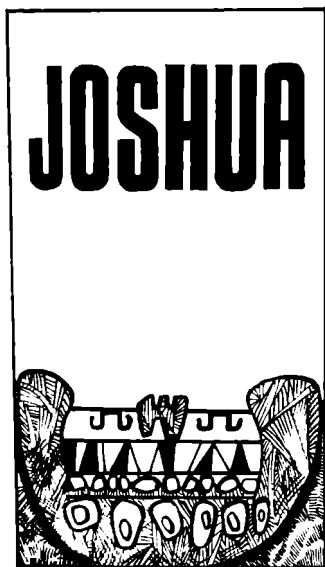
Moses led the Israelites up to the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan, but they still had to enter into the Land promised to their ancestors.

In spite of Moses' strong leadership, Israel was not an organized nation, but remained a mere association of various tribes, families and towns united by their common venture. On careful reading of the Bible, it seems that many of the Israelites had not stayed with Moses in the oasis of Cades but had entered Palestine from the south even before Joshua did. Others had occupied the plateaus of Moab (Numbers 32).

Those who crossed the Jordan in Joshua's time, for the most part entered in a peaceful manner. With their tents and their sheep, they settled in the hills surrounding the fortified cities of the Canaanites. They left the plains to the Canaanites who were better organized there. They lived side by side with the Canaanite farmers and interacted with them. The inhabitants of Canaan were richer and superior in culture, so many among the Israelites adopted their practices and their gods, incurring thereby the risk of disappearing as a people.

Those who saved Israel were the more courageous ones who, together with Joshua, decided to conquer the country. We look with repugnance at the violence they committed. Yet, they did carry out God's design, using means proper to that time. The cities and the kings of Canaan (who were no more than local chieftains) were very disunited. So Joshua, carried out against them a series of raids and blows through which he raised the national consciousness of Israel. Then began the slow conquest of the country – an undertaking that would reach its happy conclusion only after two centuries and under David's leadership.

It is always the active minority that makes history. When we talk about the church and its inroads into the world, we refer especially to a minority of believers; the rest are not aware of their mission. In the same manner, we speak of emancipation movements when, in reality, very few consciously live with such expectations. Nevertheless, the militant minority moves the masses forward. This is the way it happened with Israel. When, five centuries after Joshua, the prophets put together the documents they had about the conquest and wrote the present book, they made no pretense to be narrating an exact and complete history. They limited themselves to recalling those exploits which had prepared and made possible the formation of the future nation. Let us then not be deceived when the book says that "all Israel" fought with Joshua, or when it seems to indicate that Joshua conquered all of Palestine by killing all its inhabitants. The book of Joshua narrates small things that make up a great history.



I will be with you

1 ¹After the death of Moses, Yahweh spoke to Joshua, the son of Nun and the minister of Moses, and said to him: ²"My servant Moses is dead; therefore, the hour has come for you to cross the Jordan River, and all the people shall go with you to the land which I give to the sons of Israel. ³I give them the whole territory, as far as you may conquer it, as I promised Moses. ⁴Your territory will extend from the mountain of Lebanon in the north, to the desert in the south, as far as the great Euphrates in the east and the Great Sea in the west.

⁵As long as you live, no one will be able to stand against you. I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you. ⁶Be valiant and have courage for I will give this people the land I swore to their fathers I would give to them.

2. Dt 34. 3. Dt 11, 24. 5. Ex 3, 12.

o The person referred to here is Joshua, son of Nun, who succeeded Moses (Deut 34:9). The conquest of the Promised Land is narrated here as if Joshua had directed everything. In this way the image of a saviour ("Joshua," like "Jesus," means Yahweh-saves) who leads the People of God into their land and to their rest. Joshua

prefigures Jesus, as we are told in the Letter to the Hebrews (4:8).

The phrase: "Yahweh said to Joshua," should not be taken literally. This merely means that, in taking such an initiative, Joshua fulfilled Yahweh's plan.

I will give you all the territory you conquer.

⁷ Therefore, be brave and faithfully fulfill the whole Law which Moses, my servant, gave you. Do not turn aside from it either to the right or to the left, and you shall succeed wherever you go.

⁸ Constantly read the book of this Law and meditate on it day and night that you may truly do what it says. So shall your plans be fulfilled and you shall succeed in everything. ⁹ It is I who command you: be strong, then, and be valiant. Do not tremble or be afraid, because Yahweh, your God, is with you wherever you go."

¹⁰ Joshua ordered the secretaries of the people: "Pass through the camp and give this command: 'Store up enough food for, in three days time, you shall cross the Jordan and enter the land which Yahweh, your God, will give you.'"

¹² To the people of the tribes of Reuben and Gad and to half of the tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, ¹³ "Remember the command of Moses, the servant of Yahweh; Yahweh has provided you with a place of rest and has given you all this region. ¹⁴ The women and children, as well as the livestock, shall remain on this side of the Jordan, in the region which Moses gave you; but you who are valiant shall cross over, armed, ahead of your brothers and shall help them ¹⁵ until Yahweh gives them rest, as he has given you, that they may also conquer the land which Yahweh, our God, gives them. So you shall return to the region which Moses gave us and take possession of that land at the east of the Jordan."

¹⁶ They answered Joshua: "We will do all you have commanded us and go wherever you send us. Just as we have obeyed Moses, so shall we obey you in the same way. ¹⁷ May

Yahweh, your God, be with you as he was with Moses. ¹⁸ He who contradicts your words and disobeys your orders shall die. But be valiant and courageous."

The history of Rahab

+2 ¹ Joshua sent two spies secretly from Shittim with the following order, "Go and look over the land well, specially the city of Jericho."

The spies went and as soon as they came to Jericho, they went to the house of the prostitute named Rahab. ² But someone told the king of Jericho: "Some Israelites have entered here to-night to spy on us." ³ So the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab: "Send those men out of your house because they came to spy on the land."

⁴ But the woman had hidden them, so she said: "It is true: they came to my house but I did not know where they came from. ⁵ And at night fall, shortly before the city gates were to be closed, they went out. I do not know where they went, but hurry and you will surely overtake them." ⁶ The woman had hidden them on the roof of the house, under the stalks of flax, which she kept there.

⁷ The pursuers went to search for them by the road leading to the valley of the Jordan, and as they went out, the city gates were closed.

⁸ Then the woman went up to where she had hidden the spies of Joshua, ⁹ and she said to them: "I know that Yahweh, your God, has given this land to you; we are frightened and the inhabitants of the land tremble before you."

¹⁰ We know how Yahweh dried up the waters of the Red Sea to let you cross when you came out of Egypt. We know what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who lived at the other side of the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you destroyed by anathema.

¹¹ The news has frightened us, and every-

8. Dt 17, 19

13. Num 32

Heb 11, 31; James 2, 25; Mt 1, 5

In this way we ought to expect God's benefits. He does not do the work for us: instead, he sees to it that we make the necessary effort. The land which Yahweh gives to the Israelites will belong to them once they conquer it.

Sometimes, religious people have the reputation of being unconcerned about social problems, and of not committing themselves to tasks involving the common good. It is true that the Gospel does not speak of earthly conquests, but biblical history shows that the Gospel could not have been understood deeply except by people who had fought to conquer their land and to forge their own identity, so as later to create their own culture. The Church knows by experience that evangelization cannot be divorced from human development.

+ A prostitute receives Joshua's spies. These, in turn, promise to spare her life and that of her entire household. The huge walls of Jericho had been destroyed a century earlier but new inhabitants had settled inside without bothering to repair them. We may imagine all this people assembled together in a house which was built from the debris of the same walls.

This minor incident has a symbolic value. The author of the book places on the lips of Rahab a profession of faith in Yahweh, the living God who will entrust the country to the Hebrew people. Because of this faith, Rahab will be saved.

Jewish tradition recognizes her as an ancestress of King David, and the Gospel mentions her name in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5).

Jordan before you. ¹² Now, choose twelve men from the twelve tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ When the priests who carry the Ark of the Lord of all the earth put their feet into the water of the Jordan, the water coming from upstream shall stop flowing and stand in one single mass."

¹⁴ When the people set out from their camp to cross the Jordan, the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant went before them. ¹⁵ There was much water in the Jordan that was overflowing its banks, at this time of the barley harvest. Nevertheless, when those who carried the Ark went down to the river and their feet touched the edge of the water, the water from upstream stopped flowing.

¹⁶ The water stood still, forming something like a dam, very far from that place, near Adam, the neighboring city of Zarethan. The water flowing down to the Dead Sea was completely cut off, and so the people could cross opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant remained in the middle of the river which dried up, until all the Israelites crossed the Jordan.

4 ¹ Once the whole nation had crossed, ² Yahweh said to Joshua: "Choose twelve men, one from each tribe, ³ and give them the following order: Take twelve stones from the riverbed of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests stood still. Bring them with you and put them where you will encamp tonight."

⁴ Joshua then called the twelve men he had chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel ⁵ and ordered them: "Walk to the Ark, up to the middle of the Jordan and take from there a

stone for each tribe and carry it upon your shoulder. ⁶ They will remain with you as a sign of what happened, so that when your children ask you in the future: What do these stones mean for you? ⁷ you may answer: When the Ark of Yahweh crossed the Jordan, the water parted before it. So these stones shall serve as a memorial to the Israelites forever."

⁸ The Israelites carried out Joshua's order and picked up twelve stones from the riverbed of the Jordan, one for each tribe, just as Yahweh had ordered Joshua. They brought these to the place where they encamped and placed them there.

⁹ Joshua piled up twelve stones on the riverbed of the Jordan, at the spot where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant stood. They are still there to this day. ¹⁰ The priests who carried the Ark stood in the middle of the Jordan until Joshua finished saying everything that Yahweh had ordered him, according to the same orders of Moses. ¹¹ Then when all the people had finished crossing the river, the Ark also crossed, and the priests walked at the head of the people again.

¹² The men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh went ahead armed, according to what Moses had ordered them. ¹³ They were about forty thousand, well-armed, and they marched before Yahweh, ready for battle, to the plains of Jericho.

¹⁴ On that day, Yahweh exalted Joshua before all Israel, and henceforth, they respected him as they had respected Moses all the days of his life.

¹⁵ Yahweh said to Joshua: ¹⁶ "Command the priests who carry the Ark of the Divine Words to come up from the Jordan." ¹⁷ Joshua, therefore, ordered them to come up from the river. ¹⁸ And when these priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh came up from the middle of the Jordan, when their feet touched

6. Ex 12, 26; Dt 6, 20

much knowledge of religion; yet every place in their land reminded them that God was the saviour of his people.

Joshua pitches his camp in Gilgal from where he organizes his assaults, and he returns wisely to Gilgal after each victory before the Canaanite forces can regroup.

It is evident that several accounts which are not entirely in accord with one another are

combined here. Did they put twelve stones in the camp (4:3), or did they put them on the riverbed of the Jordan (4:9)? It really does not matter. At best, these stones were already near Gilgal even before Joshua and the Israelites; this was the sanctuary of a place devoted to pagan cult. But after the conquest, the priests wanted to give them a religious meaning in consonance with their faith, as we saw in Ex 12:15.

the banks, the water of the Jordan returned as abundant as on previous days and overflowed its banks.

¹⁹ It was on the tenth day of the first month when the people came up out of the Jordan, and encamped in Gilgal, on the eastern border of Jericho. ²⁰ There in Gilgal, Joshua set up the twelve stones taken from the riverbed of the Jordan.

²¹ Then Joshua said to the Israelites: "When your children ask you in the future what these stones mean, ²² then you shall tell them that the people of Israel crossed the Jordan without getting their feet wet, ²³ for Yahweh, our God, dried up the water of the Jordan before us just as he did in the Red Sea which he also dried up before us to let us cross. ²⁴ He did this so that the people of this land may know the power of Yahweh, our God, and that you yourselves may fear him forever."

The Israelites are circumcised at Gilgal

5 ¹ The kings of the Amorites on the west of the Jordan and all the kings of the Canaanites who lived in the neighboring lands of the Mediterranean Sea came to know how Yahweh dried up the bed of the Jordan before the Israelites until they had crossed. So they lost their courage and spirit to face the Israelites.

² At that time, Yahweh said to Joshua: "Make flint knives and celebrate a new circumcision for the sons of Israel." ³ Joshua obeyed the order of Yahweh and circumcised the Israelites at a place called the Hill of the Foreskins.

⁴ This is the reason why Joshua did this second circumcision: all the men of Israel who left Egypt were circumcised, but they died

during their journey in the desert. ⁵ But all those born in the desert were not circumcised.

⁶ For the Israelites walked in the desert for forty years until the whole nation died – the whole generation who did not obey Yahweh – as Yahweh had sworn that they would not enter the land flowing with milk and honey which he promised to their fathers. ⁷ But it was their children, whom Joshua circumcised.

⁸ After circumcising all, they rested in the camp until they were healed. ⁹ Then Yahweh said to Joshua: "Today I have removed from you the shame of Egypt." So the place is called Gilgal up to this day.

¹⁰ The Israelites encamped in Gilgal where they celebrated the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ On the following day, they ate of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain on that very day. ¹² And from that day on when they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased.

There was no more manna for the Israelites, and that year they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan.

¹³ When Joshua was near Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and saw before him a man with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua approached him and said: "Are you for us or for our enemies?" ¹⁴ And he answered: "No, I have come as the commander of the army of Yahweh." Joshua lay prostrate on the ground, worshipped him and said: "What does my Lord ask of his servant?" ¹⁵ The commander of the army of Yahweh said to him: "Take off your sandals from your feet: the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

The conquest of Jericho

6 ¹ The inhabitants of Jericho had closed the city and had fastened their bolts so that the Israelites could not enter. No one came in and no one went out. ² But Yahweh said to Joshua: "I will give you the city, its king and all its men of war.

23. Ex 14, 21. Gen 17, 10. 6. Num 32, 13. 13. Num 22, 23. 14. Ex 23, 20; Dn 12, 1; Rev 19, 11. 15. Ex 3, 5.

♦ At their first encampment, Joshua's men celebrated their first religious cult, proceeding to circumcision (see Gen 17:10). In Israel, this was the sign of one's entrance into the religious community. In order to insist on this obligation, the book notes that, upon entering the Holy Land, all the men were circumcised.

From that day on, they ate of the produce of the land (v. 11). See in Ex 16 the explanations

concerning the manna and its legends.

This event indicates a new era. Until this time, the religion of the Israelites had been that of a nomadic people. Now begins a deep crisis which will last until King David's time, with the Israelites trying to adapt themselves to their new situation as farmers and city-dwellers and gradually evolving a kind of religion suitable for this new situation.



³ For this, you shall have to go around the city once every day for seven days. ⁴ Seven priests shall go before the Ark bearing the seven trumpets used in the time of the Jubilee. On the seventh day, they shall march around the city seven times, ⁵ and when they blow the trumpets all the people shall come up to attack, shouting their battle cry. At that moment, the walls of the city shall fall and everyone shall enter straight before him.

⁶ Joshua, son of Nun, called the priests and said to them: "You shall carry the Ark of the Covenant: seven priests shall go ahead with the trumpets they use for the Jubilee."

⁷ Then Joshua said to the people: "You shall march around the city and the vanguard of the army shall go before the Ark of Yahweh."

⁸ When Joshua finished speaking, the priests began to blow the seven trumpets they used to blow on the Feast of the Jubilee, and they went before the Ark of Yahweh. ⁹ The vanguard of the people went before the priests, and the rest of the people came after the Ark.

¹⁰ The trumpets blew continually. Joshua had given this order: "Do not shout or utter anything, nor let even a single word be heard, until the day comes when I say: Shout and cry out!"

¹¹ That day he had the Ark of Yahweh carried around the city once, then all returned to the camp where they spent the night. ¹² On the following day, Joshua rose early in the morning ¹³ and the priests took the Ark and those who blew the seven trumpets again went before the Ark. The vanguard went before them and the rest followed the Ark. Once again the trumpets blew.

¹⁴ For six days they marched, once a day around the city and then returned to the camp. ¹⁵ On the seventh day, the Israelites rose early at dawn and marched around Jericho in the same way as on the previous days. But on that day, they did it seven times.

¹⁶ At the seventh time, as the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua ordered the people: "Shout your battle cry for Yahweh has given you the city!"

¹⁷ The city and all that is in it shall be

o With the capture of Jericho, the conquest begins. Jericho is made "anathema," i.e., set apart for God. The people renounce all booty, entrust the spoils to Yahweh's treasury and kill all living beings instead of taking possession of the animals and reducing the people to slavery. This same word "anathema" will eventually be used to refer to someone who bears the curse of God (See Rom 9:3). This was a practice among a number of peoples. By destroying everything Canaanite, Israel safeguarded itself from adopting the culture and materialism of the Canaanites.

Sometimes the modern reader is scandalized: How could God order such a war? And how could Joshua think of pleasing God by ordering the killing of all the inhabitants including babies?

One should bear in mind when this conquest took place and when the book was written.

The conquest took place in the thirteenth century B.C. It is difficult for us to understand the mentality of such ancient times. In Canaan, babies were burned in offering to the pagan gods. In Assyria, prisoners were skinned alive. Israel conquered Palestine by force like any nomad people of the world. God was beginning to instruct his people. To start with, he could not expect that they had already been educated. The bloody victories were a step on the way to the shaping of a national conscience. In this sense, we cannot, in the name of peace, despise heroes of past wars.

Moreover, the present book was written in the seventh century B.C., in the small kingdom of Judah, which was surrounded by powerful neighbours with whom they tried to be at peace. Hence, the accounts of past victories and massacres were amplified (compare 2 Sam 12:31 written by contemporaries of the events, and 1 Chron 20:2, written four centuries later). The author wanted to show his contemporaries that they had nothing to fear, since God was with them. By imaginatively amplifying the Canaanite massacres in times past, he wanted to say to his compatriots: Do not entertain any pagan practices, but preserve the holy germ of Israel's faith. Using these bloody examples, the Scripture gives us a lesson: since the People of God has the unique hope of the world, no sacrifice will be too big to keep it intact. But we are not to imitate the fanaticism of these ancient times.

In like manner then, when we read: *Yahweh ordered Joshua the anathema*, we should not think this was a special intervention of God (See commentary on Gen 16). These words only mean that Joshua, influenced by the mentality of his own times, decided to declare and implement the anathema, and in so doing preserved Israel's faith from idolatry, a situation even more contradictory to God's plans. But they did this as a people who did not yet know the value of human life.

It is difficult to know what is true in this story: see footnote on Joshua 2:1.



given in anathema to Yahweh. Only Rahab the prostitute with all who may be with her in her house shall live, since she hid the spies we sent. ¹⁸ But for your part, be careful not to touch anything, big or small since everything shall be consecrated in anathema, do not take anything for yourself lest the curse be upon the camp of Israel and bring trouble upon it. ¹⁹ All the gold, silver, copper and iron are to be consecrated to Yahweh and shall go into the treasury of Yahweh."

²⁰ The people shouted and the trumpets blew. At this precise moment, the walls of the city fell. Then everyone went straight into the city to the place before him.

²¹ They seized Jericho. And with the sword in hand, they killed all the men and women, both young and old, as well as the oxen, sheep and asses, and they gave these as anathema or rather, sacrificed them to God.

²² Two men had been sent by Joshua to explore Jericho, and upon entering the city, were hidden by a prostitute. Then Joshua said to them: "Go into the house of the prostitute and bring her out with all her family as you had sworn to her."

²³ These young men then brought out the woman named Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers and sisters with all her relatives to safety outside the camp of Israel. ²⁴ Afterwards, they burned the city and all that was in it. They saved only the silver, gold and the vessels of bronze and iron which they put with the precious things in the Sanctuary of Yahweh. ²⁵ Joshua saved the life of the prostitute and that of her family, and she lived in Israel.

²⁶ Joshua asked the people to pronounce his curse: "May Yahweh curse the man who rebuilds Jericho. May its foundation rise on the body of his eldest son, and the gates on that of his youngest son."

²⁷ So Yahweh was with Joshua and made him famous in all the land.

The sacrilege of Achan is punished

+7

¹ The Israelites did not keep the anathema. It happened that Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe

of Judah, appropriated for himself some of the things consecrated by anathema, and because of this, the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel.

² Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which was near Beth-aven, east of the city of Bethel. And he said to them: "Go up and explore the land." ³ The spies said to Joshua on their return: "It would not be necessary to mobilize the whole army: some two or three thousand men will be enough to conquer the land. It would be useless to tire the people for that nation is but few in number."

⁴ So about three thousand men attacked Ai but were repulsed by the city's defenders. ⁵ The people of Ai killed thirty-six men and pursued them outside the gate as far as Shebarim, defeating them on the slopes. Upon seeing this, all the people were disheartened.

⁶ Then Joshua and all the leaders of Israel rent their garments, put ashes on their heads and remained prostrate before the Ark of Yahweh until evening. Joshua lamented: ⁷ "Alas, Yahweh, why have you made this people cross the river Jordan just to give us into the hands of the Amorites who will destroy us?"

It would have been better for us to remain on the other side of the Jordan. ⁸ Yahweh, my God, what can I say when I see Israel fleeing from their enemies? ⁹ The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of this land will know of this. They will unite to surround us and drive us out. And you, what are you going to do for the honor of your Name?"

¹⁰ Yahweh answered: "Stand up! Why are you prostrate on the ground? ¹¹ Israel sinned and has violated my covenant; Israelites have taken from what was set apart by anathema and have hidden stolen objects with their belongings. ¹² So Israel cannot face its enemies, but shall flee from them, since it has come to be an anathema. I will not be with you anymore unless you remove the curse from your midst. ¹³ Go then, and sanctify the people. Say to them: 'Cleanse yourselves for tomorrow. Yahweh, the God of Israel, says to you: Oh, Israel, the anathema is in your midst and you shall not face your enemies until you have removed the anathema from you. ¹⁴ Therefore in the morning you shall come near, grouped according to tribes. The tribe that Yahweh designates by lot shall present itself by families. And the family that Yahweh designates shall present itself by

19. Num 31, 54. 20. Heb 11, 30. 26. 1 K 16, 34.

+ All the spoils had been made "anathema," i.e., consecrated to God. Whether they were used or deposited in the treasury of the Sanctuary, they were offered to Yahweh. Achan had

robbed God and, in the manner of speaking and thinking of ancient peoples, the stolen thing turned into a curse which clung to his own person and to his family. Perhaps this event

1. 6, 18. 7. Ex 32, 11; Num 14, 13. 14. 1 S 14, 41.



households, and the household by individuals. All these will be done by lot. ¹⁵ He who turns out to be responsible for this offence shall be burned together with all his household goods for having violated the covenant of Yahweh and having done a detestable crime in Israel."

¹⁶ Joshua rose early in the morning and ordered the tribes of Israel to present themselves. ¹⁷ The lot fell on the tribe of Judah. Lots were drawn among the families, and the family of Zerah was left. Lots were drawn among the households of this family and the household of Zabdi was left. ¹⁸ And then lots were drawn among the members of this household which revealed that the guilty one was Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zareh, of the tribe of Judah.

¹⁹ Joshua then said to him: "My son, confess the truth before Yahweh, the God of Israel, and render him praise. Tell me what you have done without hiding anything." ²⁰ Achan answered: "It is true that I have sinned against Yahweh. This is what I have done: ²¹ I saw among the plunder a beautiful mantle from Shinar, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels. I was tempted so I took them. Then I hid them in the ground inside my tent with the silver underneath."

²² Joshua then sent some messengers who ran to the tent of Achan and found the booty inside the tent with the silver underneath. ²³ They took all these and presented them to Joshua and to the people; everything was put before Yahweh.

²⁴ Then Joshua took Achan together with the silver, the mantle and the gold, his sons as well as his daughters, his oxen, asses and sheep, his tent and all that he had. All Israel accompanied him and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵ There Joshua said to him: "Since you brought us misfortune, may Yahweh bring this misfortune upon you today." Then all the people stoned him. ²⁶ And of those that were his, some were crushed and others were burned. They piled on him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his anger.

Henceforth the place was called the Valley of Achor.

Joshua conquers Ai

8 ¹ Then Yahweh said to Joshua: "Do not fear or be discouraged. March with all your warriors against the city of Ai. I

will give into your hands its king and its people, the city and its territory. ² You shall deal with Ai as you have dealt with Jericho and its king. But you may take possession of the plunder and all the animals. So now, prepare an ambush behind the city."

³ So Joshua left with all his warriors and went up to Ai. Then he chose thirty thousand valiant warriors, and sent them out by night. ⁴ And he commanded them: "Lie in ambush behind the city. Do not go very far and be ready."

⁵ I and all the people who are with me shall close in on the city. But when they come out against us, as they did before, we shall flee from them. ⁶ Then they shall pursue us and go out far from the city, thinking that we are fleeing from them as before. ⁷ But then you shall rise from where you are hiding and occupy the city. Yahweh, our God, will give it to us. ⁸ After taking the city, you shall burn it according to what Yahweh has commanded. These are my orders."

⁹ So Joshua sent them out and they went to the place of ambush, between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city, while Joshua slept that night in the midst of his people.

¹⁰ Very early in the morning, Joshua rose and mustered his army, and then marched at the head of the people, accompanied by the leaders. ¹¹ All the warriors who were with him went up and marched until they reached the front of the city. Then they encamped opposite the northern side of the city. The valley separated them from the city.

¹² (Then he took five thousand men whom he set in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city.)

¹³ The people then set up their camp to the north of the city and their rearguard to the west. That night Joshua was in the valley.

Battle of Ai

¹⁴ When the king of Ai saw the situation, he made haste with all his people to attack Israel in the slope opposite the valley of Jordan, without knowing that the Israelites had prepared an ambush behind the city. ¹⁵ Joshua and the Israelites pretended that they were being defeated, and so fled to the road leading to the wilderness. ¹⁶ Then all the people of the city began to shout and left to pursue them. ¹⁷ No one remained to defend the city, and they left the city open.

¹⁸ Then Yahweh said to Joshua: "Stretch



out toward Ai the javelin you have in your hand because I have given you this city." ¹⁹ So Joshua did this and at this sign, the warriors rose out of their places in the ambush and ran to the city. They entered and seized the city, and set it on fire.

²⁰ The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising up to heaven, and at the same time, the Israelites who were fleeing turned back upon them. ²¹ They lost their courage as they were trapped by the Israelites: ²² for on one side were Joshua and all the people of Israel, and on the other, those who had just set the city on fire.

The Israelites killed them until none were left to survive or to escape. ²³ Only the king of Ai was taken alive and they brought him to Joshua.

²⁴ The Israelites killed the inhabitants of Ai who went into the fields or who fled to the wilderness; they killed them all. Then they returned to the city and killed all by the sword. ²⁵ The total of those who fell that day was twelve thousand. ²⁶ Joshua did not give the order to stop the war until all the inhabitants of Ai had been killed in accordance with anathema. ²⁷ But the Israelites took for themselves the livestock and plunder as Yahweh had commanded.

²⁸ Joshua burned the city and left it in ruins. That place has remained as it was to this day. ²⁹ As for the king of Ai, Joshua had him hanged on a tree until the sun set. Then he had his body taken down; they cast it at the entrance of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones which can be seen to this day.

Joshua renews the Covenant in Shechem

■ ³⁰ Joshua then built an altar to Yahweh, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal. ³¹ He fulfilled what Moses had commanded the children of Israel. And according to what is written in the book of the Law of Moses, that altar was

made of uncut stones and was built without the use of an iron tool. On this altar, he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to Yahweh. ³² There in the presence of the Israelites he wrote upon the stones a copy of the Law which Moses had written.

³³ All the people stood on both sides of the Ark, with their leaders, secretaries and judges. Opposite it were the priests and the Levites who carried the Ark of Yahweh. Israelites by birth and aliens were together. Half the people were in front of Mount Gerizim and the other half were near Mount Ebal according to Moses' commandment for the blessing of Israel.

³⁴ Joshua proceeded to read the words of blessing and curse, and all that is written in the book of the Law. ³⁵ He did not forget any word from all that was written by Moses. He read it with a loud voice before the assembly of all Israel, including women, children and foreigners who lived among them.

The ruse of the Gibeonites

9 ¹ The kings who lived west of the Jordan, on the mountain, on the plain and on the sea coast heard of these events. The Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites ² made a pact and came to an agreement to fight as one against Joshua and Israel.

³ The inhabitants of Gibeon came to know what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai. ⁴ and decided to deceive the Israelites. They prepared provisions for themselves, loaded some worn-out, torn and mended sacks and wine-skins on their asses. ⁵ put on worn-out and patched sandals and clothes. For their journey, they brought some dry bread, broken into pieces. ⁶ Then they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him: "We come from a far land to make a pact with you."

⁷ The Israelites answered: "Do you live near us? If so, then we cannot make a pact with

30. Dt 11, 29; 27, 1-13

1. Jdg 1, 9

■ What is the meaning of this covenant celebrated in Shechem: the bible probably presents the ancient history of Israel in a fictitious form when it writes that the twelve tribes were together in Egypt, that they left together with Moses, and that all twelve tribes reached the Promised Land with him. At best, the whole history of the Exodus is that of a much smaller group who freed themselves with Moses' leadership and went through the decisive experience of an encounter with the Saving God.

Later, in the oasis of Kadesh, they encountered other Hebrew groups who had also been in Egypt and who accepted their faith (See com-

mentary on the map of Exodus).

Subsequently, when they settled in Palestine, they allied themselves with other tribes from their own race who were already living in the midst of the Canaanites. It was then that Israel first became a people of twelve tribes. Among them, Ephraim and Manasseh were the predominant tribes. Later, however, in the south, the tribe of Judah developed. It was formed from diverse groups particularly the Calebites (Judges 1:12; Num 13:30) and the Kenites (Judges 1:16).

Finally, the Covenant at Shechem could have been the occasion when all of them accepted the faith and the commandments given by Moses.

you." ⁸ They answered Joshua: "We are your servants." And Joshua asked them: "Who are you? Where do you come from?" ⁹ They answered: "Your servants come from a very far country and through the greatness of Yahweh, your God, we came to know of his power and all that he did in Egypt ¹⁰ and with the two kings of the Amorites who reigned in the eastern part of the Jordan – Sihon, the king of Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth. ¹¹ The leaders and the rest of the inhabitants of our country told us: 'Take provisions for a long journey, go out to meet them and say to them: We are your servants; may you make a covenant with us.' ¹² Look at our bread which was warm when we took it from our houses to go and meet you, but see how dry it has become and how it has broken into pieces. ¹³ These wineskins that we filled up with wine were new, now they are ripped and worn-out. The clothes and sandals that we use have worn out because of the very long journey." ¹⁴ The Israelites shared with them their food without having asked Yahweh what must be done. ¹⁵ Joshua made a covenant with them without waiting for any answer from Yahweh. So he as well as the leaders of the community promised to let them live.

¹⁶ Three days later, the Israelites learned that these people lived near their own territory. ¹⁷ On hearing this, the Israelites set out and entered their cities: Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim. ¹⁸ They spared their lives because of what the leaders of the people had sworn to them by the name of Yahweh. ¹⁹ But all the people criticized their leaders. Then all the leaders said to them: "We have sworn by the name of Yahweh, therefore, we cannot kill them. ²⁰ But this we can do: we shall let them live so that the anger of Yahweh may not be upon us, ²¹ but they shall serve by cutting firewood and fetching water at the service of the community of Israel."

²² Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and told them about the decision of the leaders: "Why have you deceived us and said to us that you come from very far when in fact, you live right in our midst? ²³ Henceforth, you are cursed and shall always cut wood and fetch water for the House of my God." ²⁴ The

Gibeonites answered: "We came to know that Yahweh had commanded Moses to destroy all the inhabitants of the land he gave you. We were afraid so we opted for this measure. ²⁵ And now, we are in your hands: do with us whatever seems good and just to you."

²⁶ Joshua fulfilled his promise and did not let the Israelites kill them. ²⁷ But from that day on, they cut firewood and fetched water for the whole community and for the altar of Yahweh in the place he would choose.

"The sun stood still"

10 ¹ Adonizedek king of Jerusalem came to know how Joshua had conquered and levelled Ai, doing to it and its king what he had done to Jericho and its king. He also knew how the Gibeonites had made peace with the Israelites and were living in their midst. ² He feared greatly for Gibeon was a very important city, a royal city greater than Ai and its men were very brave.

³ In view of this, Adonizedek sent for Hoham, king of Hebron, for Aram king of Jarmuth, for Japhia, king of Lachish and for Debir king of Eglon saying: ⁴ "Come and help me conquer Gibeon for it has made a pact with Joshua and the Israelites."

⁵ So the five kings of the Amorites – the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon – joined forces and set out, each one with troops. They encamped opposite Gibeon and surrounded it.

⁶ The Gibeonites sent word to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal: "Do not leave us alone, but come and help us for all the Amorite kings who live on the mountains have united against us."

⁷ So Joshua left Gilgal that day with all his valiant warriors. ⁸ Then Yahweh said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid because I have placed them in your hands and no one among them will be able to stand up against you." ⁹ Joshua marched from Gilgal, journeying throughout the night and came upon the Amorites by surprise.

¹⁰ Yahweh destroyed them. The Israelites gained a great victory in Gibeon and pursued the Amorites by the slope of Beth-horon up to Azekah and Makkedah.

◆ The sun of Gibeon has caused enough worry to those who take everything they read in the Bible literally.

Some thought that at that moment the sun stood still in the sky. Later, when people learned that it is the earth that revolves around the sun, they thought the earth must have stopped turning. But this explanation is not acceptable

either: for, had the earth suddenly stood still, the resulting momentum would have caused total destruction. Therefore, we have to remark that the Bible is citing in this case poetic literature, the "Book of the Just," and that the poets are talking with their imagination and not in the manner of historians or scientists. Hence, they may have wanted to say that it was a great day.



¹¹ As they were fleeing, Yahweh rained large hail stones on them and pursued them up to Azekah, and they were killed. There were more who died because of the hailstones than by the sword of the Israelites.

¹² On that day when Yahweh gave the Amorites over to them, Joshua addressed Yahweh and said in the sight of all Israel:

"Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and you, moon, in the valley of Ajalon."

¹³ And the sun stood still and the moon stopped until the people had taken revenge on their enemies; so it is written in the Book of the Lord. "The sun stood still in mid-heaven and did not hasten to set for almost a whole day. There has not been a day like this before or after in which Yahweh obeyed the order of a man. It was Yahweh who fought for Israel."

¹⁴ Then Joshua and all Israel returned to their camp at Gilgal.

¹⁵ But the five kings fled and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah. ¹⁶ And so it was told to Joshua: "We have found the five kings. They are hiding in a cave at Makkedah."

¹⁷ So Joshua ordered: "Roll great stones against the entrance of the cave and set men to guard it. ¹⁸ But the rest should not stay there. Pursue your enemies and fall upon their rear. Do not let them return to their cities for Yahweh, our God, has placed them in our hands."

¹⁹ Joshua and the Israelites destroyed and wiped them off. Only a few survivors were left who took refuge in the fortified cities while all Israel returned unscathed to the camp with Joshua. Henceforth, no one dared challenge them.

²⁰ Then Joshua ordered: "Open the entrance of the cave, take the five kings out and bring them to me." ²¹ They did this and brought the five kings before Joshua: the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Lachish, Jarmuth and Eglon. ²² Joshua assembled all Israel and said to the captains of the troops: "Come here and wipe out on the necks of these kings."

So they came near and put their feet on the necks of the kings.

²³ Then Joshua said to them: "Do not be afraid or lose courage, be valiant and firm, for Yahweh will do so to all your enemies against whom you will fight."

²⁴ Joshua immediately put them to death by hanging them on five trees until evening.

²⁵ At nightfall, they took down the bodies of the kings and threw them into the same cave where they had hidden and closed it with great stones which remain there to this day.

Joshua conquers the southern part of Canaan

²⁶ On that same day Joshua seized Makdesh. He slew its king and its inhabitants. And he consecrated it and all that was in it in anathema to Yahweh, without sparing anyone. The king suffered the same fate as did the King of Jericho.

²⁷ Then Joshua and all Israel went to attack Libnah. ²⁸ Yahweh gave the city and its king to the Israelites, and they put to the sword all its inhabitants without sparing anyone. The king met the same fate as the king of Jericho.

²⁹ From Libnah Joshua went to Lachish, laid siege to it and attacked it. ³⁰ Yahweh also gave them this city and its king and inhabitants suffered the same fate as Libnah. ³¹ Then Hiram king of Gezer came to help Lachish but Joshua destroyed him together with all his people without leaving anyone alive.

³² From Lachish he then went to Eglon; he besieged it and conquered it on the same day.

³³ The king and the inhabitants of Eglon were also put to death by the sword. They consecrated the city in anathema as they did to Lachish.

³⁴ From Eglon they went to Hebron. Joshua conquered it together with ³⁵ all the towns which were subject to it, put to the sword its king and all its inhabitants, without letting anyone survive. He consecrated it in anathema as he had dealt with Eglon.

³⁶ Joshua and all Israel with him turned back to Debir and attacked it. He took it as well as the towns subject to it. ³⁷ He put to the sword its king and inhabitants, consecrating them in anathema, without sparing anyone. Debir and its king received the same punishment as Hebron and Libnah.

³⁸ In this way, Joshua conquered the whole region of the Mountains, the Negeb Desert, the Plains and the mountain slopes with their kings.

He did not let anyone survive but consecrated all living beings in anathema according to what Yahweh had commanded. ³⁹ Joshua destroyed them all from Kadesh-barnea to

1. Is 28, 17 12. Acts 3, 11 13. 2 S 1, 18 14. 2 K 20, 10 24. Ps 110, 1 26. Dt 21, 22 33. 1 K 9, 16 40. Jdg 1, 9

o In chapter 11, Joshua's campaign in the north of Palestine is described. There he captured Hazor which, with its 40,000 inhabitants, could be called a big city. We are given the

impression that he conquered the entire country. Yet, chapters 13-19 show that each tribe had to conquer its section of the land in a series of individual operations.

Gaza and from Goshen to Gibeon. ⁴² Joshua defeated all these kings and seized all these lands in one single campaign because Yahweh fought for Israel.

⁴³ Then he and all Israel returned to their camp at Gilgal.

Conquest of the North

o11 ¹ When Jabin king of Hazor came to know all this, he sent ambassadors to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph, ² to the kings in the northern mountains, on the steppes to the south of Chinneroth in the plains, and in the heights of Dor on the west, ³ to the Canaanites in the east and the west, to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the mountains, and the Hivites at the foot of Mount Hermon in the region of Mizpah. ⁴ And they set out with their troops, a multitude as numerous as the sand of the sea, accompanied by a great number of horses and chariots ready for combat. ⁵ All these kings joined forces and encamped together at the spring of Merom to attack Israel.

⁶ Then Yahweh said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, for tomorrow at this hour I will give them to you that you may sacrifice them to me. Cut the hocks of their horses and burn their chariots of war."

⁷ So Joshua and all the armed men with him went to Merom and attacked them by surprise. ⁸ Yahweh gave them into the hand of Israel; the Israelites destroyed and pursued them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim and as far as Mizpah to the east, without leaving anyone alive. ⁹ Joshua also carried out what Yahweh had commanded – cutting the hocks of the horses and burning the chariots.

¹⁰ At once Joshua turned back and conquered Hazor, and killed its king. At that time, Hazor was the capital of all those kingdoms.

¹¹ He put to the sword all the inhabitants of that city, consecrating it in anathema. No one was left alive, and they immediately set the city on fire.

¹² Joshua took all the cities of these kings and all their kings, and consecrated them in anathema according to what Moses, the servant of Yahweh, had commanded.

¹³ Israel set on fire all the cities except those lying on the slopes and on the heights; of these only Hazor was burned by Joshua.

¹⁴ The Israelites divided among themselves the plunder and the livestock of these cities, but they put to the sword the whole population without sparing anyone. ¹⁵ So what

Yahweh had commanded Moses, and what Moses had entrusted to Joshua was completely fulfilled: Joshua did not neglect anything of what Yahweh had commanded Moses.

¹⁶ So Joshua conquered all this land: the mountains, the Negeb, Goshen, the plains, the steppes, and the mountains of Israel with its plains. ¹⁷ From the region of the mountain range that rises up to Seir, as far as Baalad in the valley of Lebanon, to the foot of Mount Hermon, he destroyed all their kings – vanquishing and killing them.

¹⁸ The war Joshua waged against these kings lasted a long time; ¹⁹ there was no city that made peace with the Israelites except the Hivites of Gibeon; all were conquered.

²⁰ Yahweh gave all of them courage to fight against Israel, so that at the end, they could be consecrated in anathema and destroyed without pity as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

²¹ At that time, Joshua attacked and wiped out the Anakim from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab and from all the mountains of Judah and Israel. They and their cities were given in anathema.

²² No Anakim was left in the land of Israel except in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. ²³ Joshua seized the whole land as Yahweh had directed Moses and gave it as an inheritance to the Israelites to be distributed among their tribes. With this, the land rested from war.

12 ¹ These are the kings of the country whom the Israelites defeated, taking their land beyond the Jordan eastward, from the valley of Arnon to Mount Hermon, including all the lowland.

² Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon, and ruled from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Arnon (the border was at the middle of the valley), as far as the Jabbok river, that was the boundary with the Ammonites. ³ To him belonged half of Gilcad and the lowland from the east side of the Lake of Chinneroth to the Beth-jeshimot road, on the east side of the sea of the lowland, that is the Salt Sea, at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah.

⁴ Og, king of Bashan, one of the survivors of the Rephaim, who lived at Ashtaroth and Edrei, ⁵ ruled over Mount Hermon, Salecah and all Bashan to the boundary of the Geshurites and Macathites, and over half of Gilead beyond the land of Sihon, king of Heshbon. ⁶ Moses the servant of Yahweh, with the Israelites, defeated them and Moses gave their land to the Reubenites, the Gadites and half the tribe of Manasseh as their inheritance.

⁷ Now these are the kings of the country whom Joshua and the Israelites defeated on the west side of the Jordan, from Baalgad, in the valley of Lebanon, to Mount Halak rising toward Seir. This is the land that Joshua divided among the tribes of Israel: ⁸ the hill country and the lowlands, the Arabah, the hillsides, the wilderness and the Negeb. This land had belonged to the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And these were the defeated kings:

⁹ King of Jericho, King of Ai near Bethel.

¹⁰ King of Jerusalem, King of Hebron.

¹¹ King of Jarmuth, King of Lachish.

¹² King of Eglon, King of Gezer.

¹³ King of Debir, King of Geder.

¹⁴ King of Hormah, King of Arad.

¹⁵ King of Libnah, King of Adullam.

¹⁶ King of Makkedah, King of Bethel.

¹⁷ King of Tappuah, King of Hopher.

¹⁸ King of Aphek, King of Sharon.

¹⁹ King of Madon, King of Hazor.

²⁰ King of Symeon, King of Achshaph.

²¹ King of Taanach, King of Megiddo.

²² King of Kedesh, King of Jokneam in Carmel.

²³ King of Dor on the hillsides of Dor. King of Goyim in Galilee, ²⁴ and King of Tirzah.

Total number of all these kings: thirty-one.

II. DIVISION OF THE LAND AMONG THE TRIBES

Joshua divides the country of Canaan

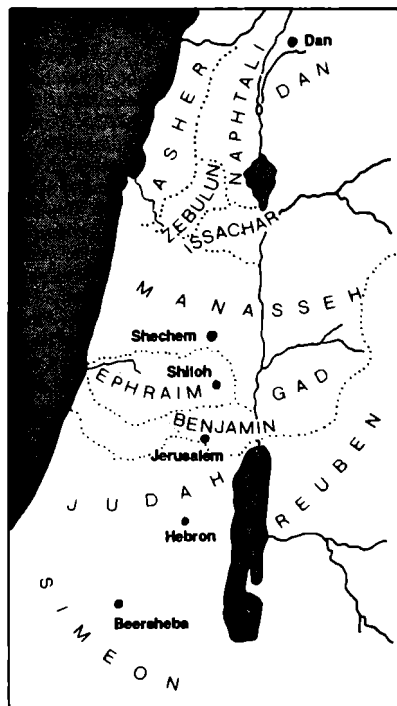
+13 ¹ Now Joshua had grown old and advanced in years. Yahweh said to him, "You are old now, yet much of the land is still unconquered, including:

² All the territory of the Philistines and the Geshurites. ³ All the land from the river east of Egypt, to the boundary of Ekron in the north that is considered Canaanite territory. (The five chief towns of the Philistines: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron; the Avvites also in the south.)

⁴ The whole country of the Canaanites from Arah, which the Sidonians hold, to Aphekah at the Amorite border, ⁵ and then the country of the Gebalites with all Lebanon eastward from Baagad at the foot of Mount Hermon to the Pass of Hamath. ⁶ All the land of the Sidonians who live in the highlands from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim westward.

⁷ I myself will drive them all out before the Israelites. In the meantime, share out the land among the Israelites by drawing lots as I have commanded you. ⁸ The time has come to divide this land among the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseb: from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea westward you shall give it to them; the Mediterranean will mark their boundary."

⁹ As for the other half tribe of Manasseh, they and the tribes of Reuben and Gad had already received the land given them by Moses



+ Joshua apportions the promised land among the twelve tribes.

Different peoples left together, as we read in Ex 12:38. In Palestine, others joined them (See

Joshua 8:33). They did not belong to one race nor were they a closely-knit group; and they were certainly not yet an organized nation. Nevertheless, they were already a group of twelve



on the east side of the Jordan River. Moses the servant of Yahweh had given them ⁹ the land as far as Aroer, which lies on the edge of the Arnon valley, with the city in the middle of that valley and all the high, flat land from Medeba to Dibon. ¹⁰ All the towns of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had reigned in Heshbon, were included, as far as the boundary of the Ammonites. ¹¹ Gilead and the territory of the Geshurites and Maacathites with all the highlands of Hermon and with the whole of Bashan as far as Salecah. ¹² In Bashan the whole kingdom of Og, who reigned in Ashtaroth and Edrei and was the last survivor of the Rephaim. Moses had conquered these people and driven them out. ¹³ But the Israelites did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites, and therefore Geshur and Maacah still live in the midst of Israel to this day.

¹⁴ To the tribe of Levi alone no land was given; Yahweh the God of Israel was their inheritance, as he had told them.

Land given to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh

¹⁵ Moses had given the tribe of Reuben a part of the land according to their clans. ¹⁶ The land they receive stretched from Aroer, on the edge of the Arnon Valley, including the town within the valley itself, and all the high, flat land up to Medeba, ¹⁷ and Heshbon and all the towns on the high, flat land: Dibon, Bamoth-baal, Beth-baal-meon, ¹⁸ Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath, ¹⁹ Kiriathaim, Sibmah and Zereth-shahar in the highlands of Gôr; ²⁰ Beth-peor, the slopes of Pisgah, Beth-jeshimoth. ²¹ All these towns and the whole kingdom of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon; he had been defeated by Moses, and with him the princes of Midian, Evi, Rekem, Zur,

Hur, and Reba, who had ruled the land for King Sihon who used to live in this country. ²² As for Balaam son of Beor, the seer, the Israelites had put him to the sword with others they had killed. ²³ Thus the land of the Reubenites stretched to the Jordan River. This was the inheritance of the tribe of Reuben according to their clans, with the towns and their outlying villages.

²⁴ Moses had given the tribe of Gad, a part of the land according to their clans: ²⁵ Jazer, all the towns of Gilead, half the country of the Ammonites as far as Aroer facing Rabbah, ²⁶ and from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim as far as the territory of Lodebar, ²⁷ and lastly, in the Jordan valley: Beth-haram, Beth-nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon the king of Heshbon. The Jordan River was their western border as far north as the Sea of Galilee, on the eastern side of the Jordan. ²⁸ This was the inheritance of the tribe of Gad according to their clans, with the towns and their outlying villages.

²⁹ Moses had given half the tribe of Manasseh a part of the land according to their clans: ³⁰ from Mahanaim right through Bashan, including the whole kingdom of Og the king of Bashan and all sixty villages of Jair in Bashan. ³¹ Half of Gilead as well as Ashtaroth and Edrei, the royal cities of Og in Bashan, were given to half the families from Machir, son of Manasseh.

³² This was how Moses divided the land when he was in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan east of Jericho. ³³ But to the tribe of Levi, Moses had given no land; Yahweh the God of Israel is their inheritance, as he has told them.

Gen 49; Dt 33

24. Dt 33, 20

33. Num 35, 1

tribes of unequal strength. Two of these tribes assumed a predominant role: Ephraim up north, and Judah down south.

Among nomads such as these, the members of each tribe claimed to be all descendants of the founder of their tribe, a prestigious man of the past whose name they bore. Inasmuch as the Israelites considered themselves descendants of Jacob-Israel, each of the twelve tribes considered itself as descending from one of the sons of their ancestor, Jacob, from whom they had received their name.

In reality, these were thirteen tribes in all and not twelve. A comparison of the list of Jacob's children in Gen 35:23 with that of the twelve tribes listed in the present book. The list shows agreement in the following names: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher and Benjamin.

But the "sons of Joseph" formed two tribes. Ephraim and Manasseh (Joshua 16:4). So including the tribe of Levi, they reached to thirteen. But this last tribe was formed by families traditionally dedicated to religious cult and they did not have their own territory (Joshua 21:10). In this way the number twelve will be restored when Joshua divides the land.

They apportioned the land by casting lots. In this manner a lesson is imparted that the Promised Land is a gift from God (Psalm 16 uses the same imagery). Each tribe receives a portion which they did not choose and which they must now conquer in order to own. Each of us has received from God his share in life. He has to accept his share in the same way as the tribes accepted their "share of their inheritance." Then we must achieve our destiny with courage and confidence in God just as they did.



14 ¹The land of Canaan was divided among the Israelites by Eleazar the priest and by Joshua son of Nun and by the heads of the families of the tribes of Israel. They divided the land by drawing lots as Yahweh had commanded through Moses for nine. ²(Remember that Moses had given the two and a half tribes beyond the Jordan their own property; to the Levites, he had given no land, ³but the sons of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim.) The Levites were given no share of the land except certain towns to live in, with pasture lands nearby for their cattle and property. ⁴In dividing the land, the Israelites did as Yahweh had commanded Moses to do.

and given to Caleb

⁵When the sons of Judah came to Joshua Gilgal, Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, said to him, "You know what Yahweh said to Moses, the man of God, at Kadesh-barnea concerning you and me. ⁶I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of Yahweh, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy on this land, and I made an honest report about it to him. ⁷But the men who had gone with me discouraged the people, whereas I myself faithfully obeyed Yahweh my God. ⁸That day Moses made this promise to me, 'Because you have obeyed Yahweh my God, the land you set your foot upon shall be the land which you and your children will own forever.' From then till now, Yahweh has kept me alive in accordance with his promise. It is forty-five years since Yahweh made this promise to Moses (Israel was then journeying through the wilderness), and now I am eighty-five years old. ⁹Today I am still as strong as the day when Moses sent me out on the raid; ¹⁰whether fighting, for going and coming, I am as strong now as then. ¹¹Give me then the highlands that Yahweh promised me. You know that there are a race of giants called the Anakim and its towns are great and strong. But if Yahweh is with me, I shall drive them out as Yahweh said."

¹²Joshua blessed Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and gave him the city of Hebron as an inheritance. ¹³And hence Hebron down to the present day belongs to the descendants of Caleb son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, because he obeyed Yahweh the God of Israel. ¹⁴The name of Hebron in earlier times was Kiriath-arba. Arba had been the greatest man of the Anakim.

And the country had rest from war.

Boundaries of the tribe of Judah

15 ¹The land given to the tribe of Judah according to their clans was near the border of Edom from the wilderness of Zin to Kadesh southwestward. ²Their southern border began at the end of the Dead Sea; ³it went south from the Ascent of Akrabbim and crossed through Zin. It went south of Kadesh-barnea, passed Hezron, went up to Addar and from there turned toward Karka. ⁴Skirting Azmon, came out at the stream on the border of Egypt and ended at the Mediterranean.

⁵On the east, the border was formed by the Dead Sea as far as the mouth of the Jordan.

⁶On the north the border began at the Sea of Tongue at the mouth of the Jordan. This border went up to Beth-hoglah, passed through the north of Beth-arabah and reached the Stone of Bohan of Reuben. ⁷The border then went up to Debir from Acor Valley and turned toward the circle of stones opposite the Ascent of Adummim, south of the valley; the border went on to the waters of En-shemesh and ended at En-rogel. ⁸Then it went on up the Benhinnom Valley on the south side of the hill where the Jebusite city, that is to say Jerusalem was located. The border then climbed to the top of the mountain on the west side of Hinnom Valley and at the northern end of the plain of Rephaim. ⁹From the mountain the border bent toward the source of the waters of Nephtoi, passed from there toward Mount Ephron and then turned toward Baalah, that is to say, Kiriath-jearim. ¹⁰From Baalah the border bent westward to the mountain country of Seir, went on the northern slope of Mount Jearim, that is to say Chesalon, went down to Beth-shemesh and through Timnah, ¹¹reached the north side of Ekron, turned toward Shikkeron, passed by the Hill of Baalah, then on to Jabneel, and ended at the Big Sea, that is the Mediterranean.

¹²The western border was the Big Sea itself. This was the border that enclosed the lands given to the clans of the tribe of Judah.

¹³Caleb son of Jephunneh was given part of the territory of Judah, as Yahweh had commanded Joshua to do. Joshua gave him Kiriath-arba, the chief city of the Anakim, which is now Hebron. ¹⁴Caleb drove the descendants of Anak out of it; the clans of Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi. ¹⁵From there he marched up to attack the people living in Debir, the name of which was once Kiriath-sepher. ¹⁶Then Caleb said, "To the man who conquers and captures Kiriath-sepher, I will give my daughter Achsah as wife." ¹⁷Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's

brother conquered the city; Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah in marriage.¹⁸ When she came to her husband, he urged her to ask her father for a field. When she jumped down from her donkey, Caleb asked her, "What do you want?"¹⁹ She answered, "Grant me a favor; since you have sent me away to the wilderness of the Negeb, at least grant me some springs of water." So he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

List of the cities of Judah

²⁰ This was the land given to the tribe of Judah according to their clans.

²¹ These are the furthestmost towns of the tribe of Judah, toward the boundary of Edom in the Negeb: Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur,²² Kinah, Dimon, Adadah,²³ Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan,²⁴ Ziph, Telem, Be-aloth,²⁵ Hazor-hadattah, Keriath-hezron (that is to say, Hazor),²⁶ Amam, Shema, Moladah,²⁷ Hazar-gad-dah, Heshmon, Beth-pelet,²⁸ Hazar-shual, Beer-sheba, Biziothiah,²⁹ Baalah, Iim, Ezem,³⁰ Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah,³¹ Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah,³² Lebaoth, Shilhim, En-rimmon. In all, twenty-nine towns, with their outlying villages.³³ In the lowlands there were fourteen towns with their villages: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah,³⁴ Zanoah, Engannim, Tappuah, Enam,³⁵ Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah,³⁶ Shaaraim, Adithaim, Gederah.

³⁷ Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal-gad,³⁸ Dilean, Mizpeh, Joktheel,³⁹ Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon,⁴⁰ Cabbon, Lahmas, Chitlish,⁴¹ Gederoh, Beth-dagon, Naamah, Makkedah, altogether sixteen towns with their villages.

⁴² Libnah, Ether, Ashan,⁴³ Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib,⁴⁴ Keilah, Achzib, Mareshah, altogether nine towns with their villages.

⁴⁵ Ekron with its towns and villages near Ashdod.

⁴⁶ From Ekron to the sea,⁴⁷ Ashdod and Gaza with their towns and villages as far as the stream on the border of Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.

⁴⁸ In the highlands: Shamir, Jattir, Socoh,⁴⁹ Dannah, Kiriath-sannah, which is now Debir,⁵⁰ Anab, Eshtemoah, Anim,⁵¹ Goshen, Holon, Giloh – eleven towns with their villages.

⁵² Arab, Dumah, Eshan,⁵³ Janum, Beth-tappuah, Aphekah,⁵⁴ Humtah, Kiriath-arba, which is now Hebron, Zior – nine towns with their villages.

⁵⁵ Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttaah,⁵⁶ Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah,⁵⁷ Kain, Gibeah, Timnah – ten towns with their villages.

⁵⁸ Halhul, Beth-zur, Gedor,⁵⁹ Maarath,

Beth-anoth, Eltekon – six towns with their villages.

Tekoa, Ephrathah, which is now Bethlehem, Peor, Etam, Kulon, Tatam, Sores, Carem, Gallim, Bether, Manach – eleven towns with their villages.

⁶⁰ Kiriath-baal, which is now Kiriath-jearim, and Rabbah – two towns with their villages.

⁶¹ In the wilderness: Beth-arabah, Middin, Secacah,⁶² Nibshan, the City of Salt and Engedi – six towns with their villages.

⁶³ But the people of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; the Jebusites lived there side by side with the sons of Judah, as they still do today.

The tribe of Ephraim

16 ¹ The land given by lot to the descendants of Joseph stretched from the Jordan opposite Jericho eastward. From Jericho onward the southern border climbed the highlands into the hill country as far as Bethel;² it left Bethel and Luz and went on toward the border of the Archites of Ataroth;³ then it went westward to the area of the Japhletites as far as the area of Lower Beth-horon. From there it went to Gezer, and reached the Mediterranean Sea.⁴ The tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, descendants of Joseph, divided this inheritance among themselves.

⁵ The border of the tribe of Ephraim ran from Ataroth-addar as far as Upper Beth-horon,⁶ and it ended at the Mediterranean Sea. Michmethath was to the north. From there the border turned east towards Tanaath-shiloh and ran beyond it on the east to Janoah.⁷ Then it went down from Janoah to Ataroth and Naarah, touched Jericho and ended at the Jordan.⁸ From Tappuah the border went westward to the stream Kanah and ended at the Mediterranean Sea. This was the land given to the tribe of Ephraim according to their clans,⁹ as well as the towns set apart for the Ephraimites inside the territory of the descendants of Manasseh, all those towns and their villages.¹⁰ The Canaanites living in Gezer were not driven out; they have lived among the Ephraimites to the present day, but are submitted to obligatory works.

The tribe of Manasseh

17 ¹ A part of the land awarded to Manasseh, who was Joseph's firstborn son, was given to Machir, Manasseh's eldest son and father of Gilead. To him was given, as was fitting for a military hero, the country of Gilead and Bashan.² Land was also given to

other families descended from Manasseh according to their clans: the families of Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hepher, Shemida. These were the clans of the male descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph.

³ Zelophehad son of Hepher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, had no sons, only daughters, whose names are: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. ⁴ These daughters went to the priest Eleazar and to Joshua the son of Nun and to the leaders, and said, "Yahweh commanded Moses to give us some of the land among our brothers as our own." According to Yahweh's command, therefore, they were given land along with their male relatives.

⁵ In this way Manasseh received ten shares besides the country of Gilead and Bashan which lies across the Jordan, ⁶ since Manasseh's female descendants received a share in the land as well as his male descendants. The country of Gilead itself belonged to the rest of the descendants of Manasseh.

⁷ The border of Manasseh stretched from Asher to Michmethath, which is opposite Shechem. From there the border went south to the spring of Tappuah. ⁸ The land surrounding Tappuah belonged to Manasseh, but the town of Tappuah on Manasseh's border belonged to the descendants of Ephraim. ⁹ The border passed down to the stream, south of the river, where the towns set apart for Ephraim from among the towns of Manasseh were situated. The border of Manasseh passed north of the stream and ended at the sea. ¹⁰ Ephraim was to the south and Manasseh to the north, and both were bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea. They touched Asher to the north and Issachar to the east. ¹¹ Within the territories of Issachar and Asher, Manasseh had Beth-shean and Ibleam with their surrounding towns, as well as Dor and Endor, Taanach and Megiddo and their surrounding towns, and a third of the Nepheth. ¹² But the people of Manasseh could not conquer these towns, and the Canaanites continued to live there. ¹³ However, when the Israelites became stronger, they forced the Canaanites to work for them, but they never drove them out.

¹⁴ The descendants of Joseph spoke to Joshua, "Why have you given us only one share of the land when there are so many of us because Yahweh blessed us?" ¹⁵ Joshua answered, "If your people are so many, go up to the forest and clear out a place for yourselves in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, since the highlands of Ephraim are too small for you." ¹⁶ The descendants of Joseph an-

swered, "The highlands are not enough for us, and, in the plain, the Canaanites have iron chariots, and so have those in Beth-shean and its surrounding towns, and those in the plain of Jezreel." ¹⁷ Joshua said to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, "You are a numerous people and very powerful; you will not be left with only this share ¹⁸ for you will go up to the forest and clear it. All the land shall be yours, and you will drive out the Canaanites despite their iron chariots and great strength."

Joshua divides the rest of the land

18 ¹ After they had conquered the land, the whole community of Israel gathered at Shiloh, and the Tent of Meeting was set up there.

² Among the Israelites were seven tribes which had not yet been given their share of the land. ³ Then Joshua said to them, "How much longer will you wait before going in and taking possession of the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers has given you? ⁴ Choose three men from each tribe. I will send them out to make a survey of the whole territory so that it can be divided. ⁵ They must divide the land into seven parts, because those of the tribe of Judah have already their territory to the south, and those of the tribe of Joseph have their territory to the north. ⁶ You are to survey the land in seven divisions and bring your findings to me here, so that I can cast lots for you before Yahweh our God. ⁷ The Levites have no share in the land with the rest of you; their share is to serve as priests of Yahweh and the tribes of Gad and Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their land beyond the Jordan eastward, as Moses, Yahweh's servant, gave it to them."

⁸ To those who were to survey the country, Joshua gave this command before they started on their way: "Go, survey and map the whole country, and then come back to me. Here in Shiloh I will consult Yahweh for you by drawing lots." ⁹ So the men left and went all over the country, making a list of all the towns and how they were to be divided into seven parts. When they brought it back to Joshua in the camp at Shiloh, ¹⁰ he drew lots to consult Yahweh for them and divided the land among the Israelites according to their clans.

The tribe of Benjamin

¹ The first share of land went to the tribe of Benjamin according to their clans: their territory lay between that of the tribes of Judah and Joseph.



¹² The northern border began at the Jordan, climbed to the northern side of Jericho, rose through the hill country westward and ended at the wilderness of Beth-aven. ¹³ From there it continued toward the south side of Luz which is now called Bethel; then downward to Ata-roth-addar, on the mountain south of Lower Beth-horon. ¹⁴ The border then curved, and on the western side of this mountain turned southward and ended at Kiriath-baal, which is now called Kiriath-jearim, a city of the tribe of Judah. This was the western border.

¹⁵ The southern border ran from the edge of Kiriath-jearim toward Gasin, and to the spring of Nephtoa. ¹⁶ It continued to the foot of the mountain facing the Valley of Ben-hinnom, at the north end of Rephaim Valley. It then went south through the Valley of Hinnom, south of the mountainside of the Jebusites and reached En-rogel. ¹⁷ It then curved northward to En-shemesh coming out at the circles of stones facing the Ascent of Adumim, ¹⁸ then on to Cheteph in sight of the Arabah and down to the Arabah and ¹⁹ the stone of Bohan (Bohan was a son of Reuben) and from there passed north of the mountainside overlooking the Jordan Valley. The border ended at the bay of the Dead Sea, at the mouth of the Jordan. This was the southern border. ²⁰ The Jordan itself was the eastern border. Such was the land given to the tribe of Benjamin, with the borders defining it.

²¹ The towns of the tribe of Benjamin, according to their clans, were Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-keziz; ²² Beth-arabah, Zemaram, Bethel; ²³ Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, ²⁴ Chephar-ammoni, Ophni, Geba: twelve towns and their surrounding villages. ²⁵ Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth; ²⁶ Mizpeh, Chephirah, Moza; ²⁷ Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah; ²⁸ Zela, Haeleph, Jerusalem, Gibeah and Kiriath: fourteen towns with their surrounding villages. This was the land given to the tribe of Benjamin, according to their clans.

The share of the other tribes

19 ¹ The second share of land went to the tribe of Simeon, according to their clans; their land was encircled by the land of the tribe of Judah. ² For they had Beer-sheba, Shema, Moladah; ³ Hazarshual, Balah, Ezem; ⁴ Eltolad, Bethul, Ezem; ⁴ Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah; ⁵ Ziglag, Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susah; ⁶ Beth-lebaath and Sharuhin – thirteen towns and their surrounding villages; ⁷ Ain, Rimmon, Ether and Ashan – four towns and their surrounding villages. ⁸ Moreover, they were given all the villages lying outside these towns as far as Baalath-beer, Ramah of the

Negeb. This was the land given to the tribe of Simeon according to their clans.

⁹ This land was taken from the territory of Judah, because their share of these was too large for them; this is why the tribe of Simeon was given land within the territory of the tribe of Judah.

¹⁰ The third share of land went to the tribe of Zebulun according to their clans; their border reached as far as Sarid. ¹¹ From there the border climbed westward to Maraalah, touching Dabbesheth first and then the stream east of Jokneam. ¹² From Sarid it went eastward toward the sunrise to the border of Chisloth-tabor, then to Dobrath and to Japhia. ¹³ From there it continued eastward to Gathhepher and Ittah-kazin; it came out at Rimmon and turned toward Neah. ¹⁴ On the north the border bent toward Hannathon and ended at the valley of Iphtahel. ¹⁵ It included Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Iralah and Bethlehem – twelve towns with their surrounding villages. ¹⁶ This was the land received by the tribe of Zebulun according to their clans; these towns and their surrounding villages.

¹⁷ The fourth share of land went to the tribe of Issachar, according to their clans. ¹⁸ Their border reached to Jezreel and included Chesulloth and Shunem; ¹⁹ Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath; ²⁰ Dobrath, Kishion, Ebez; ²¹ Remeth and En-gannim, En-haddah and Beth-pazzez. ²² Their border touched Tabor and Shahazimah and Beth-shemesh, and ended at the Jordan: sixteen towns with their surrounding villages. ²³ This was the land given to the tribe of Issachar, according to their clans: the towns with their surrounding villages.

²⁴ The fifth share of land went to the tribe of Asher, according to their clans. ²⁵ Within their territory were Helkath, Hali, Beten, Achshaph; ²⁶ Allammelech, Amad and Mishal; on the west their border touched Camel and the stream of the Libnath; ²⁷ on the other side it went eastward to Beth-dagon, touching Zebulun and the Valley of Iphtahel on the way north to Beth-emek and Neiel. It continued north to Cabul. ²⁸ Abdon, Rehob, Hammon and Kanah as far as Sidon the Great. ²⁹ The border then turned back toward Ramah reaching the fortress city of Tyre. From there it turned to Hosah and ended at the Mediterranean Sea. It included Mahalab, Achziv. ³⁰ Acco, Aphek, Rehob: twenty-two towns with their surrounding villages. ³¹ This was the land given to the tribe of Asher, according to their clans: these towns with their surrounding villages.

³² The sixth share of land went to the tribe of Naphtali according to their clans. ³³ Their



border went from Heleph and the Oak of Zanaannim to Adami-negeb, to Jabneel as far as Lakkum, and ended at the Jordan. ³⁴ From there the border ran west to Aznoth-tabor and went on to Hukkok, touching Zebulun on the south, Asher on the west and the Jordan on the east. ³⁵ The fortified towns were Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Chinnereth. ³⁶ Adamah, Ramah, Hazor. ³⁷ Kedesh, Edrei, En-hazor; ³⁸ Yiron, Migdalel, Horem, Beth-anath, Beth-shemesh: nineteen towns with their surrounding villages. ³⁹ This was the land given to the tribe of Naphtali according to their clans.

⁴⁰ The seventh share of the land went to the tribe of Dan according to their clans. ⁴¹ Within their territory were Zorah, Eshtaol, Irshe-mesh; ⁴² Sha-alabbin, Ajalon, Ithlah; ⁴³ Elon, Timnah, Ekron. ⁴⁴ Eltekeh, Gibbethon, ⁴⁵ Baalath; Jehud, Bene-berak, Gathrimmon; ⁴⁶ Mejarkon and Rakkon with the land around Joppa.

⁴⁷ But the territory of the tribe of Dan was too small for them; and therefore they went up and attacked Leshem and captured it and killed its people. Having seized the town they settled in it, and changed the name of Leshem to Dan after Dan their ancestor. ⁴⁸ This was the land of the tribe of Dan, according to their clans: these towns with their surrounding villages.

⁴⁹ When the Israelites finished distributing the land by drawing lots, they gave Joshua son of Nun a part of the land as his own; ⁵⁰ at the command of Yahweh, they gave him the town he had asked for, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim; he rebuilt the city and settled there.

⁵¹ These are the shares of land which Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of each family divided among the tribes of Israel by drawing lots at Shiloh, in Yahweh's presence, at the door of the Tent of Meeting; and thus they finished dividing the land.

The cities of refuge

20 ¹ Yahweh said to Joshua, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: Choose the cities of refuge about which I told you through Moses. ³ towns where a person who kills someone accidentally may find safety; they are to be your refuge from the dead person's relative who is looking for revenge.

⁴ The man who has killed may run away to one of these towns; he shall appear at the entrance to the town and explain his case to the elders of the place. They shall welcome him and assign him a place to live among them.

⁵ If the person who wants revenge follows him

there, they are not to hand him over, since he has killed his neighbor accidentally and not out of hatred.

⁶ The man who has killed must remain in that town until he has received a public trial and until the death of the high priest then in office. Only then may the man who has killed go back to his own town and his own house, to the town from which he has escaped."

⁷ For this purpose they set aside Kedesh in Galilee, in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the highlands of Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is now Hebron, in the hill country of Judah.

⁸ East of the Jordan, in the desert east of Jericho, they chose Bezer in the territory of Reuben, Ramoth-gilead in the territory of Gad, and Golan in Bashan in the territory of Manasseh. ⁹ These were the towns set aside for all the Israelites and for any foreigner living among them, where anyone who had killed a person accidentally could find safety from the dead person's relative looking for revenge, until he had been given a public trial.

The Levitical towns

21 ¹ The heads of families among the Levites came to Eleazar, the priest and to Joshua, son of Nun and the heads of families of all the tribes of Israel. ² At Shiloh in the land of Canaan, they said to them, "Yahweh commanded through Moses that we should be given towns to live in, with the pasture land around them for our cattle."

³ In accordance with Yahweh's command, the Israelites gave the Levites certain cities and pasture lands out of their own territories.

⁴ First among the Levite clan of Kohath, the families descended from Aaron the priest, were given thirteen towns from the territories of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin; ⁵ the other Kohath families received, clan by clan, ten towns from the territories of Ephraim, Dan and half the tribe of Manasseh. ⁶ The clan of Gershon was given thirteen towns from the territories of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and half the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan. ⁷ The families of the clan of Merari were given twelve towns from the territories of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun.

⁸ The Israelites gave to the Levites by drawing lots these towns and the pasture land near them, as Yahweh had commanded through Moses.

⁹ These are the towns of Judah and Simeon that Joshua gave ¹⁰ to the descendants of Aaron who were of the Kohathite clan of the



Levites, the first to be given some cities.

¹¹ They gave them Kiriath-arba, the chief city of the Anakim, which is now Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, with the pasture lands around it. ¹² But the fields and surrounding villages of this town had already been given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his property. ¹³ To the descendants of Aaron the priest, they gave Hebron, a city of refuge, and the pasture lands near it; also Libnah with its pasture lands, ¹⁴ and Jattir, Eshtemoa, ¹⁵ Holon, Debir, ¹⁶ Ashan, Juttah and Beth-she-mesh, each with its pasture lands; nine towns taken from these two tribes. ¹⁷ From the territory of Benjamin four towns: Gibeon and Geba with their pasture lands, ¹⁸ Anathoth and Almon with theirs. ¹⁹ The towns of the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were thirteen towns in all, with their pasture lands.

²⁰ Some towns from the territory of Ephraim were given to the other families of the Levite clan of Kohath: ²¹ the city of refuge, Shechem, with its pasture lands, in the hill country of Ephraim, together with Gezer, ²² Kibzaim and Beth-horon, each with its pasture lands; four towns. ²³ From the territory of Dan, Elteke, Gibbethon, ²⁴ Aijalon and Gathrimmon with their pasture lands; four towns. ²⁵ From the territory of half the tribe of Manasseh they were given two towns: Taanach and Jibleam with their pasture lands. ²⁶ In all ten towns with their pasture lands were given to the families of the clan of Kohath.

²⁷ To the Levite clan of Gershon were given the city of refuge Golan in Bashan and also Ashtaroth, each with its pasture lands; two towns, both from the territory of the half tribe of Manasseh. ²⁸ From the territory of Issachar four towns: Kishion, Dobrath, ²⁹ Jarmuth and En-gannim, each with its pasture lands. ³⁰ From the territory of Asher four towns: Mishal, Abdon, ³¹ Helkath and Rehob, each with its pasture lands. ³² From the territory of Naphtali three towns: Kedesh, the city of refuge in Galilee, Hammoth-dor and Rakkath, each with its pasture lands. ³³ The Gershonites according to their clans were given thirteen towns in all with their pasture lands.

³⁴ To the clans of Merari, the rest of the Levites, were given four towns with their pasture lands from the territory of Zebulun: ³⁵ Jokneam, Kartah, Rimmon and Nahalal. ³⁶ From the territory of Reuben, beyond the

Jordan four towns: the city of refuge Bezer, Jahaz, ³⁷ Kedemoth and Mephaath, each with its pasture lands. ³⁸ From the tribe of Gad four towns: the city of refuge Ramoth-gilead, Mahanaim, ³⁹ Heshbon and Jazer, each with pasture lands. ⁴⁰ A total of twelve towns were given to the clan of Merari.

⁴¹ The towns thus given to the Levites from the Israelite inheritance were ⁴² forty-eight, with their pasture lands. All these towns, as well as the pasture land around them, were given to the Levites.

⁴³ So it was that Yahweh gave the Israelites all the land he had solemnly promised to give their ancestors. They took possession of it and began to live there. ⁴⁴ Yahweh gave them peace throughout their land just as he had promised their ancestors. Not one of their enemies was able to stand against them; Yahweh gave them victory over all their enemies ⁴⁵ and kept all the promises he had made to the people of Israel.

The question of the altar across the

Jordan

+ 22 ¹ Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh ² and said to them, ³ "You have observed all that Moses, the servant of Yahweh ordered you, and you have obeyed me constantly. You have never deserted your brothers over this long period of time; at every point you have obeyed the orders of Yahweh your God. ⁴ Now that Yahweh your God has granted your brothers the rest he promised; them, go back to your tents, to the land given into your possession by Moses the servant of Yahweh, beyond the Jordan.

⁵ But take care above all to keep the commandments of the Law which Moses, the servant of Yahweh gave you: love Yahweh your God, follow his paths always, keep his commandments, be faithful to him and serve him with all your heart and all your soul." ⁶ So Joshua blessed them and sent them away; they went home to their tents.

⁷ Moses had given territory in Bashan to one half of the tribe of Manasseh; because of this Joshua gave land to the other half of Manasseh among their brothers on the west bank of the Jordan. As Joshua sent them home to their tents he blessed them ⁸ and said to them, "You are going back to your tents with

+ At the time of Joshua, the Israelites had several places of worship. When this book was edited centuries later, it was no longer allowed to offer sacrifices in any place other than the Temple of Jerusalem. This present chapter was

written to justify and excuse those who, in the past, had multiplied the sacred places. At the same time, it was meant to impart the following lesson: Israel must safeguard its religious unity.



great wealth, with cattle in plenty, with silver and gold, bronze and iron and great quantities of clothing; these are the spoils of your enemies that you shared with your brothers."

⁹ The Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh went home again; they left the Israelites at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, and made their way back to the land of Gilead, the territory which belonged to them and where they had settled in accordance with the order of Yahweh given through Moses. ¹⁰ When they came to the circles of stones at the Jordan which are in Canaanite territory, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh built there beside the Jordan, an imposing altar of great size. ¹¹ The Israelites were told, "The Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh have built this altar facing the land of Canaan near the circles of the stones at the Jordan, beyond the territory of the Israelites."

¹² At this news the children of Israel summoned the whole community at Shiloh, ready to make war on them.

¹³ The Israelites sent the priest Phinehas son of Eleazar to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, ¹⁴ and with him ten leading men, one leader from each tribe in Israel: every one of them was head of his family among the clans of Israel. ¹⁵ When they came to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead, they said to them:

¹⁶ "The whole community of Yahweh asks you: what do you mean by this treachery committed against the God of Israel? Why turn aside from Yahweh today, building yourselves an altar? You are sinning against Yahweh himself."

¹⁷ Was the sin at Peor not enough, the sin from which we are not cleansed even now, in spite of the plague that ravaged the whole community of Yahweh? ¹⁸ You have stopped following Yahweh today, and you have set yourselves in revolt against him today. Tomorrow his anger will be roused against the whole community of Israel.

¹⁹ Do you think your land is unclean? Then cross over into the territory of Yahweh, where his Holy Tent is and come to live among us. But do not rebel against Yahweh or set yourselves aside by building an altar to vie with the altar of Yahweh our God. ²⁰ When Achan, son of Zerah betrayed his trust in the matter of the anathema, did not Yahweh vent his anger on the whole community of Israel, although he was only one man? Did he not have to die for his sin?"

²¹ The Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh answered the heads of the clans of Israel:

²² "Yahweh is the God of gods! Yahweh well knows, and let Israel know it too: Let Yahweh punish us immediately if there has been defiance or treachery on our part against Yahweh. ²³ Let Yahweh punish us if we have built an altar to turn away from Yahweh and offer holocaust and oblation and communion sacrifice on it. ²⁴ We made it to prevent what might happen one day when your children say to ours: 'What link have you with Yahweh the God of Israel?' ²⁵ Has not Yahweh set the boundary of the Jordan between us and you, you sons of Reuben and sons of Gad? You have no share in Yahweh.' Thus your children might make us turn aside from Yahweh."

²⁶ So we said to each other, 'Let us build this altar, not for holocausts or other sacrifices ²⁷ but as a witness between us and you and among our descendants after us. It will prove that we, too, worship Yahweh with our holocausts, our victims and our communion sacrifices in his presence. So that your children will never be able to say to ours: You have no share in Yahweh. ²⁸ For, in this case, we should say to them: Look at this structure, Yahweh's altar made by our ancestors not for holocausts or other sacrifices but as a witness between us and you.' ²⁹ We have no intention of defying Yahweh or turning away from him today. We don't build an altar for holocaust or oblations or sacrifices to compete with the altar of Yahweh our God that stands before his tabernacle!"

³⁰ When Phinehas the priest; and the leaders of the community who were with him heard the answer of the sons of Gad and of Reuben and of Manasseh, they approved of them. ³¹ Then the priest Phinehas son of Eleazar said to the sons of Reuben and sons of Gad and sons of Manasseh, "Now we clearly see that Yahweh is among us, because you have not sinned against him; you have saved the children of Israel from the punishment of Yahweh."

³² The priest Phinehas son of Eleazar and the leaders left the Reubenites and the Gadites and returned from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, and they brought back this answer to the Israelites. ³³ The Israelites were pleased to hear this; they gave thanks to God and spoke no more of making war and ravaging the country where the sons of Reuben and of Gad had settled. ³⁴ The Reubenites and the Gadites named the altar: 'Witness.' "Because," they said, "it will be a witness between us that Yahweh is God."

Joshua's last discourse

23 ¹ It had been a long time since Yahweh gave peace to Israel in all its borders. ² Joshua who was now very old and burdened with age, summoned all Israel – their elders, leaders, secretaries and judges – and he said to them: "I am now very old. ³ You have seen all that Yahweh had done to all these nations for your sake and how he himself had fought for you. ⁴ See, I have distributed to you the territory of all these nations that we destroyed from the Jordan to the Great Sea, as well as those nations that still remain. ⁵ Yahweh, our God, will continue driving them back before you and will deprive them of their lands that you may take them as Yahweh has promised you."

⁶ Therefore be very valiant and have the determination to do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside from it either to the right or to the left. ⁷ Do not intermingle with these nations that are left among you. Do not call upon their gods or swear by their name. Do not serve them or bow before them, ⁸ but remain united to Yahweh, our God, as you have done to this day. ⁹ For that reason, Yahweh has driven away before you many powerful nations: no one was able to stand before your presence. ¹⁰ One of you pursued a thousand since Yahweh, our God, fought for you as he had promised. ¹¹ So then, be very careful to love Yahweh, your God.

¹² But if you separate from him and be one with the rest of these nations that still remain among you, if they come to be your relatives and you intermarry with them, ¹³ know very well that Yahweh shall no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this beautiful land Yahweh, our God, has given you.

¹⁴ I am now about to go the way of all creatures, so I say to you: know in your soul and in your conscience that all the promises of Yahweh, our God, have been fulfilled; not one of

them has failed. ¹⁵ But just as all these promises of Yahweh in your favor have been fulfilled, so shall Yahweh bring all the evil he has threatened against you until you have been wiped out from this magnificent land he has given you, ¹⁶ if you break the covenant that Yahweh, our God, has given us. If you follow and serve other gods and bow before them, the wrath of Yahweh shall rise against you, and you shall suddenly perish from this fertile land he has given you."

The Covenant renewed at Shechem

♦24 ¹ Joshua summoned all the tribes of Israel in Shechem, and assembled the elders, leaders, judges and secretaries. And together they presented themselves before God.

² Addressing the people Joshua said to them: "Yahweh, the God of Israel, commands me to say to you: Your ancestors lived beyond the Euphrates River – Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor – serving other gods. ³ But I brought Abraham your father from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan. Then I gave him a son Isaac, that he might have numerous descendants. ⁴ And to Isaac, I gave two sons: Esau and Jacob. Esau received the mountains of Seir as his inheritance, while Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

⁵ Then I sent Moses and Aaron to punish Egypt in the way that you know, that you might leave. ⁶ Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt and you came to the sea. The Egyptians pursued you with chariots and horses as far as the Red Sea. ⁷ Then you cried to Yahweh, and he put immense darkness between you and the Egyptians. He made the sea go back on them and they were drowned. You have witnessed all the things he did in Egypt, and then you lived in the desert for a long time. ⁸ Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites who were on the east of the Jordan. You fought them but it was I who gave them into your hand; you destroyed them and you seized their lands.

6. Ex 23, 13; Jer 5, 7

15. Dt 28, 15

16. Dt 11, 16

2. Gen 11, 27

♦ By the time Joshua will disappear, the presence of Israel in the hills and plains of Palestine will be well-established. They had asserted themselves by either peaceful infiltration or conquest. What is even more important, they were aware of their common destiny.

The twelve tribes gather together in Shechem, in Central Palestine, where the tribes of Joseph are established, stronger and more assiduously keeping the memory of Moses. Here the Covenant celebrated by Moses is renewed

(See Ex 24 and last chapters of Deuteronomy.)

After recalling the interventions made by Yahweh in favour of Israel, Joshua invites the assembly to choose Yahweh and to reject foreign gods. The law of the Covenant is committed to writing.

Remembrance of the Covenant of Shechem will keep alive the aspiration for unity and fidelity to Yahweh during those dark moments after Joshua's death, that is, during the period of the Judges.

⁹ Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, declared war on Israel and commanded Balaam son of Beor to curse you.¹⁰ But I would not listen to him, so Balaam blessed you and I saved you from the hands of Balak.

¹¹ Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the landlords of Jericho fought against you: the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites declared war on you, but I gave them to you.¹² The two Amorite kings fled from you because of the swarm of hornets that attacked them and not because of your sword and bow.

¹³ I gave you the lands which you have not filled, cities which you did not build but in which you now live. I gave you vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant but from which you now eat.

¹⁴ So fear Yahweh, and be sincere and faithful in serving him. Set aside those gods your fathers worshipped in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Serve only Yahweh.¹⁵ But if you do not want to serve Yahweh, make known this very day whom you shall serve – whether they be the gods your fathers served in Mesopotamia or the gods of the Amorites who formerly occupied the land in which you now live. As for me, I and my household will serve Yahweh."

¹⁶ The people answered: "May God not permit that we ever abandon Yahweh to serve other gods!¹⁷ For it was he who brought us and our fathers out of Egypt, the house of slavery. It was he who did those great wonders that we have seen: he protected us all on the way and through all the land where we passed,¹⁸ driving away before us all the nations especially the Amorites who lived in this land. So we shall also serve Yahweh: he is our God!"

¹⁹ Joshua asked the people: "Will you be able to serve Yahweh? He is a Holy God, a Jealous God who does not tolerate wickedness or faults.²⁰ If you abandon Yahweh to serve other gods, he will turn against you and just as

he has done you so much good so shall he punish you and destroy you."²¹ The people replied: "No, may it not be as you say. We will serve Yahweh."²² Joshua said: "You yourselves are witnesses that you have chosen Yahweh to serve him." They answered: "We are witnesses."

²³ Joshua then said, "Remove now from your midst any other gods and serve with all your heart Yahweh, the God of Israel."²⁴ The people answered: "We will serve Yahweh, our God, and obey his commands."

²⁵ On that day at Shechem, Joshua made a covenant with the people and fixed laws and ordinances.²⁶ He also wrote down everything expressed in the book of the Law of God; he chose a great stone and put it under the oak tree in the sacred place of Yahweh.²⁷ Then Joshua said to the people: "This stone shall be a witness to all that Yahweh said to us, for it heard all these words. It shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with Yahweh."

²⁸ Joshua immediately sent the people away and everyone returned to his land.

²⁹ After all these deeds, Joshua, the son of Nun and the servant of Yahweh, died at the age of a hundred and ten.³⁰ They buried him in his land at Timnath-serah, in the hill country of Ephraim, to the north of Mount Gaash.³¹ Israel served Yahweh throughout the whole life of Joshua and of the elders who outlived Joshua and who had witnessed all the wonders Yahweh did for Israel.³² The Israelites brought from Egypt the bones of Joseph. They buried them at Shechem in a place in the field which Jacob bought from the children of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money. This became the possession of the children of Joseph.

³³ Eleazar the son of Aaron also died and they buried him on the hill given to his son Phinehas on the mountains of Ephraim.

14. Ex 20, 7
De 6, 18; 9, 3

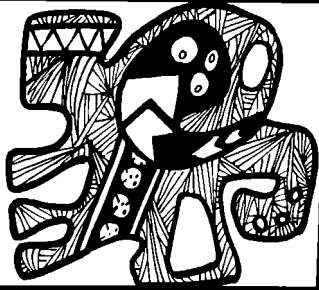
19. Ex 34, 14
27. Gen 31, 48; Dt 31, 26

22. Ex 23, 21; Ex 24, 3
28. Is 59, 13

24. Gen 35, 2; 1 S 7, 3
31. Jdg 2, 8

26. Dt 29, 11

judges



INTRODUCTION

After God's manifestation of himself to Moses on Sinai, the Book of Judges describes a world of lesser glory, where one must look closely to discover some glowing embers of what had been ignited. After the exceptional liberation of the Exodus, Judges teaches us that, in the present world, we can have no freedom apart from what we ourselves win. These teachings confirm our own experience. For though Christ brought us liberation, it still costs us much to sacrifice ourselves for something worthwhile. Likewise, even though our fathers won national independence for us, we still must struggle painfully for our right to exist.

At the start of the book, the Israelites have succeeded in occupying the poorest territories of Canaan and they look with envy at the rich plains where the pagans reside. Nevertheless settled in their encampments, they are turning into small farmers after centuries of following their flocks through pasture lands. This signifies a profound social transformation and, as happens in times of rapid change, a crisis in values of all sorts emerges.

The Book of Judges emphasizes first the temptation to idolatry. The Canaanite farmers had a very attractive religion which celebrated the forces of life and fecundity. They got together in rural festivities or in sacred forests, where they practised sacred prostitution rites while asking from their gods, the Baals, the blessings of rain and good harvests. It was difficult for the Israelites not to join their pagan neighbours in these celebrations..

Besides facing cultural and religious alienation, the Israelites were victimized by various oppressors and raiders who reduced them to misery.

THE SAVIOURS

In this situation, the Israelites, a people disorganized and divided into rival groups, followed chiefs who rose from the midst of the people. These chiefs were men from the countryside who sometimes won great victories (see chaps. 4-5)

They called these men *Sofetim*, a word that meant both *chiefs* and *judges*. Thus it happened that chiefs who never sat on a tribunal were called *Judges*. But perhaps the word "judges" should be understood in another sense: these men became instruments of God's justice.

The judges were not saints. Nevertheless, Israel recognized them as saviours that Yahweh, in his compassion, gave them. Indeed it was not a very religious thing to slay an enemy chief or to kill some Philistines. But, if we take into account the climate in which they lived, these men had shown courage and faith in the midst of much cowardice. In overcoming the passivity of their brothers they prepared for a new stage in their history.

The deeds of the Judges were joyfully recounted for many years and at times, transformed into legend. But, the writer who later combined all these stories in a single book found a unifying thread which threw light on delays in the conquest and on the stages of liberation. He noted this sequence of events:



o1 After the death of Joshua, the Israelites consulted Yahweh. "Who among us shall be the first to fight against the Canaanites?"² Yahweh answered: "The tribe of Judah shall go up first, and I will give the land into their hands."³ So the people of Judah said to their brothers from the tribe of Simeon, "Help us conquer the part of the land that is allotted to us, and then we will conquer with you the region that is yours." So they joined forces for the war.

⁴ When the tribe of Judah attacked the Canaanites and the Perizzites, Yahweh gave these into their hands; in Bezek they defeated ten thousand men.

⁵ In Bezek they encountered the Lord of Bezek and fought against him. ⁶ The Lord of Bezek fled but they pursued him. They captured him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. ⁷ The Lord of Bezek then said, "Seventy rings whose thumbs and big toes I cut off used to pick scraps under my table, now God has done to me according to what I had done." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died here.

⁸ The tribe of Judah attacked the city of Jerusalem, and after killing its inhabitants they burned the city. ⁹ Afterwards they went down from Jerusalem to attack the Canaanites who lived in the mountains, in the Negeb and in the plains. ¹⁰ They also attacked the Canaanites who were in Hebron (Hebron was also called Kiriath-arba at that time), and they defeated Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi. ¹¹ From there they marched against the inhabitants of Debir, a city which was also called Kiriath-sepher. ¹² Then Caleb made this promise, "To the one who takes Kiriath-sepher, I will give my daughter Achsah as wife." ¹³ It was Othniel who took the city; he was the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, and Caleb gave him Achsah, his daughter, as wife.

¹⁴ When Achsah came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field. She delighted from her ass, and Caleb asked her, "What do you want?" ¹⁵ She answered, "What a gift this Negeb wilderness is! Give me also

springs of water." And Caleb gave her the Upper Springs and the Lower Springs.

¹⁶ The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, also went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms to that part of the desert of Judah on the boundary of the Negeb near Arad, and they settled there with them.

¹⁷ Those from Judah and their brothers from the tribe of Simeon attacked the Canaanites who lived in Zephath, and they sacrificed Zephath in honor of Yahweh. For this reason, the city was named "Anathema." ¹⁸ Judah seized Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron with their respective territories.

¹⁹ Although they conquered the mountainous regions with the help of Yahweh, they could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they fought with iron chariots. ²⁰ Following the orders of Moses, they gave the city of Hebron to Caleb who had cast out the three sons of Anak from there. ²¹ But the tribe of Benjamin did not succeed in expelling the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; the Jebusites have stayed in Jerusalem until this day.

²² The people of Joseph went up against Bethel with the help of Yahweh. ²³ They sent men out to spy in Bethel, formerly called Luz, ²⁴ and they met a man coming out of the city. They said to him, "Tell us how we can enter the city, and we will not kill you." ²⁵ He showed them the way. Then they entered and put the city to the sword, but set that man free together with his whole family. ²⁶ The man went to the land of the Hittites where he built a city which he named Luz which is its name to this day.

²⁷ However, the tribe of Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth-shean and Taanach or the inhabitants of Dor, Ibleam and Megiddo. The Canaanites persisted in dwelling in these cities and in the towns that depended on them, and they kept their lands. ²⁸ But when the Israelites grew stronger, they exacted taxes from the Canaanites who stayed in their place. ²⁹ Neither did the tribe of Ephraim expel the Canaanites who lived in Gezer ³⁰ nor did the tribe of Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron and Nahalol. These

8. Jos 15, 63

16. Num 24, 21; Ex 2, 16

20. Num 14, 24

24. Gen 28, 19; Jos 6, 21

o The first chapter throws some light on the conquest. It was not as triumphal as it appears in the Book of Joshua, but slow and difficult. The Israelites did not obey the command to wipe out the pagans, though such a massacre would have

protected their faith in the only God. On the contrary they had peaceful relations with them which set the stage for idolatry.

Compare verses 8 and 22: there is no certainty as to this data.

- The Israelites abandon Yahweh and fall into idolatry.
- Because of this, Yahweh delivers them into the hands of these enemies.
- The Israelites acknowledge their errors and call on Yahweh.
- Yahweh then raises up a saviour.

But once victory has been won, after a period of peace the people forsake their mission once again. In this present world, there is no definitive liberation.

Canaanites lived among them, but had to pay taxes to them.

¹¹ Those of Asher did not expel the people of Acco, Sidon, or those of Ahlab, or Achzib, Helbah, Aphik and Rehob.

¹² The tribe of Asher had to live in the midst of the Canaanites who occupied their territory, for they could not drive them out from that region. ¹³ The same with the tribe of Naphtali which failed to drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath; they had to dwell in the midst of the Canaanites who lived in that region. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath paid taxes to this tribe.

¹⁴ The Amorites did not allow the descendants of Dan to come down to the plain, so the latter had to live in the mountains. ¹⁵ The Amorites also remained in Har-heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the tribe of Joseph grew stronger, they forced the Amorites to pay taxes. ¹⁶ The territory of the Amorites extended from the slope of Akkrabbim, and from Sela and upward.

+ 2 ¹ The Angel of Yahweh went up from Gilgal to Bochim where the Israelites were gathered, and he said to them, "I made you go up from Egypt and brought you to the land I had promised your fathers. I said to them, 'Never will I break my covenant with you,' ² but you shall not make any covenant with the Canaanites and shall destroy their altars." But you have not obeyed my command. Why did you not obey me? ³ Now, I will not drive out these nations before you. They shall be your oppressors and their gods shall be a trap for you."

⁴ After the Angel of Yahweh had spoken, all the Israelites began to weep and cry. ⁵ For this reason, they named that place Bochim, which means "those who weep," and they offered sacrifices to Yahweh.

⁶ When Joshua dismissed the Israelites, each one of them went to his inheritance to occupy the land. ⁷ The people served Yahweh during the lifetime of Joshua and of the leaders

who outlived him, and who had witnessed all the great works of Yahweh for Israel. ⁸ Joshua, son of Nun, the servant of Moses, died at the age of hundred and ten years. ⁹ They buried him at the boundary of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. ¹⁰ That whole generation died and another one came, but they did not know Yahweh or what he had done for Israel.

Summary of the book: unfaithfulness and punishment

■ ¹¹ The Israelites treated Yahweh badly and they served the Baals instead. ¹² They abandoned Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt and served other gods, the gods of the neighbouring peoples. They bowed before those gods and offended Yahweh.

¹³ When Yahweh saw that they had abandoned him to serve Baal and Ashtaroth, ¹⁴ he got angry with his people, so he gave them into the hands of plunderers who left them in misery. He himself sold them to their enemies who completely surrounded the Israelites, so that these Israelites could no longer withstand them. ¹⁵ Whenever they felt strong for an offensive, Yahweh would turn against them and send evil upon them, as he had warned and sworn to them. And this caused much distress and anguish for the Israelites.

¹⁶ Yahweh raised up "judges" (or liberators) who saved the Israelites from their exploiters. ¹⁷ But neither did they obey those "judges" for they still prostituted themselves to other

1. Ex 23, 32; Dt 7, 2

3. Ex 34, 12

7. Jos 24, 31

+ The "Angel of Yahweh" goes up from Gilgal, the first Israelite sanctuary in Palestine beside the Jordan, to Bethel. We know that using the expression *Angel of Yahweh* is a way of naming Yahweh himself.

The sin consists in not having destroyed the culture and religion of the Canaanites. Let us think of these beginnings: the true faith is given to a few tribes who have neither chief nor organization, and who are surrounded by a more advanced but pagan culture. History teaches us

that when a people changes its lifestyle, it also changes its form of religion.

Proof enough is seen in what happens today to a great part of humanity which passes from a rural, traditional civilization to an urban, industrial one. Many people are tempted to give up their religion and adopt a lifestyle where there is no room for the faith of their fathers.

Israel will go through several tests and disasters. Nevertheless, the miracle will be realized: faith in the only God will not be lost but proved.

gods and worshipped them. They soon left the way of their fathers who obeyed the commandments of Yahweh; they did not follow the way of their fathers.

¹⁸When Yahweh made a judge appear among his people, Yahweh was with him and saved them from their enemies. That lasted as long as the judge lived, for Yahweh was moved to pity by the lament of his people who were oppressed and persecuted. ¹⁹But when the judge died, they again became worse than their fathers – worshipping and serving other gods. They would not renounce their pagan practices and stubborn ways.

²⁰Yahweh was angry and he said, "These people broke the Covenant I had made with their fathers and they refused to obey me." ²¹Well now, neither shall I drive out before them any of the nations left when Joshua died. ²²And I shall test the Israelites through those nations, so I will know if they will finally follow my ways as their fathers did."

²³So Yahweh left those nations in their place and did not take the land immediately from them. This was

also why he did not give them into the hands of Joshua.

3 ¹These are the nations that Yahweh left to live in order to test the Israelites through them, that is to say, all the Israelites who had not known any of the wars in Canaan. ²He let these people live so that the generation of the children of Israel who had not known war before might learn how to fight. ³These people were the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites, the Sidonians and the Hivites of Mount Lebanon, from the mountain of Baal-hermon to as far as the entrance of Hamath.

⁴They remained to test Israel to see if they would observe the commandments that Yahweh had prescribed to their fathers through Moses. ⁵So the Israelites lived in the midst of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁶The Israelites married the daughters of these people, gave their own daughters in marriage to the sons of these people and served their gods.

Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar

♦ ⁷The Israelites treated Yahweh badly; they forgot Yahweh, their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroths. ⁸Because of this, the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel and he left them at the hands of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram, to whom they were subject for eight years.

⁹Then the Israelites cried to Yah-

17. Dt 31, 16; Hos 1, 2

■ Here begins a second introduction to the book of Judges wherein, after recalling the death of Joshua (see Joshua 23:31), the real causes of the events that will transpire are given.

The first cause of Israel's disaster, when they cannot drive out the Canaanites, is their infidelity to Yahweh.

But the book also gives other explanations. God lets the enemy live:

- to put his people to the test (2:22);
- to train them in warfare (3:2);
- so that the country would not be transformed into a desert (Ex 23:29; Dt 7:22).

This text summarizes the lesson found throughout the entire book and which we already read in Dt. 4:1-31.

God always acts as an educator. Since Israel was still a very primitive people and could understand only what was seen and felt, God

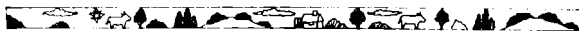
dealt with them through material rewards and punishment. Only centuries later, when Israel should have a more mature faith, would God make them understand that true rewards and punishments are not those of the present life.

They abandoned Yahweh to serve Baal. Baal (that means: Lord) referred to any Canaanite god, especially to him who let the rain fall. The Asheroths were goddesses, particularly of the soil and of fertility.

So Yahweh raised up liberators. The chiefs or leaders who exercised authority for a time were called "judges" because, at that time, to judge a people and to govern meant one and the same thing (see Introduction). In the present translation we shall often use the term *commanders* since this word expresses most accurately what those "judges" were.

Chapter 3 presents three of these Judges.

♦ They forgot Yahweh and served the Baals... and Yahweh abandoned them into



weh, and he raised up from among them a liberator who saved them - Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ¹⁰The spirit of Yahweh was upon him and he led Israel. When Othniel went to war, Yahweh gave Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram, into Othniel's hands. ¹¹Othniel won over the king and the land had peace for forty years. Then Othniel, son of Kenaz, died.

¹²The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, so he strengthened Eglon, king of Moab, so he could attack them; that was because they had treated Yahweh badly.

¹³Eglon joined the Ammonites and the Amalekites; they set out and marched together defeating Israel and taking the City of Palms. ¹⁴The Israelites became subject to Eglon, king of Moab, for eighteen years. ¹⁵But as they cried to Yahweh, he gave them a liberator - Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera, from the tribe of Benjamin.

The Israelites entrusted to him a gift to bring to Eglon, king of Moab.

¹⁶So, Ehud made for himself a two-edged dagger, one cubit long, and strapped it on his right thigh under his clothes. ¹⁷He then went to present the gift to Eglon, king of Moab. Eglon was a very fat man.

¹⁸When Ehud finished offering the present, he dismissed the men who who had brought all the things. ¹⁹But when he arrived at the place of the

Idols, near Gilgal, he went back to the king, and said to Eglon, "I have a secret message for you, O king. Eglon, king of Moab, then declared "Leave me alone!" And so everyone who was present left the room.

²⁰Then Ehud approached him while the king was seated alone on his private roof chamber where it was cool. Ehud said to him, "Lord, I have a warning from God for you." The king rose from his seat. ²¹Then Ehud with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh and thrust it into the king's belly. ²²The handle even went in with the blade and the fa closed over the blade, for Ehud did not draw the dagger out of his belly and the dirt came out. ²³Ehud jumped out through the window after having locked the doors of the roof behind him.

²⁴When he had gone, the servant came and saw that the doors of the upper room were locked. They thought, "He must be relieving himself in the cool room." ²⁵They waited for some time, but the doors of the roof room remained closed. Finally they took the keys and opened the doors: their lord lay on the floor dead.

²⁶Ehud had escaped while the servants waited for their king; he had passed through the place of the Idol and reached a safe place in Seirah. ²⁷When he arrived he had the trumpets sounded in the mountains of Ephraim and the Israelites went down

10. 1, 3; Jos 15, 17; 6, 34; 11, 29; 1 S 10, 6

11. 5, 31; 8, 28

the hands of the king of Aram. The Biblical text often plays with these words: he who serves a false god by his own will, will be a slave against his own will. Compare with 1 Sam. 7:3.

The spirit of Yahweh was on Othniel. See commentary 11:1.

Whereas Othniel and Ehud fought against the Edomites, the Moabites and Ammonites, raiders from the other side of the Jordan, Shamgar encountered the Philistines. The latter had arrived by sea on the Philistinian coast at the same time that the Israelites arrived from the desert. A

people of superior civilization, who were well armed and organized, the Philistines occupied the "Five Departments" i.e.: the five cities of Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gaza, with the surrounding territories.

They dominated the rich plain that bordered on the Mediterranean Sea, and their troops, time and again, harassed the Israelites who settled in the hills. Only King David would conquer them definitively but their name would survive: *Palestine*, name of the land of Israel comes from "Philistines".



from the mountains. ²⁸He stood before all of them and said, "Follow me, for Yahweh has given the people of Moab, our enemy, into our hands." They went down with him, barred the passages of the Jordan towards Moab and they let nobody pass.

²⁹They defeated Moab on that occasion, killing some ten thousand strong and brave men. Nobody was spared. ³⁰So on that day, Moab became subject to Israel, and the land remained peaceful for eighty years.

³¹Then Shamgar, the son of Anath, came; he killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He, too, saved Israel.

Deborah and Barak

4 ¹After Ehud died, the Israelites again treated Yahweh badly, ²so he left them in the power of Yabin, king of Canaan. Yabin reigned in Hazor, and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim.

³Then the Israelites cried to Yahweh, for Yabin had nine hundred chariots of war, and had kept the Israelites oppressed for twenty years.

⁴At that time, Deborah, a prophetess and wife of Lappidoth, became judge. ⁵"She used to sit under what was called the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel, in the land of Ephraim. There she resolved the complaints that the Israelites presented to her. ⁶And she sent and called for Barak, the son of Abinoam, who was from the town of Kedesh of Naphtali.

She said to him, "This is the order of Yahweh: Go, gather the people on Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, ⁷for I am going to bring Sisera to you at the river Kishon with his chariots and men, and I will give him into your hands."

⁸Barak answered her, "If you will go, then I shall go, too; but if you do not go, I shall not go." ⁹Deborah answered, "I will go with you, but if you do it that way the honor of the victory will not be yours, for Sisera will be killed by a woman."

In this way Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰Barak summoned those from Zebulun and Naphtali and ten thousand men followed him. Deborah also went up with him. ¹²When Sisera came to know that Barak had climbed Mount Tabor, ¹³he gathered all his chariots – nine hundred chariots of war in all – and all his men, and they set out from Harosheth-ha-goiim to the river Kishon.

¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, "Rise, for this is the day in which Yahweh shall give Sisera into your hands. Today, Yahweh has set out before you."

So, Barak went down from Mount Tabor with his ten thousand men. ¹⁵Yahweh made him win over Sisera and his chariots and all his army. Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled, ¹⁶while Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-ha-goiim. All of Sisera's army perished. Nobody was spared.

4. Ex 15, 20

5. Gen 35, 8

o Yabin, king of Canaan, was, in reality, king of the plain of Northern Canaan, called Jezrael. It was here that a great victory was won at the time of the Judges.

l A woman, Deborah, is judge of Israel, i.e., she administers justice in the name of Yahweh. This is an exceptional case among a people where men carry all the social and religious responsi-

bilities. She sends for Barak from the north. He refuses to go alone, and seeks the cooperation of the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin among whom Deborah is installed. Nor does he have enough trust in Yahweh to act unless Deborah is present at his side.

Barak will be the "technician" of victory, and nothing more, since he refused to commit him-

¹¹ At that moment, Heber the Kenite was encamped by the oak of Zaananim, near Kedesh, after separating from the other Kenite descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law. ¹⁷ There Sisera took refuge, and came running to the tent of Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Peace reigned between the Kenite tribe and the Canaanites of Yabin, king of Hazor.

¹⁸ Yael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come this way, my lord, have no fear." Sisera entered and Yael hid him under a blanket. ¹⁹ He asked her for a little water to quench his thirst. The woman opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him again with the blanket. ²⁰ And he said to her, "Stand at the entrance; and if anyone comes and asks you, tell him there is no one with you." ²¹ Sisera was very tired, so he slept. Then the woman took a hammer and a tent peg, went quietly to him and drove the peg into his temple till it was fixed into the ground. ²² When Barak arrived, Yael came out to meet him and said, "Come in, and I will show you the man you are looking for." He entered and saw Sisera dead with a tent-peg through his temple.

²³ On that day Yahweh humbled Yabin before the Israelites. ²⁴ The Israelites did not rest until they destroyed all the Canaanites.

Song of Deborah

+ 5 ¹ On that day, Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinoam, sang this song:

² In Israel the warriors let their hair loose, in Israel they presented voluntary offerings for the war. Blessed be Yahweh!

³ Listen, O kings; pay attention, O princes. To Yahweh will I sing. To Yahweh, the God of Israel, will I offer praise.

⁴ When you went forth from Seir, O Yahweh, when you came from the camp of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens reeled and the clouds poured down rain. ⁵ The mountains rocked before Yahweh, before Yahweh — the God of Israel.

⁶ In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Yael, caravans ceased and travelers wandered through the byways. ⁷ There were no leaders in Israel until I, Deborah, awoke and arose as a mother of Israel.

⁸ They went after new gods, and war was upon them. There was hardly a shield or a spear for forty thousand men in Israel!

⁹ My heart is with the leaders of Israel, among the people who came willingly. Blessed be Yahweh!

¹⁰ Those who go riding on white asses, those who walk by the way, meditate! ¹¹ Hear the voice of those who divide the plunder near the watering place: they sing the favors God has done to Israel when the people of Yahweh march down to the gates.

¹² Wake up, Deborah, wake up! Wake up, wake up and begin to sing. Arise, Barak! And bring your songs, son of Abinoam.

¹³ Let the survivors of the people rule over their oppressors! May Yahweh be with me, stronger than the valiant! ¹⁴ Your roots, O Ephraim, are in Amalek: your brother Benjamin is behind you among your army. From Machir the commanders marched down: from Zebulun the leaders bearing the brass staff.

¹⁵ The leaders of Issachar are with Deborah, Issachar is with Barak; the people rushed forth following their footsteps into the plain.

There were long talks among the clans of Reuben. ¹⁶ Why did you choose to remain in your folds listening to the flute among this flock? The clans of Reuben could not decide.

¹⁷ Galaad remained on the other side of the Jordan, and Dan, why did you remain in your ships? Asher has remained on the sea coasts; he is quiet in his ports.

¹⁸ Zebulun, in turn, has scorned death: Naphtali went up to the battlefield, too. ¹⁹ The kings came to fight: the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach, near the waters of Megiddo, but they got no silver.

²⁰ From the heavens the stars fought, from their orbits they fought against Sisera. ²¹ The torrent Kishon dragged them away, the cold-

4. Dt 33.2; Ps 68.8; Ex 19.16; Js 6.2

self totally. The Bible held in higher regard Deborah, who has inspired the uprising.

+ The "Song of Deborah" is one of the more ancient pieces of Hebrew Literature. Com-

posed a little after the events, it is a hymn to Yahweh the conqueror. This poem takes note of the individualism of the tribes with only three of them joining together to confront the Canaanites.



ment, the torrent Kishon. March on without
 fear, my soul!

²² Hoofs of horses shake the ground: the
 clapping, galloping of his horses. ²³ Cursed be
 the land, said the angel of Yahweh, cursed be it,
 cursed be its inhabitants, for it came not to the
 help of Yahweh, not like the heroes.

²⁴ Blessed among women be Yael, wife of
 the Kenite, among the women who
 kill in tents, blessed may you be! ²⁵ He asked
 for water, she gave him milk; in the cup of
 silver she served him cream.

²⁶ She put her hand to the peg and with her
 right hand took the hammer of a workman. She
 struck Sisera, crushed his head, pierced and
 shattered his temple. ²⁷ He collapsed at her feet,
 there he fell, and lay still.

²⁸ Sisera's mother looks out of the win-
 dow, and she cries out behind the lattice: Why
 is his chariot late in coming? Why is his chariot
 delayed? ²⁹ The wisest of her women answers
 and says: ³⁰ Surely they are dividing the plun-
 der — one captive, two captives for each war-
 ring; colored cloths for Sisera as booty, colored
 cloths twice adorned with raised embroidery
 and a scarf.

³¹ So may all your enemies perish, O Yah-
 weh, but may your friends be like the brilliant
 sun!

And there was peace in the land for forty
 years.

6 ¹ The Israelites treated Yahweh badly,
 and Yahweh gave them into the
 hands of the Midianites for seven years, ² and
 the hand of the Midianites lay heavily on
 them.

Because of Midian, the Israelites made for
 themselves passages in the mountains, caves
 and shelters. ³ When the Israelites had sown,

Midian would come with Amalek and with the
 people of the East. They would come up
 against the Israelites, ⁴ encamp in the lands of
 the Israelites and destroy all the fields as far as
 the entrance to Gaza. They would leave no
 provisions of sheep or ox or ass, ⁵ for they
 would come up like locusts in number, bring-
 ing with them their livestock and their tents.
 They and their camels were many and they
 invaded and plundered the land. ⁶ In this way,
 Midian subdued Israel and brought upon it so
 great a misery that the Israelites cried to Yah-
 weh.

⁷ When the Israelites cried to Yahweh be-
 cause of Midian, ⁸ Yahweh sent them a proph-
 et who said to them, "This is the word of Yah-
 weh, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt
 and brought you out of the house of slavery. ⁹ I
 freed you from the hands of the Egyptians and
 from all your oppressors. I drove out before
 you the inhabitants of these lands, and gave
 their lands to you. ¹⁰ and I said to you, 'I am
 Yahweh, your God. Disregard the gods of the
 Amorites, in whose land you dwell.' But you
 did not listen to me."

Call of Gideon

¹¹ The Angel of Yahweh came and
 sat under the sacred tree at Ophrah,
 which belonged to Joash, of the fami-
 ly of Abiezer. Gideon, the son of Jo-
 ash, was threshing the wheat in the
 winepress to hide it from the Midia-
 nites.

¹² The Angel of Yahweh said
 to him, "Yahweh be with you, val-
 iant warrior." ¹³ Gideon answered,

4. Judt 13, 18; Lk 1, 42

31. Dn 12, 3; Mt 13, 43

11. Ex 3; Jer 1

■ Chapters 6-9 relate the story of Gideon
 and his son, Abimelech. The former is called
 Yahweh and acts as "Judge."
 In two successful campaigns he ensures the
 freedom of his people. After Gideon, Abime-
 leh rides on his father's fame in a bid to
 become king.

The Angel of Yahweh shows himself to Gid-
 eon in human form. This incident brings to mind
 1:28-36.

Where and when hope is diminished, Yah-
 weh raises up a saviour. Gideon believes in
 Yahweh but lacks confidence: God could do even-
 ing in the past, but Gideon does not see him
 acting in the present.

6:15: We find this attitude of Gideon in other
 parts of the Bible. The mission which God en-
 trusts to us always goes beyond our human
 strength (Ex 3:11; Jer 1:6).

Yahweh gives hope when he gives a task to be
 done; he does not promise to do things for us but
 he invites us to take action: *by your valour, you
 will save Israel from the Midianites.* Thus Yah-
 weh looks to the man he chooses. Then the
 young farmer Gideon, inspired, conscientized,
 and moved by hope, will discover that he has suf-
 ficient capability to save his people.

Verses 25-31 tie up closely the liberating mis-
 sion entrusted to Gideon with the public confes-
 sion of his faith in Yahweh, thereby making him
 worthy of God's commitment to him.

Gideon agrees to commit himself but wants to
 have the assurance that it is indeed Yahweh who
 speaks. He, therefore, asks for a sign which
 Yahweh grants him. Gideon does not resemble
 others who ask for signs to gain time because
 they doubt or do not want to be convinced (see
 Mk. 8:11 and Lk. 1:18).

"Please, my lord, if Yahweh is with us, why is all this happening to us? Where are the wonders which our fathers recounted to us? Did they not say that Yahweh led them up from Egypt? Why has he abandoned us now and given us into the hands of the Midianites?"

¹⁴ Yahweh then turned to him and said, "Go and with your courage, save Israel from the Midianites. It is I who send you." ¹⁵ Gideon answered: "Pardon me, Lord, but how can I save Israel? My family is the lowliest in my tribe and I am the least in the family of my father."

¹⁶ Yahweh said to him, "I will be with you and you shall defeat the people of Midian with one single stroke." ¹⁷ Gideon said to him, "Please give me a sign that it is indeed you who speak." ¹⁸ Do not leave until I return with an offering and present it to you." Yahweh responded, "I am going to wait for you here."

¹⁹ Gideon went and prepared a young goat, took a measure of flour and baked unleavened bread. He put the broth in a pot and the meat in a basket, and went to present them to the Angel under the tree. ²⁰ Then the Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the bread; put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." Gideon did so. ²¹ At that moment, the Angel of Yahweh extended the staff he was holding and touched the meat and the bread. Suddenly, fire blazed from the rock. The fire consumed the meat and the bread, and the Angel of Yahweh disappeared.

²² Gideon realized that he was the Angel of Yahweh and said, "Alas, O Lord Yahweh! I have seen the Angel of Yahweh face to face." ²³ But Yahweh said to him, "Peace be with you.

Do not fear for you shall not die."

²⁴ Gideon built an altar to Yahweh in that place and called it Yahweh-Peace. To this day, it is still in Ophrah of Abiezer.

²⁵ That same night Yahweh said to Gideon, "Take with you ten of your father's servants and a seven-year-old bull. Destroy your father's altar to Baal and cut the sacred pillar beside it. ²⁶ Then build an altar to Yahweh on this knoll and sacrifice the bull to me, burning it with the wood from the sacred pillar."

²⁷ So, Gideon, with the help of his ten servants, did what Yahweh had commanded. But because he feared his family and the people of the town, he did it by night.

²⁸ On the following day, the townspeople saw the altar of Baal broken into pieces and the sacred pillar cut off. They also saw that a bull had been sacrificed on the new altar. ²⁹ So they asked one another and as they investigated, found out that it was Gideon who did it, ³⁰ and they went to Joash and said, "Hand your son over to us for he must die; he destroyed the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred pillar." ³¹ But Joash said to the angry crowd, "Are you going to defend Baal and save him? If he is god, let him defend himself when someone destroys his altar."

³² On that day they gave Gideon the name Jerubbaal which means "Let Baal defend himself against Gideon for Gideon destroyed his altar."

³³ All Midian, Amalek and the people of the East joined forces, crossed the Jordan and invaded the plains of Jezreel. ³⁴ Then the spirit of Yahweh clothed Gideon with strength; he blew the trumpet and summoned the men of Abiezer. ³⁵ He

sent messengers throughout the whole territory of Manasseh and they joined him. The people of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali also went out to meet them.

³⁶ Gideon said to God, "If indeed you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, grant me this favor. ³⁷ I am going to spread a fleece of wool on the threshing ground. If the dew falls only on the fleece while all the ground remains dry, then I shall know that you are to save Israel by my hand, as you have promised."

³⁸ So it was: Gideon rose at day-break, squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew, filling a cup with water.

⁹ Gideon again spoke to God and said to him, "Don't get angry with me if I dare to speak to you again. Allow me to make another test with the fleece: let it be dry only on the fleece and let dew come on all the ground." ⁴⁰ That night, Yahweh did so. The fleece remained dry and dew covered all the ground.

7 ¹ Jerubaal, that is Gideon, rose early with all the people who were with him and they encamped beside the spring of Harod. The Midianite camp was farther north and extended from the hill of Moreb to the blains.

² Then Yahweh said to Gideon, "There are too many people with you. If I give the Midianites into their hands, the Israelites would think that they won over the Midianites by their own strength. ³ So summon your men and say to them that whoever is afraid may go home." So twenty-two thousand men returned and only ten thousand remained.

◆ ⁴ Yahweh said to Gideon, "There

are still too many people. Take them down to the water and I myself will test them for you. If I say: This one shall go with you, he will go. And if I say: Not this one, he shall not go." ⁵ So Gideon brought them down to the water and Yahweh told him, "Those who lap the water like a dog, you shall place on one side. And those who kneel down to drink, you shall place at the other side."

⁶ Three hundred men lapped the water, and the rest knelt down to drink. ⁷ Then Yahweh said to Gideon, "I will help these three hundred men who lapped the water and give the Midianites into your hands. Let the rest return to their homes." ⁸ The three hundred men took the pitchers and the horns of the others; these Gideon discharged. Finally, Gideon and his three hundred men faced the Midianites who were encamped below the valley.

⁹ That night Yahweh said to him, "Rise and go down to the camp, because I have given it into your hands." ¹⁰ But if you are afraid to go down alone, set out for the camp with your servant Purah, "and listen to what they say there. You shall be strengthened by it and then you shall attack the camp." He then went down with his servant Purah to the outposts of the guards of the camp.

¹² Midian, Amalek, and all the people of the East were in the valley, thick as locusts, and their camels were countless as the sand on the seashore. ¹³ Gideon approached just as a man was recounting his dream to his comrade. Gideon heard him say, "I had a dream: a big loaf of barley bread rolled down into the camp of Midian, until it came to a tent, bumped against it and overturned the tent." ¹⁴ His comrade answered him, "This cannot mean anything other than the sword of Gideon, son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given Midian and the whole camp into his hands." ¹⁵ When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed, returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into your hands."

39. Gen 18, 30

3. Dt 20, 8; 1 Ma 3, 56

◆ *There are too many people with you.* These words of Yahweh help us believe that a

small minority of militant people can bring about revolutionary change.

¹⁶ Gideon divided the three hundred men in three groups. Then he handed the trumpets to all and the empty pitchers with lighted torches inside. ¹⁷ He said to them, "Look at me, and do what I do. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. ¹⁸ When I and those who are with me blow the trumpets then blow yours all around the camp and shout, "For Yahweh and for Gideon!"

¹⁹ With the hundred men with him, Gideon came to the Midianite camp just as the guards were changing shifts at the beginning of the midnight watch. ²⁰ Then the Israelites smashed the jars, took the torches in one hand, and blew the trumpets they were holding in the other hand. After blowing the trumpets, the three groups shouted, "For Yahweh and for Gideon!" ²¹ Everyone stood in his place around the camp while the Midianites ran, shouting as they fled. ²² As the three hundred Israelites went on blowing the trumpets, Yahweh made the Midianites in the camp kill one another. Those who managed to escape went as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, and as far as the border of Abel-meholah opposite Tabbath.

²³ Then the Israelites from the tribe of Naphtali, Asher and the whole of Manasseh came to help Gideon, and they pursued Midian. ²⁴ Gideon also sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim to say, "Come down to fight against Midian and block the passages as far as Beth-barah and along the Jordan." So, all the men of Ephraim came out and occupied the shallow waters as far as Beth-barah and along the Jordan. ²⁵ They took the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb as prisoners. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They

pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon at the other side of the Jordan.

Gideon's second campaign

8 ¹ The people of Ephraim said to Gideon, "Why didn't you call us when you went to fight against Midian?" They argued with him violently. ² He said to them, "What have I done in comparison with what you have done? Are not the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? ³ Yahweh has given the leaders of Midian - Oreb and Zeeb - into your hands. What have I been able to do in comparison with what you have done?" After hearing this, their anger lessened.

⁴ Gideon and his three hundred men came to the Jordan and crossed it. They were exhausted and hungry. ⁵ So he said to the people of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the army that follows me, for they are exhausted and hungry, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."

⁶ But the elders of Succoth answered, "Have you by chance already restrained the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna? Why should we give bread to your army?" ⁷ Gideon answered them, "Well, when Yahweh has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hands, I will skin your flesh with the thorns and thistles of the desert."

⁸ From there he went up to Penuel and made the same request. But they answered him: as those of Succoth had. ⁹ So Gideon said, "When I return victorious, I will tear down this tower."

¹⁰ Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army of about fifteen thousand men; all that were left of the people of the East; a hundred and twenty thousand warriors had died! ¹¹ Gideon went up by the road of the nomads, east of Nobah and Yogbehah, and fell upon Zebah and Zalmunna and their army. ¹² Zebah and Zalmunna fled. He pursued them; took the two as prisoners and scattered all their army.

¹³ After the battle, Gideon, the son of Joash, returned through the slope of Heres. ¹⁴ He caught a young man of the people of Succoth and questioned him. The young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven leaders and elders of Succoth. ¹⁵ Gideon went to the people of Succoth and said to them: "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna about whom you mocked me by saying: Have you by chance already restrained the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna for us to give bread to your hungry troops?"

¹⁶ So he took the elders of the town and punished the people of Succoth with thorns and thistles of the desert.

¹⁷ He tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the inhabitants of the town. ¹⁸ Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What did the men whom you killed at Tabor look like?" They answered, "They looked like you, they looked like sons of kings." ¹⁹ Gideon answered, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As Yahweh lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you."

²⁰ He said to Yether, his eldest son, "Courage, kill them!" But the youth did not draw his sword; he did not dare do it for he was still very young. ²¹ So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise and kill us yourself, for as the man is, so is his courage." Gideon arose and killed them, and took the ornaments off their camels' necks.

Gideon's error

◆ ²² The Israelites said to Gideon, "Since you have saved us from the Midianites, you shall be our king, and after you, your son and the descendants of your son."

²³ But Gideon answered, "I will not rule over Israel, nor my son, for Yahweh is our king!" ²⁴ Gideon added, "I will ask something from you. Let each of you give me an earring from your booty." Gideon said this for these Midianites wore gold earrings like all the Ishmaelites.

²⁵ They answered him, "That we will gladly do." Then Gideon spread out his cloak and every Israelite threw in an earring from his booty. ²⁶ The gold earrings reached a thousand

and seven hundred pieces of gold; not counting the brooches, the rings, the expensive garments used by the kings of Midian, and the collars of the camels. ²⁷ With this money, Gideon made an idol and put it in his city of Ophrah. People from all Israel began to go to that place, turning away from Yahweh. That was the trap into which Gideon and his family fell.

²⁸ In spite of this, the Midianites were humbled in such a way that peace reigned in Israel for forty years during Gideon's lifetime. ²⁹ Gideon returned to Ophrah and remained in his house. ³⁰ He had seventy sons of his blood, for he had many wives. ³¹ A woman from the city of Shechem also bore him a son whom he named Abimelech.

³² Gideon the son of Joash died at a happy old age, and he was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of Abiezer.

³³ After the death of Gideon, the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals and took Baal-Berith as god. ³⁴ The Israelites no longer remembered Yahweh, their God, who had freed them from the hands of all the enemies who surrounded them. ³⁵ Neither were they grateful to the family of Jerubbaal-Gideon for all the good things he had done to Israel.

Abimelech

9 ¹ Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal, marched to Shechem where the brothers of his mother were, and he said to them and to the whole paternal family of his mother, "Please ask this to all the lords of Shechem: Which is better for you, that you be governed by all the

◆ The Israelites had to form a nation, and this stage would bring great progress after the anarchy created by disunited and disorganized tribes. For the first time in the Bible, the desire to have a king is hinted in 8:22-31.

Perhaps those who edited the present book in the last century of the kingdom of Jerusalem had been so created by their rulers that they dreamt of that time in the past when there had been neither kings nor administrators. They thought that Israel, being the people of God, had no need of permanent chiefs like the rest of the nations, that perhaps it would have been better had they lived day by day, trusting in Yahweh who would raise up a liberator whenever necessary.

That is why the Book of Judges remarks on Gideon's refusal to be their king: *Yahweh has to be your King*. Unfortunately, Gideon asked for gold instead of authority, and, by this, the hero destroyed everything he had done for his people.

All these saviours: Gideon, Barak, Jephthah

and Samson are very disappointing – like many of those who now speak of liberating oppressed people. What lesson shall we draw from these bitter experiences which Scripture recalls? That political action is useless and that we should instead focus our efforts on prayer and catechetical work? Shall we leave to others the struggle for justice? But justice is inscribed in every page of the Bible.

Let us consider that most of these liberators did not enjoy a real family life nor were they properly educated by their parents. It was in their early years that they needed to be corrected, by a father who could give them example, and by a mother firm enough not to consent to their caprices. For no one becomes a mature person, firm and faithful to his duty unless he has been liberated from childhood by having to obey the just demands of others. That is why after those years of war and conquest, other times came for the Israelites when God educated the believers and their families through the teaching of wise men and the practice of the Law.

23. Ex 32, 2 24. 1 S 8, 7 5. 1 K 10, 1; 11, 1

seventy sons of Jerubaal, or by only one man? Remember that I am of the same blood as you are."

³ The brothers of his mother sent this message to all the lords of Shechem. The lords of Shechem took sides with Abimelech, saying "He is our brother." ⁴ So they gave him seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-berith which Abimelech used to hire wicked mercenaries to set out with him. ⁵ Abimelech went with them to the house of his father in Ophrah, and on one stone killed all his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubaal. Only Jotham, the youngest son of Jerubaal, was able to escape by hiding himself. ⁶ Then all the lords of Shechem and the whole council assembled together by the oak at the pillar in Shechem, and proclaimed Abimelech king.

⁷ This was told to Jotham who was at the top of Mount Gerizim. There he cried out to them, "Listen to me, lords of Shechem, that God may listen to you!"

⁸ "The trees once set out to find and anoint a king. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.'"

⁹ The olive tree answered, 'Am I going to renounce the oil by which - thanks to me - gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?'

¹⁰ The trees said to the fig tree: 'Come and reign over us.' ¹¹ The fig tree answered them, 'Am I going to renounce my sweetness and my delicious fruit, to hold sway over the trees?'

¹² The trees said to the vine: 'Come and reign over us.' ¹³ The vine answered, 'Am I going to renounce my juice which cheers gods and men to hold sway over the trees?'

¹⁴ Then the trees said to the bramble bush: 'Come, reign over us.' ¹⁵ The bramble bush answered the trees, 'If you come in sincerity to anoint me as your king, then come near and take shelter in my shade; but if not, let fire break out of the bramble bush to devour even the cedars of Lebanon.'

¹⁶ And now, tell me, have you acted rightly and truthfully in choosing Abimelech king? Have you treated Jerubaal and his family well and given him back what he deserves according to his merits?

¹⁷ For my father fought for you, risking his life to free you from the hands of Midian. ¹⁸ But now, you have risen against the family of my father. You have killed all his seventy sons with one stone, and have declared Abimelech,

the son of his slave, as king over the lords of Shechem because he is your brother. ¹⁹ If you have acted rightly and truthfully toward Jerubaal and his family today, then may Abimelech rejoice in you and you in him. ²⁰ But if not, let fire break forth from Abimelech to devour the lords of Shechem and their council; and let fire break forth from their council to devour Abimelech."

²¹ Jotham fled to the safety of Beer, where he lived far from his brother Abimelech.

²² Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years. ²³ But Yahweh sent a spirit of discord between Abimelech and the lords of Shechem; and the lords of Shechem betrayed Abimelech. ²⁴ Yahweh did this so that the seventy sons of Jerubaal might be avenged. Their blood had to fall back upon their brother Abimelech who murdered them, and the lords of Shechem who helped him murder his brothers.

²⁵ To do him harm, the lords of Shechem prepared ambushes against Abimelech on the mountaintops, and intimidated everyone who passed by the way. Abimelech was informed of this.

²⁶ Then Gaal, the son of Ebed, came with his brothers, and he won the confidence of the lords of Shechem. ²⁷ One day they went to the vineyards and gathered grapes and trod on them. Then they feasted in the temple of their god. While eating and drinking, they cursed Abimelech. ²⁸ Then Gaal, the son of Ebed, exclaimed, "Who is Abimelech for the Shechemites that we should serve him? He is only the son of Jerubaal, and Zebul is but his town captain. Let us serve the people of Hamor, the father of Shechem. Why should we serve Abimelech?"

²⁹ If only this people were in my hands, then I would remove Abimelech and say to him: Reinforce your army, come out and fight!"

³⁰ When Zebul, the city governor, was informed of the plan of Gaal, the son of Ebed, he was very angry. ³¹ He sent messengers to Abimelech in secret to say to him, "See, Gaal, the son of Ebed, has come with his brothers to Shechem and he is stirring up the city against you. ³² Therefore, arise, you and the men you have with you, and lay an ambush in the field. ³³ By early morning at sunrise, go and rush upon the city. When Gaal comes out against you with his men, you may do to him whatever you wish."

+ In 9:8-15, an ancient fable was inserted and placed in the mouth of Jotham whereby the authority of the kings was vehemently criticized:

it is the most useless persons, it claims, who are willing to reign. The story of Abimelech confirms this viewpoint.

³⁴ Abimelech and all his troops rose by night, and they laid an ambush against Shechem in four groups. ³⁵ When Gaal, the son of Ebed, went out and stood at the entrance of the city, Abimelech and his troops rose from their hiding place.

³⁶ Gaal saw the troops and said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the mountain tops." But Zebul answered him, "It is the shadow of the mountain that you see. You mistake it for men." ³⁷ Gaal said again, "Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another group is coming from the Diviners' Oak." ³⁸ Zebul then said, "Did you not say: Who is Abimelech that we should serve him? Are not these men those whom you despised? Go now and fight them."

³⁹ Gaal went out and led the people of Shechem in fighting Abimelech. ⁴⁰ Abimelech pursued Gaal who fled and many fell dead before reaching the gates. ⁴¹ Abimelech returned to Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, and did not let them live in Shechem.

Shechem destroyed

⁴² The following day, the people went out into the fields. Abimelech was informed about this, ⁴³ so he called his troops, divided them into three groups and laid an ambush in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he rose against them and killed them. ⁴⁴ Abimelech and the group with him attacked and took possession of the entrance to the city gates; other groups rushed upon those who were in the fields. ⁴⁵ Throughout that day, Abimelech attacked the city. He took it and killed all its inhabitants. Then he destroyed the city and sprinkled salt over it.

⁴⁶ When the inhabitants of the Tower of Shechem heard this, they went to the underground room of the temple of El-Berith. ⁴⁷ Abimelech was told that all the inhabitants of the Tower of Shechem were together, ⁴⁸ so he went up to Mount Zalmon with all his troops. Taking an ax, he cut down a branch of a tree, lifted it up and bore it on his shoulders. He then said to the troops with him, "You have seen what I have done, so do the same." ⁴⁹ So all his men cut the branches, then followed Abimelech. They piled the branches on top of

the underground room and set them on fire over the people inside. So all the inhabitants of the Tower of Shechem – about a thousand men and women – died.

Death of Abimelech

⁵⁰ Abimelech went against Thebez, besieged it and took it. ⁵¹ But inside the city was a strong tower in which all the men and women, all the inhabitants of the city sought refuge. They locked it from within and went up to the roof of the tower. ⁵² Abimelech came to the tower to attack them; he approached the door, intending to set it on fire. ⁵³ But a woman threw a millstone upon his head and shattered his skull. ⁵⁴ He immediately called out to his young armour-bearer and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me: 'A woman killed him'." So his armour-bearer thrust him through, and he died. ⁵⁵ When the people of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, everyone returned to his home.

⁵⁶ In this way God repaid to Abimelech the evil he had done to his father when he murdered his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷ He also made the people of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. So the curse of Jotham, son of Jerubaal, was fulfilled.

Tola, Jair and Jephthah

10 ¹ After Abimelech, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, appeared to save Israel. He was from the tribe of Issachar and lived at Shamir, in the mountains of Ephraim. ² He was judge of Israel for twenty-three years and when he died, he was buried in Shamir.

³ After him rose Jair of Gilead who was judge of Israel for twenty-two years. ⁴ He had thirty sons who rode on thirty asses, and had thirty cities which are still called the villages of Jair to this day, in the land of Gilead. ⁵ When Jair died, he was buried in Kamon.

54. 2 S 11, 21; 1 S 31, 4

■ Each tribe had its own problems. There rose up saviours in various places who, after a victory, were honoured as "Judges" for the rest of their lives: Gideon from Manasseh; Tola from Issachar; Jair from the country of Gilead.

One notices Yahweh's tireless and everforgiv-

ing love. As sins increase Yahweh says "I will not save you again"; and again God could no longer bear the sufferings of Israel. If we complain about God's inaction with regard to oppression and social injustice, it is because we are not able to see the sinfulness and responsibility of the oppressed people.

⁶ The Israelites again treated Yahweh badly; they served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram and Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. They abandoned Yahweh and no longer served him.⁷ The anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, so he gave them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites.

⁸ For eighteen years, all the Israelites living on the other side of the Jordan in the Amorite land of Gilead were disturbed and oppressed.⁹ The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to attack Judah, Benjamin and the people of Ephraim. Israel was in great distress.

¹⁰ In those years the Israelites called out to Yahweh saying, "We have sinned against you, for we have abandoned Yahweh, our God, to serve the Baals."¹¹ Yahweh said to the Israelites, "When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines,¹² the Sidonians, Amalek and Midian oppressed you, and you cried out to me, did I not save you from their hands?"¹³ But in spite of this, you have abandoned me and served other gods. So I will not save you again.¹⁴ Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen: see if they will save you in the time of your distress."

¹⁵ The Israelites answered Yahweh, "We have sinned. Do to us whatever you wish, but save us

today."¹⁶ Then they put away the strange gods and served Yahweh. And he could no longer endure the suffering of Israel.

¹⁷ The Ammonites assembled and went to encamp in Gilead. The Israelites also assembled and they encamped at Mizpah.¹⁸ There the people and the leaders of Gilead asked one another, "Who will lead us all to fight against the Ammonites? Whoever he is, we shall make him head of all the inhabitants of Gilead."

♦11 ¹ Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior. His mother was a prostitute, and his father was Gilead.² But Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they grew up, they drove Jephthah out saying, "You shall not share or inherit anything in the household of our father, for you are the son of another woman."³ Jephthah fled from his brothers and went to the region of Tob. There he joined a band of mercenaries who made their raids with him.⁴ The time came when the Ammonites declared war on Israel.⁵ So the elders of Gilead went to Jephthah in the land of Tob⁶ and said to him, "Come and lead our men in fighting the Ammonites."

⁷ Jephthah answered the elders of Gilead, "Didn't you drive me out of my father's house because you hated me? Why do you come to me now in your distress?"⁸ The elders answered him, "We come asking you to join us

18. 1 S 15, 17

2. Heb 11, 32

♦ Jephthah is one of the more controversial saviours found in the Bible. He is filled with rancour against his brothers who despise him. His war against the tribe of Ephraim does not bring glory to the people of Israel. Finally, his vow to sacrifice a member of his family is in line with the custom of the Canaanites who sacrificed their children very easily. Still we read: *the Spirit of Yahweh was on Jephthah*.

By the Spirit people of those times meant the superhuman strength from Yahweh which drives a man to accomplish extraordinary feats. The Spirit of Yahweh does not act merely in re-

ligious ceremonies, or through religious people, prophets or priests. It acts "renewing the face of the earth" (Ps. 104) through people who, very often, are neither believers nor blameless, but who have enough intelligence and courage to undertake the liberation needed in their times. Sometimes, the liberators of modern times are undeservingly looked upon as saints in spite of the fact that they do not always live by faith, or recognize Christ. It would be more accurate to compare them with the "judges" who, in spite of their limitations, served God's plans "moved by the Spirit of Yahweh."

in fighting the Ammonites; we want you to be head of the whole of Gilead." ⁹ Jephthah answered them, "If you ask me to return to fight the Ammonites and Yahweh grants me victory, I will be your head." ¹⁰ And they said to him, "May Yahweh listen to us! Woe to us if we do not carry out what we have just said!"

¹¹ So Jephthah returned with the elders of Gilead and the people made him their head and general, and Jephthah repeated all his conditions before Yahweh in Mizpah.

¹² Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites to say to him, "What happened between us that you come and attack me in my own country?" ¹³ The king answered the messengers, "When Israel went up out of Egypt, they seized my own country from the Arnon to the Yabbok and to the Jordan. So give it back willingly."

¹⁴ Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, ¹⁵ saying "This is what Jephthah says: Israel has not seized the land of the Ammonites. ¹⁶ When they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the desert to the Sea of Reeds and came to Kadesh. ¹⁷ Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom and said to him, 'Let us pass through your country.' But the king of Edom did not listen. They also sent to the king of Moab, and he, too, refused. So Israel remained at Kadesh. ¹⁸ Then journeying through the desert, they went around the country of Edom and Moab, and came to the east of the land of Moab. They encamped on the other side of the Arnon, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. ¹⁹ Israel then sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and said to him, 'Let us pass through your country and go to our place.' ²⁰ But Sihon did not trust Israel enough to let them pass through; he gathered all his men and encamped at Jahaz and attacked Israel. ²¹ Yahweh the God of Israel gave Sihon and all his people into the hands of Israel. Israel defeated them and conquered all the land of the Amorites who lived there. ²² So they conquered the whole territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Yabbok, and from the desert to the Jordan.

²³ Since Yahweh the God of Israel has taken this land from the Amorites for his

people, Israel, can you now take it away from us? ²⁴ Do you not hold all that your god Chemosh has given you? In the same way, we hold all that Yahweh, our God, has given us. ²⁵ Will you do better than Balak, son of Zippor, the king of Moab? Was he able to attack Israel? ²⁶ For three hundred years, Israel has lived in Heshbon and the cities that depend on it. They have also lived in Aroer and in its villages and in all the cities on both sides of the Jordan. Why didn't you recover these within that time? ²⁷ I have not offended you, but you are treating me badly by attacking me. Let Yahweh, the Judge, decide today between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon."

²⁸ But the king of the Ammonites did not pay attention to Jephthah's message.

Jephthah's daughter

²⁹ The Spirit of Yahweh came upon Jephthah. He went through Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and then entered the territory of the Ammonites.

³⁰ Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh: "If you make me victorious, ³¹ I shall sacrifice to you whoever first comes out of my house to meet me when I return from battle. He shall be for Yahweh and I shall offer him up through the fire."

³² Jephthah crossed the territory of the Ammonites to fight against them, and Yahweh gave him victory. ³³ He pursued them from the city of Aroer to the entrance of Minnith and Abel Keramim, seizing twenty towns. So he defeated the Ammonites.

³⁴ When Jephthah returned home to Mizpah, his daughter came out to meet him. She was so happy to see her father that she danced to the sound of her tambourine. She was an only child; besides her he had no other daughter or son.

³⁵ When Jephthah saw her, he tore his clothes and cried out, "My daughter, you have shattered my life; you have brought me misfortune. For I

17. Dt 2.17-37 29. 3.10; 6.34; 1 S 11.6 31. 2 K 3.27; Gen 22; Mt 6.7 36. Num 30.3; Eccl 5.3

o The Bible relates Jephthah's vow without commentary. We see the lamentable error of a hero.



have made a foolish vow to Yahweh, and now I cannot take it back." ³⁶ She answered him, "Father, even if you have made such a foolish vow, you have to do to me just as you promised, for Yahweh has made you victorious. ³⁷ I only beg of you to give me two months to live with my companions in the mountains. There I shall lament because I will never marry." ³⁸ Jephthah said to her, "Go then." And he sent her away for two months. She and her companions went to the mountains and wept because she would never marry.

³⁹ At the end of two months, she returned to her father and he fulfilled the vow he had made. The young girl had never known a man. From this comes the Israelite custom ⁴⁰ that the daughters of Israel go out for four days annually to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

12 ¹ The men of Ephraim gathered, crossed the Jordan northward and said to Jephthah, "Why did you go and attack the Ammonites without asking us to march with you? For this we shall burn you inside your house." ² Jephthah answered them, "My people and I had a great struggle with the Ammonites. I asked help from you but you did not save me from their hands. ³ When I saw that no one had come to help me, I risked my own life and marched against the Ammonites, and Yahweh gave them into my hands. Why, then, have you come up today to fight me?"

⁴ Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and attacked Ephraim. The Gileadites defeated the Ephraimites who told them, "You, Gileadites, are fugitives who crossed from Ephraim and Manasseh." ⁵ Gilead seized the shallow waters of the Jordan and blocked the way. Whenever a fugitive from Ephraim said, "Let me pass," the men of Gilead would

ask him, "Are you an Ephraimite? If he responded, "No," ⁶ they would add, "Then say Shibboleth."

But then he would say, "Sibboleth" for an Ephraimite could not pronounce it correctly. So they would seize him and cut his throat by the shallow waters of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand men from Ephraim perished at that time.

⁷ Jephthah was judge in Israel for six years. Then he died and was buried in his city, Mizpah of Gilead. ⁸ After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem was judge in Israel. ⁹ He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. His thirty daughters were given in marriage outside his clan, but for his sons, he brought in thirty women. He was judge in Israel for seven years. ¹⁰ When Ibzan died, he was buried in Bethlehem.

¹¹ After him, Elon the Zebulunite became judge in Israel. He governed Israel for ten years. ¹² Then he died and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

¹³ After him, Abdon, the son of Hillel of Pirathon, was judge in Israel. ¹⁴ He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy asses. He was judge in Israel for eight years. ¹⁵ Then he died and was buried at Pirathon, in the mountains of Ephraim, in the mountain of the Amorites.

Samson's birth foretold

+ 13 ¹ The Israelites again treated Yahweh badly so he gave them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

² There was a man of Zorah of the tribe of Dan, called Manoah. His wife could not bear children. ³ The Angel of Yahweh appeared to this woman and said to her, "You have not borne children and have not given birth, but see, you are to conceive and give birth to a son. ⁴ Because of this, take care not to take wine or any alcoholic drink, or eat unclean foods from now

+ Here follow four episodes of the "stories" of Samson. Samson is no more than a man from the countryside who has extraordinary strength and fights on his own account against the Philistines. Legend attributes to him numerous feats.

Samson is said to have been miraculously

born of a barren couple. This was in accordance with God's ways, as seen in the case of Abraham's son (Gen 18), and in the case of Samuel (1 Sam 1), and still later John the Baptist (Lk 1:5).

The child must be a *Nazirite*, i.e., consecrated to God, according to a very ancient rite in the Bible (Num 6:1). This consecration to God is the source of his strength.

2. Gen 18, 11; 1 S 12; 1 K 1, 7 3. 1 K 1, 30 4. Num 6, 4; 1 K 1, 15



on.⁵ for you shall bear a son who shall be a Nazirite of Yahweh from the womb of his mother. Never shall his hair be cut for he is consecrated to Yahweh. He shall begin the liberation of the Israelites from the Philistine oppression."

"The woman went to her husband and told him. "A messenger of God who bore the majesty of an angel spoke to me. I did not ask him where he came from nor did he tell me his name.

"But he said to me: 'You are to conceive and give birth to a son. Henceforth, you shall not drink wine or fermented drinks, nor eat anything unclean, for your son shall be a Nazirite of God from the womb of his mother until the day of his death.'"

"Manoah called upon Yahweh and said, "I pray you, Lord, that the man of God whom you have sent may come again to us and teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."

"Yahweh listened to Manoah and the Angel of Yahweh came to the woman as she was seated in the fields. Again Manoah, her husband, was not with her when the Angel came.

"The woman immediately ran to inform her husband and told him, "Look, the man who came to me the other day is here again." "Manoah rose and followed his wife. He came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who has spoken to this woman?"

He answered, "I am." "Manoah said to him, "When your word is fulfilled, what rule and direction shall the boy follow?"

"The Angel of Yahweh answered Manoah, "He must abstain from all I have indicated to this woman. "He shall not taste anything that comes from the grape, nor drink wine or fermented drinks, nor eat anything unclean, and she shall observe everything I have commanded her.

"Manoah then said to the Angel of Yahweh, "Permit us to detain you and prepare a young goat for you. (Manoah did not know that the man was the Angel of Yahweh.) "But he said to Manoah, "Even if I did stay, I would not taste your food. But if you want to offer a burnt offering, offer it to Yahweh." "So Manoah said to the Angel of Yahweh, "What is your name, that we may honor you when your word comes true." "The Angel of Yahweh answered him, "Why do you ask my name? It

is Wonderful." "Manoah then took the young goat and the cereal offering, and offered it upon the rock as a holocaust to Yahweh who does wonderful things.

"And something happened as Manoah and his wife looked on. A fire broke forth from the altar toward heaven, and the Angel of Yahweh ascended in the flame.

When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell face downwards on the ground. "When the Angel of Yahweh vanished from the sight of Manoah and his wife, Manoah knew then that he was the Angel of Yahweh. "And he said to his wife, "We shall surely die for we have seen God." "She answered him, "If Yahweh had wanted to kill us, he would not have accepted the holocaust or the offering from our hand; he would not have made all these things happen or said what we have just heard."

"The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew and Yahweh blessed him. "Then the Spirit of Yahweh began to move him when he was in Mahane Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Stories of Samson

14¹ Samson went down to Timnah and saw a Philistine woman. ² He came up and said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman at Timnah; get her for me that she may be my wife." ³ His father and mother said to him, "Is there no one among the daughters of your brothers and among all your people that you should go and take a wife from among those uncircumcised Philistines?"

Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for I like her." ⁴ They did not know that this came from Yahweh who was seeking a quarrel with the Philistines; for at that time, the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

"Samson then went down to Timnah, and when he reached the vineyards at Timnah, a young lion came up roaring toward him. ⁶ The Spirit of Yahweh then seized Samson. With bare hands he tore the lion to pieces as he would have done with a young goat. ⁷ But he told neither his father or mother what he had done. ⁸ Then he went down and talked to the woman who pleased him.

After some time, he returned to take her. He went out of his way to look at the carcass of the lion. He found a swarm of bees and honey in the lion's carcass. ⁹ Samson scraped the honey into his hands and ate it as he walked.



When he reached his parents, he gave them honey and they ate it, too. But he did not tell them he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.¹⁰ Then, Samson's father went down to the woman and Samson offered a banquet as was the custom among the young.¹¹ When he appeared, the Philistines assigned thirty of their men to go with him as his wedding companions.

¹² Samson said to them, "I am going to give you a riddle. If you can give me the right solution within seven days of the feast, I shall give you thirty tunics and thirty linen garments.¹³ But if you can't tell me the solution, you will give me thirty tunics and thirty linen garments." They answered, "Tell your riddle; we are listening."

¹⁴ He said to them, "From he who eats came what is eaten, and from the strong, sweetness came."¹⁵ After three days, they had not guessed the riddle. So on the fourth day, they said to Samson's wife, "Convince your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's family. Did you invite us to rob us?"

¹⁶ Samson's wife began to weep and she threw herself upon her husband saying, "You do not like me or love me anymore. You have given a riddle to the young men of my people, but you have not explained it to me." He said to her, "I have not explained it even to my parents, why should I explain it to you?"¹⁷ She cried before him for seven days while the feast lasted. On the seventh day, he explained it to her for he was bored with her crying. She then related it to her countrymen.

¹⁸ On the seventh day, before the married couple were to enter the wedding chamber, the people of the city said to Samson, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" He said to them, "If you had not plowed with my young cow, you would not have guessed my riddle."

¹⁹ Then the Spirit of Yahweh seized him. He went down to Ashkelon, killed thirty men, took their plunder and gave the linen garments to those who had guessed the riddle. Then, in great anger, he came up to his father's house.

²⁰ So Samson's wife was given to one of his wedding companions.

15 After some time, during wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, bringing a young goat with him, and he said, "I want to be with my wife in our room." But her father would not let him in,² saying "I thought that you did not like her anymore, so I gave her to your companion. Why not take her younger sister for a wife?"³ Samson replied, "This time

I owe nothing to the Philistines even if I do them harm."

⁴ Samson went out and caught three hundred foxes, took some torches and tied the animals tail to tail. He then placed a torch in between every two tails,⁵ set fire to the torches and turned the foxes loose in the grain fields of the Philistines. In this way, he burned the sheaves and the standing grain together with the vineyards and olive groves.

⁶ The Philistines asked, "Who did this?" And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah, because this man took his wife and gave her to his companion." So they went up and burned her and her family.⁷ Samson said to them, "Since you did this, I will not rest until I have had my revenge on you."⁸ So he caused a great havoc upon them. Then he went down to live in a cave in the rock of Etam.

⁹ The Philistines went up to the mountains of Judah and raided Lehi.¹⁰ The men of Judah asked them, "Why have you come to attack us?" They answered, "We have come to capture Samson, and do to him what he did to us."

¹¹ Three thousand men of Judah went down to the cave at the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines lord it over us? Now what have you done to us?" He answered, "What they did to me, I have done to them."¹² They said to him, "We have come down to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines." Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me."

¹³ They answered, "No, we only want to tie you up and hand you over to them, but we will not kill you." They bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rocks.

¹⁴ When they arrived in Lehi, the Philistines ran to him with shouts of victory. But the Spirit of Yahweh came upon Samson. The ropes that bound him became like linen flax burned in the fire and the knots were loosened from his arms.¹⁵ He found a fresh jawbone of an ass, grabbed it and with it killed a thousand men."

¹⁶ Samson then said, "With the jawbone of an ass, I dealt them a mighty blow; with the jawbone of an ass, I beat a thousand men."

¹⁷ When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone and that is why the place was called Ramath-lehi.¹⁸ Then he became terribly thirsty and called out to Yahweh saying, "You have given your servant this great victory. Now am I to die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"

¹⁹ So Yahweh opened a hollow in the ground at Lehi and water gushed forth from it. Samson drank; his strength returned and he revived. For this, the name En-hakkore was



given to the fountain which is still in Lehi to this day.

²⁰Samson became judge of Israel for twenty years during the time of the Philistines.

16 ¹When Samson went to Gaza, he saw a prostitute there and entered the place where she lived. ²When the men of Gaza were notified that Samson had come, they made the rounds and lay in wait for him at the city gates. They kept quiet all night, thinking, "We will wait for him until dawn and then we will kill him." ³But Samson slept until midnight. At midnight, he arose and took hold of the door panels of the city gates together with the doorcase, and pulled them up with the bar. He put them upon his shoulders and carried them to the hilltop opposite Hebron.

Samson and Delilah

■ ⁴After this, Samson fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek; she was called Delilah. ⁵The Philistine chiefs said to this woman, charm him and find out where he gets such strength and how we can defeat and tie him up. Each of us shall give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."

⁶So Delilah asked Samson, "Tell me, please, where do you get such strength and how can others tie you up to subdue you?" ⁷Samson answered her, "If they bind me with seven new and moist bowstrings, then I shall lose my strength and be as any other man."

⁸The Philistine chiefs sent seven new bowstrings that had not been tried to Delilah, and she tied Samson with them. ⁹With men hidden in her dwelling, she shouted, "Samson, here come the Philistines!" Samson broke the bowstrings as if these were burned flax. So they did not find out where his great strength came from.

¹⁰Then Delilah said to Samson, "You made a fool of me, and you lied to me. Tell me, how can they subdue you?" ¹¹Samson answered her, "If they bind me this time with seven newly-braided ropes which have never been used, then I shall lose my strength and be like any other man."

¹²So Delilah bound him with seven newly-braided ropes. But when she shouted, "Here come the Philistines!" he again snapped the ropes round his arms like thread. ¹³So Delilah said to him, "Until when will you deceive me and lie to me?" Tell me how they could subdue you." He answered her, "If you braid the seven locks of my hair in the warp of the loom and tighten it with a pin, then I shall lose my strength." ¹⁴She lulled him to sleep, and then braided the seven locks of his hair in the warp of the loom and tightened it with a pin. Then she cried, "Here come the Philistines!" Samson woke up and pulled the warp with the locks of his hair. And so, Delilah did not find out where his great strength came from.

¹⁵Delilah said to him for the third time, "You say that you love me, but your heart is not with me. Three times, you have deceived me and have not told me where your great strength comes." ¹⁶And as Delilah insisted and bothered him day after day with her questions, the time came when Samson felt he would die in disgust. ¹⁷So he told her the truth: "Never has my hair been cut for I am a Nazirite, consecrated to God from the womb of my mother. If my hair is

■ After presenting Samson as a "superman" always winning over the Philistines, the story shows him conquered by a woman.

Samson reveals to Delilah his consecration to God, as a Nazirite. There is in him a part reserved for Yahweh which is the source of his supernatural strength.

Weakness of Heroes. Samson entrusts him-

self, body and soul to a woman who does not love him. The last paragraph, which narrates Samson's death shows him perishing in an act of faith in God.

Elsewhere in the Bible we read: "It is good to keep to oneself the King's secret", and "Do not throw your pearls before swine lest they trample on them and stretch themselves over you."



cut, then I shall lose my strength and be like any other man.

¹⁸ Delilah understood that he had told her the truth this time, so she called the Philistine chiefs and said, "Come, because Samson has revealed his secret to me." They came and gave her the money they promised. ¹⁹ Delilah lulled Samson to sleep upon her knees and called a man to cut the seven locks of his hair. And she could immediately subdue him for his strength had left him.

²⁰ When Delilah shouted "Samson, the Philistines!" he awoke and thought that he could still save himself as on other occasions. But he did not know that Yahweh was no longer with him. ²¹ So the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and brought him to Gaza. There they bound him with two bronze chains and made him turn the mill in the prison. ²² The hair on Samson's head, however, began to grow as soon as it was cut.

Death of Samson

²³ The Philistine chiefs assembled to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and had a great feast, saying, "Our god has given Samson, our enemy, into our hands!"

²⁴ While they were celebrating, they said, "Bring out Samson that he may amuse us." They brought him out of prison and placed him between the columns, and he amused them.

²⁵ When they saw him, the people praised their god saying, "Our god has put our enemy into our hands,

Samson who has destroyed our country and killed our men."

²⁶ Samson then said to the boy who held him by the hand, "Lead me where I can touch the pillars on which this house rests, so that I may lean on them." ²⁷ The house was full of men and women, all the Philistine chiefs were also there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson for amusement.

²⁸ Samson called on Yahweh and exclaimed, "Lord, Yahweh, please remember me and restore my strength only this once, so that I may avenge myself against the Philistines for my eyes."

²⁹ Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, leaned on them with his right arm on one pillar and his left on the other, ³⁰ and cried out, "Let me die with the Philistines!" He pushed with all his strength and the house fell upon the chiefs and the people gathered there. Those who joined him in his own death were more than those he had killed during his lifetime.

³¹ His brothers and the whole family of his father went down to get him. They buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel for twenty years.

Story of Micah

◆17 ¹A man named Micah in the mountains of Ephraim one day ²said to his mother, "The eleven hundred pieces of silver taken from you and about which you

2. Lev 5, 1

◆ The Book of Judges concludes with two typical stories about the life of Israel at that time. After having extolled that epoch during which there was no need for kings (see 8:22), the author recognizes the evils that anarchy produced.

In Chr. 17-18, the absence of religious authority results in a situation where priests just do as they please. Let us bear in mind that, at that

time, men of the tribe of Levi were dedicated to Yahweh's service (see Num 3).

In 18:27 we have one of those passages in the Bible where great indifference is shown regarding a savage massacre. The Israelites at that time did not know how to value human life, either that of an enemy or their own. Individuals did not count but only the people collectively. To them it was not more serious to wipe out a foreign people than to destroy a forest.



uttered a curse, well, it was I who took that silver. And now, I return it to you." ³ His mother answered, "May Yahweh bless my son!" So he returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother.

But his mother said to him, "I had consecrated this money to Yahweh with my own hand, so that with this money, my son could make a statue cast in metal. So I am giving back this silver to you."

⁴ He, however, returned the silver to his mother who set aside two hundred pieces for the silversmith, who made a statue cast in metal. ⁵ This was placed in the house of Micah, so that Micah had a House of God. He also made an ephod to consult Yahweh as they cast lots, and some small idols, and consecrated also one of his sons as his priest. ⁶ At that time, there was no king in Israel and each one did what seemed right to him.

⁷ A young Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, a descendant of Moses who lived there as a foreigner, ⁸ left Bethlehem one day and set out to see where he could live as a guest. He came to the house of Micah in the mountains of Ephraim, ⁹ and Micah asked him, "Where do you come from?" He answered, "I am a Levite and I come walking from Bethlehem; I come in search of a place where I can stay as a guest." ¹⁰ Micah said to him, "Stay in my house and be a father and priest to me; I shall give you ten pieces of silver a year, clothing and food." So the Levite went in to his house.

¹¹ The Levite agreed to stay in Micah's house and became like one of his sons. ¹² Micah consecrated the Levite, and this young man became his priest and remained in the house of Micah. ¹³ And Micah said, "Now I know that Yahweh will bestow favors on me for this Levite has become my priest."

18 ¹ At that time there was no king in Israel. The tribe of Dan was looking for a territory to dwell in, because until that day they had not received a share in the inheritance of the tribes of Israel. ² So the Danites sent five valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol – all from the Danite tribe – to go around the land and explore it. They said to them, "Go and explore the country." These men came to the mountains of Ephraim near the house of Micah and spent the night there.

³ As they were near the house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite, so they went in. They asked him, "Who has brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?" ⁴ He answered, "Such and such a thing Micah has done for me. He has

hired me to become his priest." ⁵ They said to him, "Ask God so we may know whether the journey we undertake shall be successful or not." ⁶ The priest answered them, "Go in peace, the journey you make is under the eye of Yahweh."

⁷ The five men left and came to Laish. They saw that the inhabitants of that place were living in security according to the customs of the Sidonians – quiet and trusting people – with no one creating trouble. They lived far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone else.

⁸ Upon their return to their brothers in Zorah and Eshtaol, ⁹ they were asked, "What news do you bring?" They answered, "Come on, let us go and attack them for the country we have seen is an excellent place. But why are you silent? Do not delay in setting out to conquer the land." ¹⁰ When you go, you shall meet a quiet people; the land is vast and God has given it into our hands, a place which does not lack anything."

¹¹ So six hundred armed men of the tribe of Dan set out from Zorah and Eshtaol: ¹² they went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. ¹³ From there they passed through the mountains of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

¹⁴ Then the five men who had gone to explore the land addressed their brothers and said, "Do you not know that in one of these houses, there is an ephod used to consult Yahweh, some small idols and a statue cast in metal? Now you know what you have to do."

¹⁵ The troops made a detour and entered the house of the young Levite, the house of Micah. They greeted him ¹⁶ while the six hundred armed Danites stood at the threshold of the gate. ¹⁷ Then the five men who had earlier gone up to explore the land went up again, entered Micah's house ¹⁸ and took the statue, the ephod that is used to consult Yahweh and the small idols, while the priest stood at the gate with the six hundred armed men. The priest said to them, "What are you doing?" ¹⁹ They said to him, "Be quiet!" Put your hand on your mouth and come with us. You shall be a father and priest to us. Do you prefer to be a priest in the house of one individual or to be a priest for a tribe of Israel?"

²⁰ This made the priest happy, so he took the ephod, the small idols and the statue, and went with the troops.

²¹ The Danites went on their way, putting the women, children, livestock and precious objects in front of them. ²² They were already



far from the house of Micah when the people of the neighbouring houses started shouting and set out to pursue them.²³ But the Danites turned around and said to Micah, "What is the matter with you that you shouted?"²⁴ He answered, "You have taken the gods which I had made, and my priest is going away with you. What else is left to me? And yet you still ask me: 'What is the matter with you?'"²⁵ The Danites answered him, "Be quiet now lest some ill-tempered men fall upon you, and kill you and your household."²⁶ So the Danites went their way, and Micah, seeing that they were stronger, returned home.

²⁷ As for them, they now had the gods which Micah had fashioned and the priest he had in his service, and they marched on against Laish, a quiet and trusting people. They put the inhabitants to the sword and burned the city.

²⁸ No one came to help them for they lived far from Sidon, and had no relationship with anyone else. This city was in the valley which extended to Beth-rehob.

²⁹ The Danites rebuilt the city and lived there, and they gave it the name Dan in memory of their ancestor Dan, son of Israel, though the city was formerly called Laish.³⁰ They set aside a place for the statue, and Jonathan – a descendant of Gershom, son of Moses – and his sons after him, became priests of the tribe of Dan until the people were driven out of the land.³¹ They set up the image Micah had made, and there it remained all the time the House of God was in Shiloh.

The crime at Gibeah

o19 ¹ At that time there was still no king in Israel. A Levite who lived in the borders of the mountains of Ephraim took a woman from Bethlehem in Judah as concubine.² This woman deceived him and then returned to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah. She remained there for about four months.³ Her husband set out to visit her and speak to her heart to make her return to his home. He brought with him a servant and two asses.

She welcomed him in the house of her father who was glad to see him.⁴ His father-in-law, the father of the girl, made him stay so he remained with him for three days. They ate, drank and spent the night there.⁵ On the

fourth day, they rose early in the morning and the Levite prepared to leave. But the father of the young maiden said to his son-in-law, "Eat some bread first so you can regain your strength, then you can go."

⁶ The two sat and began to eat and drink together. Then the father-in-law said, "Please spend the night here and have a good time."

⁷ But the Levite got up to leave, so his father-in-law insisted, so he stayed that night.

⁸ On the fifth day, he again rose early in the morning to go, but the father of the young maiden said to him, "Have more patience and stay until evening." So they ate together.⁹ But when the husband, his concubine and his servant stood up to leave, the father-in-law said to his son-in-law, "Look, it's already getting dark. Spend the night here and enjoy yourself. You can leave early tomorrow morning and be on your way home."¹⁰ But the Levite refused to spend the night there, so he got up, left and arrived opposite Jebush, or Jerusalem. He brought with him the two saddled asses, his concubine and his servant.

¹¹ It was very late when they came near Jebush. So the servant said to his master, "Let us not go any farther but go into the city of the Jebusites and spend the night there."¹² His master answered him, "Let us not go to a foreign city where there are no Israelites; we will go to Gibeah." And he added to his servant,¹³ "Come and let us go near one of those towns. We will spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah."¹⁴ So they went their way, and at sunset they arrived opposite Gibeah of Benjamin.

¹⁵ They turned aside and went there to spend the night.¹⁶ Then, an old man came in from his work in the fields. He was a man from the mountains of Ephraim and lived as a visitor in Gibeah, for the people of that place were of the tribe of Benjamin.¹⁷ Looking to one side, the old man noticed the visitor in the city square and said to him, "Where do you come from and where are you going?"¹⁸ And he answered, "We are passing through, for we come from Bethlehem of Judah, and we are going up to the borders of the mountains of Ephraim where I come from. I went to Bethlehem of Judah and now I am returning home. But here no one has offered me his house."¹⁹ We have, however, straw and green fodder for our asses, and bread and wine for me, my wife and the young

16. Gen 19, 1-11; Hos 9, 9; 10, 9 24. Gen 19, 4 29. 1 S 11, 7 10. Dt 22, 21; 2 S 15, 18 13. Dt 17, 12

o This misdeed resembles very much what is found in Gn 19 and what is said there in the footnote, with respect to the answer of the master of the house, is also relevant here. Verses 24-25 and 27-28 are a horrible testimony to

what has been for centuries, the attitude of men towards women: total irresponsibility and contempt. Woman is no more than a love object or someone who does work that men find repugnant.

nan who accompanies us. We don't lack anything."

²⁰ The old man said to him, "Peace be with you. I shall provide you with all that you need. Just don't spend the night in the square." ²¹ He brought them to his house and gave fodder to the asses. The travelers washed their feet, then ate and drank.

²² As they were relaxing, the wicked men of the city went round the house, pounded on the door and said to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man you have welcomed into your house so we may amuse ourselves with him." ²³ The owner of the house went out to them and said, "No, my brothers, do not eat him badly. This man has come into my house, so do not do him evil. ²⁴ Here is my daughter, a virgin, and my companion's concubine. I can give her to you if you want. Ravish her and do with her what seems good to you, but not against this man." ²⁵ But those men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and brought her outside. They violated and maltreated her the whole night until morning. At dawn, they left her.

²⁶ At early morning, the woman came and fell at the entrance of the man's house where her husband was. She lay there until it was day. ²⁷ When her husband rose up in the morning, opened the door of the house and went out to go on his way, he saw the woman, his concubine, lying at the entrance of the house, her hands on the threshold. ²⁸ He said to her, "Get up, and let us go." But there was no response. So the man put her on his ass and went home.

²⁹ When he arrived home, he took a knife and taking hold of his concubine, he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces and sent them throughout the territory of Israel. ³⁰ He gave his messengers, this order: "Say this to the Israelites: Until today, have you seen anything like this since the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt? Think about it. Seek counsel and decide." Everyone who saw it said: Until today, never has this happened nor has anything like this been seen since the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt."

20

¹ So all the children of Israel, the whole community from Dan to Beer-

sheba, gathered as one man, including the land of Gilead, before Yahweh at Mizpah. ² The heads of all the people and of all the tribes of Israel came to the assembly of the people of God: four hundred thousand men on foot, all armed with swords.

³ The men of the tribe of Benjamin also knew that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah.

The sons of Israel said, "Tell us how this crime happened." ⁴ The Levite, the husband of the murdered woman, addressed them and said, "I arrived at Gibeah in Benjamin with my concubine to spend the night there. ⁵ By night, the residents of Gibeah showed up and surrounded the house, intending to harm us. They were determined to kill me, and they abused my concubine in such a way that she died. ⁶ I then took her, cut her into pieces one piece to each territory of Israel, because what they have done is a shame for Israel. ⁷ Now that you are here, all sons of Israel, discuss among yourselves and make a decision now."

⁸ All the people rose as one man and said, "None of us shall return to his tent nor go to his house. ⁹ This is what we will do with the people of Gibeah: we will draw a lot ¹⁰ and will take from the tribes of Israel ten men for every hundred, a hundred for every thousand, and a thousand for every ten thousand. They shall gather provisions for the troops who will go to punish Gibeah in Benjamin for the crime its inhabitants have committed in Israel." ¹¹ So all the men of Israel united as one man against the city.

¹² The tribes of Israel sent messengers throughout the whole tribe of Benjamin and said to them: "What is this crime that has been committed among you? ¹³ Hand over those wicked men of Gibeah to us, that we may kill them and banish the evil from Israel." But the Benjaminites did not mind their Israelite brothers.

¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Benjaminites also left their cities and gathered at Gibeah to face the Israelites. ¹⁵ That day the Benjaminites who came from different cities totalled twenty-six thousand men, armed with swords, without counting the inhabitants of Gibeah. ¹⁶ Among them were seven hundred valiant men, all left-

31. Jos 8, 4

For as long as there was no central authority, the king who would "judge", each family and tribe was obliged to defend and avenge its own members. There was no other way to protect the individual among a people who had no authorities. In this situation, a crime could cause war among the tribes, as happened in the example recounted here. The narration gives much emphasis to the war and to the destruction of

Benjamin. We do not need to accept the figures as authentic.

A lesson is imparted here: in spite of all the sins and errors of Benjamin, not one of the twelve tribes which are Yahweh's inheritance, can disappear. In spite of the trials they bring upon themselves, a remnant will always be saved.



handed and able to sling a stone at a hair's breadth without missing.

¹⁷ The people of Israel also counted their men. Without counting Benjamin, there were four hundred thousand men, able to draw sword, all men of war. ¹⁸ So they set out and went up to Bethel where they asked God: "who among us shall go up first to fight the sons of Benjamin?" And Yahweh answered, "Judah shall go up first."

¹⁹ The Israelites rose early and encamped opposite Gibeah. ²⁰ They went out to fight against Benjamin and drew up the battle line against Gibeah. ²¹ But the Benjaminites came out of Gibeah and killed twenty-two thousand Israelites. ²² On the second day, the sons of Israel attacked the Benjaminites.

²³ The sons of Israel then went up to weep before Yahweh until evening, and asked Yahweh, saying, "Shall we fight again with the sons of our brother Benjamin?" Yahweh answered, "Go up against them."

²⁴ So the people, the troops of Israel, regained their courage and returned to their former battle line. ²⁵ On that day, too, the Benjaminites went out against them and killed eighteen thousand sword-wielding Israelites.

²⁶ Then all the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel. There they sat weeping before Yahweh. They fasted the whole day until evening and presented burnt and peace offerings before Yahweh. ²⁷ For the Ark of the Covenant was there, ²⁸ with Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, as its minister. They asked: "Shall we come out again and fight the sons of our brother Benjamin, or not?" Yahweh replied, "Go up tomorrow, and I will give them into your hands."

²⁹ Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah.

³⁰ On the third day, the sons of Israel marched against Gibeah and positioned themselves in the battle line as on previous times. ³¹ The sons of Benjamin went out against them, but the Israelites cut off the way that led back to the city. The Benjaminites began as before to attack the men of Israel, killing about thirty men on the roads, going up to Bethel and to Gibeah. ³² So the Benjaminites thought: "We have defeated them again as before."

But the Israelites said to themselves: "Let us flee to draw them away from the city and cut off the roads." ³³ All the men of Israel moved from their camp and took up position at Baal-Tamar, while those who were in ambush rushed out of their place to the west of Gibeah. ³⁴ So ten thousand chosen men from all Israel came against Gibeah. The battle was fought hard, and the Benjaminites did not notice the calamity which was to come upon them.

³⁵ Yahweh defeated Benjamin before Israel, and on that day the Israelites killed twenty-five thousand Benjaminites, all sword-wielding men.

³⁶ Though the Benjaminites were defeated, the men of Israel gave them ground, because they relied on the ambush they had set against Gibeah. ³⁷ The men in ambush rushed out and quickly deployed themselves. They attacked Gibeah and put the whole city to the sword. ³⁸ The men of Israel had planned with those in ambush that a great smoke would rise from the city as a signal. At this, the Israelites would then return and fight.

³⁹ So the Israelites who pretended to escape returned when the Benjaminites had killed about thirty men and had thought: "Now they are defeated as in the first battle." ⁴⁰ The smoke signal was already rising from the city. When the Benjaminites looked behind, they saw that the whole city was on fire, with flames rising up to heaven. ⁴¹ When the Israelites faced them, the Benjaminites trembled before the calamity which had come upon them. ⁴² They retreated before the men of Israel and fled in the direction leading to the desert. But the Israelites who came out of the city overtook them and destroyed them. ⁴³ They surrounded the men of Benjamin, pursued them without rest and crushed them opposite Gibeah by the east.

⁴⁴ Eighteen thousand Benjaminites fell, all valiant men. ⁴⁵ The survivors retreated and fled towards the desert to the rock of Rimmon. About five thousand men, however, were killed on the way. They also pursued Benjamin as far as Gideon, killing two thousand men.

⁴⁶ On that day, twenty-five thousand sword-wielding Benjaminites died, all valiant men. Of those who fled to the desert to the rock of Rimmon, ⁴⁷ six hundred were able to escape. They remained there for four months. ⁴⁸ The troops of Israel turned against the towns of Benjamin and put them to the sword, the people as well as the livestock and everything in them. They also burned all the cities they found.

21 ¹ The men of Israel swore at Mizpah: "None of us shall give his daughter in marriage to any Benjaminite."

² The people went to Bethel. There they sat before Yahweh until evening, called on him and wept with great lamentation.

³ They said, "Yahweh, God of Israel, why has this misfortune happened to Israel, that one of its tribes has perished today?" ⁴ On the next day, the people rose early, built an altar there and offered holocausts and peace:



offerings. ⁵ The Israelites then asked, "Who among all the tribes of Israel did not come to the assembly of Yahweh?" For they had solemnly sworn that whoever would not come up to Mizpah before Yahweh shall die.

⁶ The sons of Israel had compassion on their brother Benjamin and they said, "Today a tribe of Israel has been cut off, ⁷ what shall we do to provide wives for those that remain, for we have sworn to Yahweh not to give them our daughters in marriage?"

⁸ Because of this they asked, "Did any tribe of Israel not come up to Mizpah before Yahweh?" And they found out that none from Yabesh of Gilead had come to the camp for the assembly. ⁹ They made the census and saw that here was no one from Yabesh of Gilead.

¹⁰ Then the community sent there twelve thousand of their valiant men with this order: "Go and put to the sword the inhabitants of Yabesh of Gilead, including women and children. ¹¹ This is what you shall do: kill every man and every woman who has had a relation with a man, but let the maidens live." ¹² So they did. They found four hundred young virgins among the inhabitants of Yabesh in Gilead who had not had any relations with man, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in the land of Canaan.

¹³ Then the community sent messengers to the Benjaminites who were at the rock of Rimmon to make peace with them. ¹⁴ and the Benjaminites returned. The Israelites gave them the women of Yabesh of Gilead they had spared, but they were not enough for all.

¹⁵ The people had compassion again on

Benjamin for Yahweh had let one of the tribes of Israel perish. ¹⁶ So the community elders said, "What can we do to provide wives for those that are left, for the women of Benjamin were killed?" ¹⁷ and they added, "How can the survival of Benjamin be assured that a tribe of Israel may not perish? ¹⁸ We cannot give them our daughters since we have made this oath: Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin?"

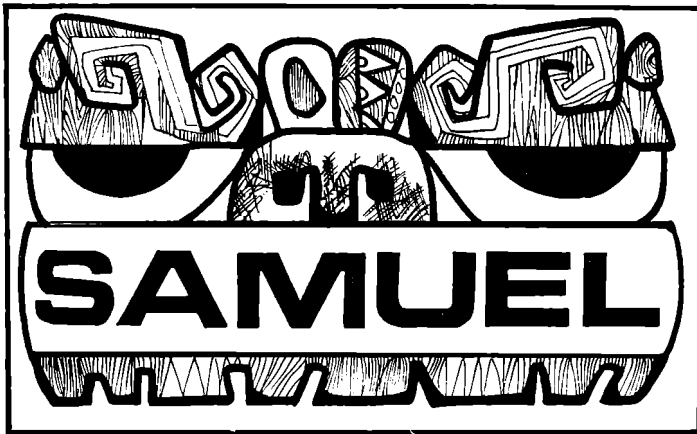
¹⁹ But they said, "It is now the feast of Yahweh which is celebrated annually at Shiloh, north of Bethel, east of the road that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." ²⁰ So they advised the Benjaminites: "Go and wait in ambush in the vineyards. ²¹ Be ready and when the maidens of Shiloh come dancing in groups, come out of the vineyards and each man seize a wife and go to the land of Benjamin."

²² If their fathers or brothers come to complain against you, we shall tell them: "Try to understand them; see, the war left us with no means of giving a wife to each one of them. You are not the ones who gave them your maidens, otherwise you would have broken your vow."

²³ So the Benjaminites did and seized the women they needed. Then they went and returned to their inheritance, rebuilt their cities and dwelt in them.

²⁴ The Israelites then marched from there to their homes, every man to his tribe and family.

²⁵ At that time, there was no king in Israel and everyone did what seemed good to him.



INTRODUCTION

The Book of Samuel, now divided in two, marks the third stage of sacred history after Genesis and Exodus. Here we are made to discover THE WORK OF GOD IN MEN'S HEARTS and how they cooperate with God's rule.

Here are presented very simply the examples and failures of DAVID; his life, similar to that of any of us, seems to hold mystery. At the end, though, we find that God was present in everything that happened to him and that he established with them something that will not perish.

The importance of this book does not come from historical events of great magnitude. Certainly, there are some there, but the Bible is more concerned with the PERSONAL HISTORY of David than with his victories. This first king of Israel was the model of a believer since, being a man with great personality and of no ordinary intelligence, he also let himself be guided and INSPIRED BY GOD, and it was his main concern to serve him in everything.

In a way, here GOD HIDES HIMSELF. Nothing is said about revelations or grandiose manifestations of God. Only a word to the prophet Nathan which will be decisive for the future of the kingdom of David, in Jerusalem and over Palestine, will develop into the universal kingdom of God. Christ Jesus will be the SON OF DAVID.

Two personages precede David:

- SAMUEL, the last of the Judges who is also a prophet. This is the time during which the disunited Israelites feel the need to have a permanent authority: "We want a king, like the rest of the nations have," instead of depending solely on the inspired ones, the "judges" who are not always there when the people need them.
- SAUL, the first king chosen by God, but later rejected.

When the book opens, Israel is not yet master of the land of Canaan, but already the tribe have become used to a sedentary, country life after having been nomad herdsmen. Settled in the hills, they have often submitted to the incursions of the Philistines established in the fertile plain of the coast, in their cities of Gat, Azoto, Ascalon, Acaron.

The story of Hannah

1 There was a man from Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah. He was the son of Elihu of the family of Zuph. He had two wives: Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children but Hannah had none.

³ Every year, Elkanah went to worship and to sacrifice to Yahweh at Shiloh. The priests there were the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas. Whenever Elkanah offered sacrifice, he gave portions to his wife, Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ To Hannah, however, he gave the more delightful portion because he loved her more, although she had no child. ⁶ Her rival used to tease Hannah for being barren every time they went to Yahweh's house. And Hannah would weep and refuse to eat. Once, Elkanah, her husband, asked her: "Hannah, why do you weep? Why aren't you eating? Why are you sad? Are you not better off with me than with many sons?"

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah stood up not far from Eli, the priest who was seated beside the doorpost of Yahweh's House. ¹⁰ Deeply distressed and weeping bitterly, she prayed to Yahweh, ¹¹ and as he prayed, she made this vow. "O Yahweh of hosts, if only you will have compassion on your maidser-

vant and give me a son, I will put him in your service for as long as he lives and no razor shall touch his head."

¹² As she was praying before Yahweh, Eli observed the movement of her lips. ¹³ Hannah was praying silently and, although she was moving her lips, she uttered no sound. Because of this, Eli thought Hannah was drunk. ¹⁴ He, therefore, said to her: "For how long will you be drunk? Let your drunkenness pass." ¹⁵ But Hannah answered: "No, my Lord, I am a woman in great distress, not drunk. I have never drunk wine or strong drink, but I am pouring out my soul before Yahweh. ¹⁶ Do not take me for a bad woman. I was so afflicted that I could not stop praying." ¹⁷ Then Eli said: "Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you what you asked for." ¹⁸ Hannah said: "Let your maidservant deserve your kindness." Then she left the temple and went back to eat. She seemed a different woman and was no longer downcast.

¹⁹ Elkanah rose early in the morning and worshipped before Yahweh with his wives. Then they went back home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with his wife, Hannah, Yahweh took compassion on her, ²⁰ and she became pregnant. She gave birth to a son and called him Samuel because she said: "I have asked Yahweh to give him to me."

2. 9, 1; Jdg 13, 2

5. Dt 12, 18

8. Rut 4, 15

o It all starts with an ordinary couple living a familiar drama in a hill town.

A woman, afflicted with sterility, complains to Yahweh - she is not resigned to a seemingly useless life. Yahweh listens to the afflicted and his answer always exceeds what they ask for. He not only gives Hannah a son, he also gives his people a prophet.

God likes to choose his servants precisely from those families who have no hope of having children. It is God who gives life to the dead and hope to those who have none. The same happens with the birth of Isaac and John the Baptist (Lk 1:5). In the book of Isaiah is a poem which

starts with these words: "Shout out for joy, oh you who were barren!" (Is 54:1)

These pages depict for us the religious life of those days. The campaign tent which shelters the ark is at Shiloh. There is no temple yet in Israel, so pilgrims bring their animals; and the father as head of the family and priest of his household sacrifices the victims. Only after David's time will the priests of Levi's tribe be the exclusive intermediaries between Yahweh and his people.

The woman's inferior status also appears here. Elkanah loves Hannah as he loves his children, but as long as the menfolk are allowed

²¹ Once more Elkanah went to the temple with his family to offer his yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow to Yahweh. ²² Hannah, who would not go along, said to her husband: "I will bring the child there as soon as he is weaned so that he may appear in the presence of Yahweh, and he shall stay there in his service for as long as he lives." ²³ Her husband said to her: "Do what seems best to you. Stay here until you have weaned the child. I only pray that Yahweh may fulfill his word." So Hannah stayed behind and continued to nurse her son until he was weaned.

²⁴ When the child was nursed, Hannah took him with her along with a three-year-old bull, a measure of

flour and a flask of wine, and she brought him to Yahweh's house at Shiloh. The child was still young.

²⁵ After they had slain the bull, they brought the child to Eli. ²⁶ Hannah exclaimed: "Oh, my Lord, look! I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to Yahweh. ²⁷ I was praying for this child and Yahweh has granted me my petition. ²⁸ Therefore, I give him to Yahweh. As long as he lives, he is given to Yahweh."

And they worshipped Yahweh there.

Hannah's Prayer

2 ¹ And this is the song of Hannah:

"My heart exults in Yahweh,
I feel strong in my God.
I rejoice and laugh at my enemies
for you came with power to save me.
² Yahweh alone is holy, no one is like you;
there is no Rock like our God.
³ Speak proudly no more;
no more arrogance on your lips.
for Yahweh is an all-knowing God,
he it is who weighs the deeds of all.
⁴ The bow of the mighty is broken
but the weak are girded with strength.
⁵ The well-fed must labour for bread
but the hungry need work no more.

The childless wife has borne seven children

24. Num 15, 8	1. Is 61, 11; Lk 1, 45	2. Ex 15, 11; Is 64, 3	5. Ps 113, 9
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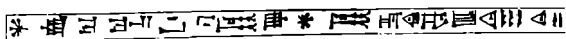
to have several wives, couples will not exist the way God willed. (See Gen 2:24).

+ In her thanksgiving song Hannah makes herself the spokesperson of all the despised people of the world.

Yahweh is the God who saves the abandoned. He rejects those who put their trust in *their arm* and in *their bow*, in the food assured for their household, i.e., in themselves and their possessions. He manifests his glory in shifting the differences existing among men (as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lk 16:25). *Yahweh brings to the grave and raises up*. The song of Hannah has a prophetic vision. Like Hannah, we ought to be proud of our God, even

more than of the material progress of our society which blesses the rich and the powerful.

This text condemns whoever seeks to advance in society and promotes his own welfare with the sole purpose of ensuring his family's future. He who sides with the weak will be saved. Whereas others feel ashamed of their poor background, as laborers or farmers or of the undeveloped condition of their country, the believer knows that the poor and the hungry contribute to the salvation of the world. Where everything is wanting, it is easier to discover the value of human persons, and to understand that no world is worthy of man except one where food and dignity are given to all.



but the proud mother is left alone.
⁶Yahweh is Lord of life and death;
 he brings down to the grave and raises up.

Yahweh makes poor and makes rich,
⁷he brings low and he exalts.
 He lifts up the lowly from the dust,
⁸and raises the poor from the ash heap;
 they will be called to the company of princes,
 and inherit a seat of honour.

The earth to its pillars belongs to Yahweh
 and on them he has set the world.
⁹He guards the steps of his faithful ones,
 but the wicked perish in darkness,
 none of them will succeed by his own strength.

¹⁰The enemies of Yahweh are shattered,
 against them he thunders in heaven.
 Yahweh rules over the whole world,
 he will raise his own king
 and exalts the might of his anointed."

¹¹ After that Elkanah went home to Ramah while the boy served Yahweh in the presence of Eli, the priest.

The story of Eli

¹² Now, the sons of Eli were worthless men who had no regard for Yahweh. ¹³ When any man offered sacrifice, a servant would come while the meat was boiling. ¹⁴ With a fork, the servant would reach into the pan, or kettle, or cauldron, or pot, and all that the fork brought up would be for the priests. This was how these priests at Shiloh treated all the Israelites who went there. ¹⁵ Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you, only raw." ¹⁶ And if the man would say to him, "Let the fat be burned first and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, give it to me now or else I will take it by

force." ¹⁷ Thus the sin of Eli's sons was very great in the sight of Yahweh because they defiled the offering of Yahweh.

¹⁸ Meanwhile, Samuel, now a boy wearing a priest's garment, was ministering before Yahweh. ¹⁹ His mother used to make a little robe which she handed to him every time she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰ On such occasions, Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May Yahweh give you more children by this woman in return for the boy whom she has given to Him." After this, they would go back home.

²¹ Yahweh blessed Hannah with three sons and two daughters while the boy Samuel grew in the presence of Yahweh.

²² Eli had grown very old. He heard all that his sons were doing to Israel; they even slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of

Meeting.²³ He, therefore, asked them, "People are talking about your misdeeds. Why do you do such things?"²⁴ What the people of Yahweh are spreading abroad about you is not good news to me.²⁵ If a man sins against another man, God will mediate for him. But if he sins against Yahweh, who can intercede for him?" But the two would not listen to their father for Yahweh had already decided that they should die.

²⁶The boy Samuel, in the meantime, continued to grow in stature and in worth before Yahweh and the people.

²⁷One day, a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is Yahweh's word: I revealed myself to your ancestors when they were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt.²⁸ I chose them out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priests, to go up to my altar, to burn incense and to wear a priest's robe in my presence, and I gave them all the burnt offerings of Israel.²⁹ Why do you now look with greed on my sacrifice and the offerings that I myself ordered? Why do you listen to your sons more than to me and fatten yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering made by my people Israel?"³⁰ Therefore, Yahweh, the God of Israel declares: I promised that your family and that of your father should go on ministering before me forever; but now I shall no longer honour my word. Those who honour me I shall honour, those who despise me will be despised.³¹ The days are coming when I will break your strength and

the strength of all your relatives. No one will live to a ripe old age.³² Then, in distress, you will be filled with envy, seeing how Israel prospers.³³ Those of your household that I do not reject from my service will be spared only to weep bitterly and live in grief; but the rest shall die by the sword.³⁴ What will happen to your sons Hophni and Phinehas shall be a sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day.³⁵ I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who shall be just, the one I love in heart and in mind. I will give him a lasting succession that will serve me and my anointed one forever.³⁶ And everyone that is left of your family shall ask a priest humbly for some money or a loaf of bread saying: Appoint me, I beg you, for a priestly function so that I may have something to eat."

God calls Samuel

3 ¹The boy Samuel ministered to Yahweh under Eli's care. The word of Yahweh was rare in those days and visions infrequent.

²One night, Eli, who was by then half blind, was lying down in his room. ³The lamp of God was still lighted and Samuel was lying down in the house of Yahweh where the ark of God was located. ⁴Then Yahweh called, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "I am here!"⁵ and ran to Eli saying, "I am here, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call. Lie down again." Samuel went back.

26. Lk 2, 52 30. Ps 18, 26 33. Lev 26, 16 35. Num 25, 12; 1 K 2, 26 5. Gen 22, 1

■ God's call to Samuel is personal and direct. This is not the lightning touch by which God definitively marks his great prophets and reveals to them something of his mystery as he does in the case of Isaiah or Paul. Nevertheless, the answer of the child Samuel prepares him for greater things.

How seriously Eli, in spite of his age and function, takes Samuel into account! He knows that spiritual maturity has nothing to do with physical age and he accepts God's reproaches relayed through this boy.

The Bible also underlines the responsibility of those who do not discipline their children. The father's duty to educate and correct his children, even by punishing, instead of leaving them to their own selves to do what they want, was taught in Israel. Parents must not shirk from their responsibility under the false

pretext that if one becomes demanding towards his children, he will lose their affection. As the conscience of the child is not yet fully awake, the future liberty of the young person and the grown man has to be ensured through the discipline of a "Law." (See Sir 30; Gal 4 and commentary on Judg 8:22.)

The call of Samuel reminds us that every person has a vocation, i.e., that God calls him and destines him to accomplish his own irreplaceable task. In our society many people are looked upon merely as a work force and receive little appreciation. Since they have no duty or responsibility of which they can be proud, they rightly feel frustrated. They do not feel themselves "called" or needed for something big. So they lack one of the more important drives to build their own life. In directing his life, each one has to ask himself: "What does God want of me?"

* Then Yahweh called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel stood up and went to Eli saying, "I am here, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call you, my son. Go back and lie down."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know Yahweh and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ But Yahweh called Samuel for the third time. Samuel stood up and went to Eli saying, "I am here, for you called me." Then Eli realized that Yahweh was calling the boy *and he said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you again, say, 'Speak, Yahweh, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went back and lay down.

¹⁰ Then Yahweh came and stood before Samuel, calling as he did before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant hears."¹¹ Then Yahweh said to Samuel, "Look, I am about to do something in Israel which will scare everyone who hears about it. ¹² On that day, I will punish Eli and fulfill all that I have spoken against his family from beginning to end. ¹³ You will tell him that I am about to punish his family forever, because he was aware that his sons were blaspheming God but he did not stop them. ¹⁴ Therefore, I swear that the sin of Eli's family shall never be atoned for by sacrifice or by any offering."

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of Yahweh's house. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ But Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "I am here." ¹⁷ Eli asked, "What did Yahweh tell you? Do not hide it from me. May God

punish you if you hide anything from me." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything. Then Eli said, "It is Yahweh. Let him do what seems good to him."

¹⁹ Samuel grew and Yahweh was with him. Whatever Yahweh told him became true. ²⁰ All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had proven to be Yahweh's prophet. ²¹ Yahweh would appear at Shiloh; he revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh through his word.

The Philistines capture the ark

♦4 ¹ At that time, the Philistines gathered for an attack on Israel, and Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, while the Philistines encamped at Aphek. ² The Philistines then drew up in battle formation. They attacked Israel and after a fierce struggle, Israel was defeated, leaving about four thousand men dead on the battlefield. ³ When the troops retreated to their camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why has Yahweh allowed us to be defeated by the Philistines? Let us take the ark of God from Shiloh and bring it here so that Yahweh may be with us and save us from our enemies." ⁴ So the people sent messengers to Shiloh and also the ark of the covenant of Yahweh who is seated on the cherubim. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, accompanied the ark.

⁵ As soon as the ark of Yahweh entered the camp, the Israelites began to cheer so loudly that the earth resounded. ⁶ The Philistines heard the shouting and asked, "What does this loud

♦ In their war against the Philistines, the Israelites seek the protection of Yahweh. They look for the Ark, thinking that, with this, Yahweh is obliged to grant them victory.

But God is not concerned with the sacred Ark,

nor is he at the service of an irresponsible people. Instead, he wants to educate them by making them pay the price of their unfaithfulness. For this reason, God does not respond to them and the sacred Ark is lost.

shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And they were told that the ark of Yahweh had been brought to the camp.

⁷ The Philistines were overcome with fear. They exclaimed, "A god has come into the camp. ⁸ Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can save us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all sorts of plagues and pestilence. ⁹ Take courage and conduct yourselves like men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews the way they have been slaves to you. Be manly and fight."

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated. Everyone fled to his home. It was a disastrous defeat; thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel were killed. ¹¹ The ark of God was captured and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

¹² A man from the tribe of Benjamin fled from the battle line and arrived that same day in Shiloh. His clothes were torn and his head was covered with dust. ¹³ When this man arrived, Eli was on his seat by the road, watching, for his heart trembled for what might happen to the ark of God. When the people heard the news the man brought, all the city cried out. ¹⁴ Eli heard their outcry and asked, "What is all this noise?" The man came to Eli at once and told him what happened. ¹⁵ Eli was by then ninety-eight years old and was already blind. ¹⁶ The man said to him, "I came from the battle, for I was able to flee from it." Then Eli asked him, "How did the battle go, my son?" ¹⁷ The newsbearer answered, "Israel fled before the Philistines. There has been a disaster for our men; your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are among the dead and the ark of God has been taken." ¹⁸ As soon as the man mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate. He broke his neck and died for he was an old and heavy man. Eli judged Israel for forty years.

¹⁹ Eli's daughter-in-law, wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and was about to give birth. When she heard that the ark of God was taken and that both her father-in-law and her hus-

band were dead, she gave birth prematurely. ²⁰ As she lay dying, the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid for you have given birth to a son." But she neither answered nor listened. ²¹ She then named the child Ichabod, saying: "The glory has departed from Israel!" ²² She referred to the seizure of the ark of God and to the death of her father-in-law and her husband.

5 ¹ After they had taken the ark of God, the Philistines carried it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² There they brought it into the temple of Dagon and set it up beside him. ³ Rising up early the following day, the people saw that Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of Yahweh. So they picked up Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But when they rose the following morning, the people saw Dagon on the ground again, face downward before the ark of Yahweh. His head and hands were broken off and lay at the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left where he fell. ⁵ This is why the priests of Dagon and his worshippers do not tread on the threshold of his temple in Ashdod up to this day.

⁶ The hand of Yahweh was heavy upon the people of Ashdod. Yahweh afflicted the people of Ashdod and its vicinity with hemorrhoids. ⁷ Seeing this, the people of Ashdod said, "Let the ark of the God of Israel not remain with us. His hand is heavy on us and on Dagon, our god." ⁸ So they had all the chiefs of the Philistine cities gathered together to ask them, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" They answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought to Gath." So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there. ⁹ But as soon as they had brought it to Gath, Yahweh raised his hand against the city, causing a very great panic. He afflicted the people there, both young and old, with hemorrhoids. ¹⁰ So they moved the ark of God to Ekron. But when the ark entered Ekron, the people there cried out, "They have brought us the ark of the God of Israel to slay us all." ¹¹ So they had the chief of the Philistine cities gathered together to tell them, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel. Let it return to its own place lest we all die." For there was great panic throughout the city because of God's heavy hand. ¹² Those who did not die were stricken with hemorrhoids and the cry of the city reached to heaven.

6 ¹ The ark of Yahweh was in the country of the Philistines for seven months. ² The Philistines called their priests and diviners and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of Yahweh? Tell us how we shall send it,

back to its place.”³ The priests and diviners answered, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it away empty. Instead, provide him with a guilt offering. Then you may be healed and you will know why God dealt with you so severely.”⁴ The chiefs then asked, “What guilt offering shall we provide him with?” The priests and diviners answered, “Make five golden figures of hemorrhoids and five golden figures of mice corresponding to the number of Philistine cities, for the same plague was on all of you and on your chiefs.

So you must make images of your hemorrhoids and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will remove his hand from you, your gods and your land.” But do not harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did. After Yahweh had afflicted them, did they not have to let the people go?

Now, then, prepare a new cart and take two milking cows which have never carried a yoke. Yoke the cows to the cart but take their calves away from them.⁸ Then, take the ark of Yahweh and place it on the cart. Put in a box beside it the golden figures which you are providing him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way.⁹ Then, watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, through Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm. If not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us, that all these things happened to us by chance.”

The people carried out these instructions. They took two milking cows and yoked them to the cart and shut their calves in their shed.¹¹ They then put the ark of Yahweh on the cart, along with the box with the golden mice and the images of their hemorrhoids.¹² The cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along the way; they turned neither to the right nor to the left. Meanwhile, the chiefs of the Philistine cities followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley when they saw the ark drawing near, and they rejoiced greatly.¹⁴ The cart arrived in Beth-shemesh in Joshua's field and stopped there. A big stone lay nearby, so the people split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows over the stone as a burnt offering to the Lord.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Levites took down the ark of Yahweh and the box containing the golden figures, and they set these up on the big stone.

That day the people of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrifices to Yahweh. The five chiefs of the Philistine cities however, upon seeing what happened, immediately returned to Ekron.

These are the Philistine cities who gave golden figures of hemorrhoids as a guilt offering to Yahweh: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Akron.¹⁶ Similarly, there were golden figures of mice corresponding in number to all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five leaders, counting fortified cities and unwallled villages. The big stone beside which the people set down the ark of Yahweh in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh, is a witness to this day.

Yahweh caused the death of seventy men of Beth-shemesh who had looked into the ark of Yahweh. On seeing this, the people mourned greatly.²⁰ The people of Beth-shemesh then said, “Who can stand before Yahweh, this holy God? And where can we send the ark away from us?”²¹ So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim with this word, “The Philistines have returned the ark of Yahweh. Come down and take it up with you.”

7 The people of Kiriath-jearim came for the ark of Yahweh. They took it and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and they consecrated his son, Eleazar, to take charge of it.

Samuel awakens Israel

A very long time passed from the day the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim. For some twenty years, all Israel mourned and longed for Yahweh.

Then Samuel told the Israelites, “If you mean to turn back to Yahweh in all sincerity, then get rid of the foreign gods and the Ashteroth that you have with you. When you have set your heart on Yahweh and serve no one but him, he will deliver you from the Philistines.”⁴ So the Israelites got rid of the Baals and the Ashteroth and began serving no one but Yahweh.

Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel in Mizpah and I will pray to

6. Ex 7, 1 14. 2 S 24, 22; 1 K 19, 21 20. Mal 3, 2

2. Jdg 6, 6; 10, 10 3. Gen 35, 2; Jos 24, 14; Jdg 6, 1c

o The same experience recorded in the Judges is repeated here. Samuel convinces Is-

rael to return to Yahweh. Yahweh, in turn, faithful to his Covenant, grants them victory.



Yahweh on your behalf. ⁶ And so they gathered at Mizpah. They drew water and poured it before Yahweh. They fasted on that day and said, "We have sinned against Yahweh." It was Samuel who led this assembly of Israel and Mizpah.

⁷ When the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the chiefs of the Philistine cities went up to Israel's land. The Israelites became afraid when they learned this ⁸ and they said to Samuel, "Pray without ceasing to Yahweh our God on our behalf so that he may save us from the Philistines." ⁹ Samuel then took a suckling lamb and offered it to Yahweh as a whole burnt offering, appealing to Him in behalf of the people. And Yahweh answered him.

¹⁰ At the very time Samuel was offering the sacrifice, the Philistines launched an attack against Israel. But Yahweh's voice thundered loudly in the midst of the Philistines; they were suddenly confused and discouraged before Israel. ¹¹ The Israelites left Mizpah, pursuing and slaying the Philistines to a point beyond Beth-car.

¹² Samuel, then, took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah and named it Ebenezer, for he said, "Unto this place Yahweh has helped us." ¹³ After this defeat, the Philistines did not dare enter the territory of Israel and Yahweh held them in check for as long as Samuel lived. ¹⁴ The Israelites recov-

ered the cities from Ekron to Gath which the Philistines had seized from Israel. And there was peace, even between the Israelites and the Amorites.

¹⁵ Samuel was judge in Israel for the rest of his life. ¹⁶ Every year he went around to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah and judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ After that he returned to Ramah for his home was there. There he judged Israel and there he built an altar to Yahweh.

The people ask for a king

8 ¹ When Samuel grew old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ² His elder son was Joel and the second was Abijah, and both of them were judges in Beersheba. ³ But they were not like their father; they had their vested interests, taking bribes and perverting justice.

⁴ Because of this, all the chiefs of Israel gathered together and went to Samuel in Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, "You are already old and your sons are not following your ways. Give us a king to rule over us as in all the other nations.

⁶ Samuel was very displeased with what they said, "Give us a king to rule us," and he prayed to Yahweh. ⁷ And Yahweh told him, "Give to this people all that they ask for. ⁸ They are not rejecting you but they have rejected me as their king. They are now doing to you what they did to me from the day I brought them out of Egypt until now, forsaking me and serving

6. Jdg 20, 26

3. 2, 12; Ex 23, 8; Dt 16, 19

5. Ezk 20, 32; Est 3, 8

+ A new situation arises in Israel. The people realize their weakness which leads to division and anarchy. The temporary authority of the "Judges" does not suffice; the twelve tribes must unite around a king.

Samuel is a defender of the past, and his warnings are inspired by his personal distrust. He does not recognize the advantage of a stronger and more centralized government. Instead, he clearly denounces the dangers of a strong authority.

Samuel rebukes the people for their lack of faith in Yahweh. Today we would be talking about their security problem. They prefer to entrust to another the duty of taking initiative

and of being responsible for them. The same happens when democracy or agrarian reform are introduced, people miss either the dictator or the master who exploited them.

Wherever there is no personal initiative and individual responsibility, there political tyranny prevails. When individuals rely on the government for everything, there is general stagnation.

According to Samuel, theoretically the king will be God's representative and his people's servant. But in reality, he will serve his own ambitions and be the nation's oppressor. Already in that ancient time, dictators had enough knowledge of propaganda to convince people that they were indispensable (Lk 22:25).



other gods. ⁹ Nevertheless, listen to them, and give them a serious warning. Tell them how they will be treated by their king."

¹⁰ So Samuel answered those who were asking him for a king, ¹¹ and he told them all that Yahweh said to him. ¹² Look, these will be the demands of your king: he will take your sons and assign them to his chariots to be his horsemen or to run before his chariots. ¹³ Some he will assign as commanders over a thousand men and commanders over fifty. ¹⁴ He will take your sons to till his own ground and to reap his own harvest: to make his implements of war and the equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters as well to prepare perfumes, to cook and to bake for him.

¹⁵ He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards and your olive orchards and give them to his officials.

¹⁶ He will take a tenth portion of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants.

¹⁷ He will take your menservants and maidservants, the best of your cattle and your asses for his own work. ¹⁸ He will take the tenth of your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁹ When these things happen, you will cry out because of the king whom you have chosen for yourselves. But by then, Yahweh will not answer you."

²⁰ The people paid no attention to all that Samuel said. They insisted, "No! We want a king to govern us as in all the other nations." ²¹ Our king shall govern us, lead us and go ahead of us in our battles." ²² Upon hearing all that his people said, Samuel repeated it to Yahweh. ²³ But Yahweh said to him, "Listen to them and give

them a king." Samuel then said to the Israelites, "Go back, all of you, to your own cities."

The story of Saul

9 ¹ There was a man from the tribe of Benjamin whose name was Kish. He was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a valiant Benjaminite. ² Kish had a son named Saul, a handsome young man who had no equal among the Israelites, for he was a head taller than any of them.

³ It happened that the asses of Kish were lost. So he said to his son Saul, "Take one of the boys with you and go look for the asses." ⁴ They went all over the hill country of Ephraim and the land of Shalishah but did not find them. They passed through the land of Shaalim and the land of Benjamin, but the asses were nowhere to be found.

⁵ When they reached the land of Zuph, Saul said to his boy, "Let us go back, lest my father be more worried about us than about the asses." ⁶ But his servant said to him, "Look, there is a man of God in this city. He is a highly respected man. All that he says comes true. Let us see him for he may be able to help us find what we are looking for." ⁷ Saul replied, "But if we go, what can we bring him? We have no more bread in our sacks and we have no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?" ⁸ The servant answered, "I still have with me a quarter silver coin. I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way." ⁹ (Formerly, people in Israel who went to consult God, would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," for they did not speak of prophets, but of seers.)

11. 2 S 15, 1; 1 K 1, 5

17. Mt 3, 4

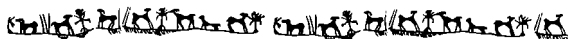
3. Jdg 10, 4

6. Jdg 18, 5

7. 1 K 14, 3

■ The continuation of ch. 8 is in 10:17. Here instead the story of Saul's vocation begins. Saul

sets out to look for his father's mules and, on the way, encounters something he did not expect.



¹⁰ And Saul said to his boy, "Well said! Come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was.

Samuel anoints Saul

◆ ¹¹ As they went up the hill to the city, they met young girls coming out to draw water and asked them, "Is the seer here?" ¹² The maidens answered, "The seer is straight ahead. He has just arrived because they have a sacrifice today on the high place." ¹³ As soon as you enter the city, you shall find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not eat until he comes because he must first bless the sacrifice and then, those who are invited may eat. Now go up; you will meet him immediately.

¹⁴ So they went up to the city and entered it, and saw Samuel coming out towards them on his way up to the high place.

¹⁵ The day before Saul came, Yahweh had already disclosed this to Samuel, ¹⁶ "Tomorrow, about this time, I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin and you shall anoint him to rule over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines for I have seen the affliction of my people and their cry has come to me."

¹⁷ So, when Samuel saw Saul, Yahweh told him, "Here is the man I spoke to you about! He shall rule over my people."

¹⁸ Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and said, "Tell me, where is the house of the seer?" ¹⁹ Samuel an-

swered Saul, "I am the seer. Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me. In the morning, before you leave, I will tell you all that is in your heart." ²⁰ As for your asses that were lost three days ago, do not worry about them for they have been found."

Samuel added, "For whom is the land of Israel? Isn't it for you and for all your father's kin?" ²¹ Saul answered, "I am a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the lowliest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why do you speak to me in this way?"

²² Samuel took Saul and his boy, brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of the table, before some thirty guests. ²³ Then Samuel told the cook, "Bring in the portion which I asked you to put aside." ²⁴ The cook brought in the leg with the tail portion and set it before Saul, saying to him, "This has been set aside for you. Please eat." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

²⁵ Then they went down from the high place and entered the city. On the terrace they prepared a bed for Saul where he lay down to sleep. ²⁶ Early the next morning, Samuel called to Saul, "Get up, for I must send you on your way." Saul got up and began to walk down the street with Samuel.

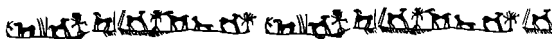
²⁷ As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell your servants to walk ahead. You stay here for a while and I shall give you a message from God."

16. Acts 9, 10

◆ The young Saul just like many other Israelites, goes to Samuel. For them the prophet is a seer, a diviner, and they go to him for some solution to their economic problems. We should not find this strange. For centuries, those who were addicted to the science of the stars also attended consultations concerning the future. Horoscopes were their way of earning a living. Afterwards, science departed from that supersti-

tion. Similarly, in the beginning, the prophet would transmit answers from God concerning everything. He attended to everyone's request for consultation and made his living from this. But Samuel first and the major prophets thereafter, knew that their mission was to guide the people on God's behalf.

Samuel anoints Saul with anointing oil. (See commentary on Lev 8).



10 ¹ Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on Saul's head. And kissing Saul, Samuel said, "Yahweh has anointed you to rule over and to lead his people Israel. And this will be Yahweh's sign to you that he has anointed you." ² After we part today, you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb at Zelzah, in the territory of Benjamin. They will say to you: "The asses you were looking for have been found. But your father is now worried about you, and what may have happened to you." ³ When you go on to the oak of Tabor, you will meet three men going up to see God at Bethel. One will be carrying three kids; another, three loaves of bread; and another, a skin of wine. ⁴ They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread which you are to accept from them. ⁵ After that, you will come to Gibeath-elohim where the garrison of the Philistines is. At the entrance of the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place, and a choir with harp, tambourine, flute and lyre going before them. They will be in a trance as the prophets used to be. ⁶ Then the Spirit of Yahweh will seize you. You shall prophesy with them and become another man.

⁷ Now when these signs are ful-

filled, do whatever seems good to you for God is with you. ⁸ You shall go down to Gilgal ahead of me, and I shall join you there to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. Wait there seven days until I come and tell you what you have to do."

⁹ As soon as Saul parted from Samuel, God transformed him into a different person and all the signs Samuel mentioned to Saul were fulfilled that day. ¹⁰ Upon entering Gibeah, a band of prophets met Saul; then the Spirit of God seized him and he began to prophesy with them.

¹¹ Those who knew him and saw him prophesying with the prophets asked one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also one of the prophets?" ¹² One of them exclaimed, "And who is his father!" This, therefore, became a saying. "Is Saul also one of the prophets?" ¹³ When Saul finished prophesying, he came back home.

¹⁴ Saul's uncle asked him and his boy, "Where did you go?" Saul answered, "To look for the asses. When we could not find them, we went to Samuel." ¹⁵ His uncle said, "Please, tell me what Samuel told you." ¹⁶ Saul replied, "He merely told us that the asses had been found." But Saul did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

Saul is elected king

¹⁷ After that, Samuel called the people together before Yahweh at Mizpah. ¹⁸ He then spoke to the Israelites, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: I brought Israel out of Egypt and

12. 19, 20

o Here is the logical continuation of ch. 8; it is another account of Saul's election. This one does not contradict the previous chapter, since Samuel consecrated Saul secretly and, some time later, the drawing of lots publicly shows the man whom God has chosen.

The same event is narrated in the Bible by two men of contrary opinions. The first saw the institution of kings as a good thing and in accordance with God's plan (Chr 9-10); the second (Sam 8 and 10:17-19) saw it as a dangerous innovation which God merely tolerated. In bringing together these two accounts, the Bible helps us understand that no political party owns the truth and that usually those who defend contrary positions have each of them some part of the truth.

He is hidden among the baggage. Here begins the tragedy of Saul, king in spite of himself. The Israelites asked for a king because of external threats (the Philistines), but in their innermost self they rejected all authority. Saul himself did not feel cut out for governing. In spite of his courage, as seen in ch. 11, he was not one to risk himself. He was an obstinate man; attached to the ideas of his time (See ch. 25). Saul, a modest man, did not have the humility that God likes, which consists in undertaking new and great things without being afraid of possible failure.

Everybody shouted: Long live the King! We have witnessed several enthusiastic meetings such as this, which led to no positive result. As happens to many leaders, the next day Saul finds himself alone in the midst of a people who think



I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and all the kingdoms oppressing you.¹⁹ But you have this day rejected your God who saves you from all your calamities and your distress. You have said, 'No! Give us a king to rule over us.' So now present yourselves before Yahweh, grouping yourselves into tribes and clans."

²⁰ Then Samuel made all the tribes of Israel come near him and when they cast lots, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen.²¹ He made the families of the tribe of Benjamin come near him, and the family of the Matrites was chosen. He made the members of the family of Matrites come near him, and the lot fell to Saul, son of Kish. They looked for him but could not find him.²² So they asked Yahweh again, "Did the man come here?" Yahweh answered, "He has hidden himself among the baggage."²³ They ran to fetch him and when Saul stood among the people, they saw that he was a head taller than the others.²⁴ Samuel spoke and said, "Do you see the one Yahweh has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

²⁵ Samuel then told the people the rights and duties of the king. He wrote all these in a book and presented it before Yahweh. Then Samuel sent all the people home.²⁶ Saul himself went home to Gibeah with these valiant men whose hearts God had touched.²⁷ Some evil people, however, remarked: "How can this man save us?" And they ignored Saul and brought him no gift.

Saul rescues the city of Jabesh

+11 ¹ One month later, Nahash the Ammonite went to Jabesh-gilead and surrounded the city. The people of Jabesh told Nahash, "Make an agreement with us and we will serve you."² Nahash answered, "I will make an agreement with you on this condition: I will pluck out the

right eye of all of you, so that Israel will be left disgraced."³ The elders of Jabesh then told him, "Give us seven days so we may send messengers through all the territories of Israel. If none of them comes to save us, we will surrender to you."

⁴ So the messengers went to Gibeah of Saul, breaking the news to the people. And all the people wept aloud.

⁵ Just then Saul came from the field with his oxen. He asked, "What has happened to make the people weep?" And they told him what the men of Jabesh had said.⁶ At once, the spirit of God seized Saul and he was greatly angered.⁷ He took a yoke of oxen, cut them into pieces and gave them to the messengers to be taken through all the territories of Israel with this warning. "I will do the same with the oxen of anyone who does not come out after Saul and Samuel."

Then a holy fear came upon the people and they set out as one man.

⁸ When Saul inspected them at Bezek, the men of Israel were three hundred thousand; those of Judah, thirty thousand.⁹ And they sent the messengers with this answer to the people of Jabesh, "Tomorrow, by noontime, we shall come to you." When the messengers returned, the people of Jabesh were very comforted¹⁰ and they told Nahash, "Tomorrow we will surrender and you may do to us whatever you please."

¹¹ The following morning, Saul,

that they have solved everything because an election has been carried out.

+ The account which was interrupted in chap. 10:16 is resumed here. The people of Jabesh are disposed to accept peace. Israel weeps and shouts, but Saul decides that this situation is unbearable. His courage obliges God to act.

Who are those who asked if Saul was going to reign? There is no political life without parties. From the beginning, Saul has his allies and his foes. But he must heed even more the

"tribalism" of the Israelites, especially the rivalry between the northern tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin, and the tribe of Judah, in the south. As for the people of Jabesh, they will remain grateful to their saviour and will be faithful to him until after his death. (See 1 Sam 31:11).

Saul is a good and generous man who does not take revenge on his enemies. Yet when one is the highest authority, he easily isolates himself from others and becomes arrogant or pessimistic. Saul will refuse to listen to God and to his

20. Jos 7, 16

24. 2 K 11, 12; Dt 17, 4

6. 10, 6



divided the people into three groups. They broke into the enemy camp early in the morning and slew the Ammonites until noontime. Those who could escape were scattered, each one running his own way.

¹² Then the people asked Samuel, "Who are these who said: Saul will never reign over us? Bring the men and we shall put them to death."¹³ But Saul said, "No man shall be put to death today, for this day Yahweh has saved Israel."

¹⁴ Samuel told the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and officially proclaim the king."¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal and there they proclaimed Saul king before Yahweh. They sacrificed peace offerings and Saul and all Israel celebrated.

Samuel gives way to Saul

12 ¹ Samuel spoke to the Israelites, "Listen. I have paid attention to all that you have told me and have given you a king. ² From now on, the king is here to lead you. As for me, I am old and my hair gray. My sons are with you. I have led you from my youth, and I have done so until this day. ³ Now, if you have complaints against me, I am here. Say it before Yahweh and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I stolen? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? Have I taken a bribe from anyone? Testify against me and I will restore it to you."⁴ But they said, "You have not cheated or

oppressed us; you have not stolen anything from anyone."

⁵ Then Samuel said, "Yahweh is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they answered, "He is witness."

⁶ Samuel then said to the people, "Yahweh is witness, he who sent Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt. ⁷ Now, stand still, that I may confront you with all the deeds of Yahweh who saved you and your ancestors. ⁸ Jacob went to Egypt and the Egyptians oppressed your ancestors. Then they cried to Yahweh and he sent Moses and Aaron. They brought your ancestors out of Egypt and brought them to this land. ⁹ But they forgot Yahweh, their God and he delivered them into the hands of Sisera, commander of the army of Jabin, king of Hazor, into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the king of Moab who fought against them. ¹⁰ Then your ancestors cried to Yahweh and said: 'We have sinned, forsaking Yahweh and serving the Baals and the Ashteroth. But now, deliver us out of the hands of our enemies and we will serve you.' ¹¹ And Yahweh sent Jerubbaal and Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hands of your enemies from all sides, so that you lived in safety in your land.

¹² Now, when you saw that Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, attacked you, you said to me: 'No! Let a king rule over us' although Yahweh your God was your king. ¹³ Yet Yahweh has given you the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for. May you fear Yahweh and serve him! ¹⁴ May you listen to him and not go against his commandments! And both you and the king who reigns over you will be happy following Yahweh, your God. ¹⁵ But if you will not listen to Yahweh and if you break his commandments, his hand will be against you and your kingdom.

¹⁶ Now wait awhile that you may see the wonder which Yahweh will do before you. ¹⁷ Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call on

11. Jdg 7, 16	12. 14, 45; 2 S 19, 23	3. Num 16, 15; Acts 20, 33	9. Jdg 4-5; Jdg 13-16
11. Jdg 6-8	14. Dt 13, 5	17. Jdg 6, 36	

relatives, and his jealousy will blind him, as in the case of David.

■ On his retirement, Samuel gives Saul and his successors a last lesson. He invites future kings and those given responsibility to examine themselves to see if they are totally disinterested in the discharge of their functions, or if they are

using them for their vested interests. (See a similar discourse of Paul in Acts 20:33).

Samuel is also an example for those who should retire when they are no longer able to serve. He belonged to another time, that of the Judges, and there was no place for him in the monarchy which was set up. It was enough for him that he had prepared a successor.



Yahweh that he may send thunder and rain. So you shall know and see that you have gone very wrong in asking for another king."

¹⁸ So Samuel called on Yahweh who sent thunder and rain on that day. Then all the people greatly feared Yahweh and Samuel.

¹⁹ The people said to Samuel, "Pray to Yahweh, your God, for your servants so we may not die. For we have added to our sins this evil of asking for a king." ²⁰ Samuel told the people, "Fear not! You have done evil, but now you must not turn away from Yahweh. Serve him, instead, with all your heart. ²¹ Do not go after these useless and vain idols that are unable to save. ²² Yahweh will not cast away his people; his great Name has been pleased to make you his people. ²³ As for me, how can I commit the sin of ceasing to pray for you? I will continue to instruct you in the good and right way. ²⁴ Only fear Yahweh and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for you have seen the wonderful things he has done for you. ²⁵ But if you still persist in wickedness, both you and your king shall be swept away."

+13 ¹²...Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with him in Michmash and in the hills of Bethel, and a thousand with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul sent the rest of the people away, every man to his home. ³ Jonathan killed the Philistine governor in Geba and the Philistines heard of this. Saul then blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" ⁴ And the news spread throughout Israel, "Saul has killed the Philistine governor and now Israel is at war with them." And they called everyone out to join Saul at Gilgal.

The "sin" of Saul

◆ ⁵ The Philistines gathered to fight with Israel – three thousand

chariots, six thousand horsemen, and troops as many as the sand on the seashore. They went up and encamped in Michmash, East of Bethaven. ⁶ When the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble, they hid themselves in caves, in holes, in rocks, in tombs and in cisterns, ⁷ or crossed the fords of the Jordan River to the land of Gad and Gilead.

⁸ Saul was still at Gilgal and all the people with him were afraid. He waited seven days – the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not arrive at Gilgal and the people were beginning to disperse. ⁹ So Saul said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings as well." Saul then offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰ He had just finished offering when Samuel arrived. Saul went out to greet Samuel who threw him this question, "What have you done?" Saul answered him, "When I saw the people beginning to disperse because of your failure to arrive on time, and considering that the Philistines have mustered their forces at Michmash, ¹² I said to myself, 'The Philistines will launch their attack against Yahweh's blessings, and so I decided to offer the burnt offerings.'" ¹³ Samuel told Saul, "You have done a foolish thing by not obeying the command of Yahweh your

18. Ex 14, 31

24. J1 2, 20

5. 2 S 17, 11

6. Jdg 6, 2

12. 1 K 13, 6

+ Saul did not think of leaving his town of Geba to construct a capital for the new state of Israel. But, gradually, he created a permanent army, instead of merely depending on volunteers who presented themselves whenever the people were in danger. (See 14:52) For years, he fought unceasingly to repel incursions of the Philistines.

◆ Not once, but on several occasions Saul vacillates between obedience to God and Samuel, and doing what appears to him more reasonable. (See also chap. 15) Finally, he prefers to act according to his own judgements.

Yahweh would have secured your rule over Israel. Yahweh demands more from him who will be the first king of his people, and with

whom he wants to establish a lasting covenant! To receive from Yahweh promises which go beyond ordinary destiny, Saul has to show complete loyalty, even when it seems that God delays or is mistaken. In this, Abraham was proved, and in this, Saul failed.

In recounting the story of the kings and leaders of Israel, the Bible makes us understand that power is too heavy a burden for man. Authority and money fatally corrupt those whom God himself had elected but who seek and earn the approval of their contemporaries. (See Judges 8:22) To rule over others and, ever more, to direct the destiny of a nation is somehow to partake in God's authority. No one can measure up to such responsibilities if he cannot obey and listen to God more than to his subjects.



God who would have established your rule forever. ¹⁴But now your kingship will not last, for Yahweh has chosen someone else more pleasing to him, whom he has appointed to be commander over his people because you have not done what Yahweh commanded you." ¹⁵Samuel then left Gilgal for Gibeah of Benjamin.

Saul reviewed his men numbering some six hundred. ¹⁶While Saul and his son, Jonathan, stayed in Gebah of Benjamin with the men, the Philistines pitched camp in Michmash. ¹⁷Raiders came out of the Philistine camp in three companies – one company turned to Ophrah, to the land of Shual; ¹⁸the other, to Bethoron; and the third, to the border overlooking the valley of Zeboim, toward the wilderness.

¹⁹The Israelites had no smith anywhere in their land for the Philistines did not want the Hebrews to make their own swords or spears. ²⁰To have their ploughshare, mattock, axe or sickle sharpened, the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines ²¹who would charge them two thirds of a shekel for ploughshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening axes and setting goads. ²²And so, on the day of battle, the Israelites had neither sword nor spear. Only Saul and Jonathan had them.

²³Yet the Philistine raiders had moved on toward the pass of Michmash.

+14 ¹The same day, Jonathan, son of Saul, said to his armour-bearer, "Let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side. Jonathan did not inform his father about this. ²Saul was at that time on the out-

skirts of Gibeah, at Migron, under the pomegranate tree with about six hundred men. ³Also with Saul was Ahijah, son of Ahitub, brother of Ichabod, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, priest of Yahweh in Shiloh, and he was wearing the ephod to consult Yahweh. Not even the soldiers knew that Jonathan had left them.

⁴The pass through which Jonathan planned to go to reach the Philistine garrison was flanked by a rocky crag on each side: one called Bozez, the other, Seneh. ⁵One of the crags was to the north in the direction of Michmash; the other to the south, in the direction of Giba.

⁶Jonathan said to his shield-bearer, "Let us go over to the garrison of those uncircumcised fellows. It may be that Yahweh will help us, for it is as easy for Yahweh to give victory with a few men as with many." ⁷His armour-bearer replied, "Do whatever you think best. As for me, I follow and obey you." ⁸Jonathan said, "Look, we will draw near and show ourselves to those men. ⁹When they see us, if they cry out: 'Stay there and we shall go over to you,' we shall stay quiet and go no further. ¹⁰But if they say: 'Come up to us,' we shall go up because that will be a sign that Yahweh has delivered them into our hands."

¹¹When the two were seen by the Philistines, the latter exclaimed, "Look! Hebrews coming out of their hiding places!" ¹²And they challenged Jonathan and his shield-bearer, "Come over here and we will teach you a lesson!" Jonathan then told his armour-bearer, "Follow me, for Yahweh has delivered them into the hands of Israel." ¹³Then Jonathan crawled up on feet and hands, his armour-bearer following him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armour-bearer finished them off. ¹⁴In that first slaying by Jonathan and his armour-bearer, about twenty men lost their lives within half a furlong. ¹⁵Panic struck in the camp and the countryside, sowing terror in the garrison. Even the band of raiders was disturbed. It was like an earthquake and they were filled with a holy terror.

¹⁶Saul's watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin saw the commotion in the camp: the Philistines were running and scattering in all

20. Jdg 14, 1

3. 4, 21; Jdg 8, 27

6. 1 Ma 3, 18; 2 Ma 4, 31

+ Chapter 14 helps us understand the Israelites' situation. They occupy the mountain, but the Philistines who are better organized and better armed, lord it over the plains.

The incident of Saul's oath shows the very primitive level of religious knowledge at that time, as in the case of Jephtha (Judges 11:30):

- an oath with a death-threat
- importance given to the crime of one who "eats over the blood" (See verse 33: it was not the same as to "eat meat with blood" as in Lev 17:8).
- the practice of casting lots to get Yahweh's response.



directions. ¹⁷ Saul then told those who were around him, "Count our men and see who is missing." And they discovered that Jonathan and his armour-bearer were not with them. ¹⁸ Saul ordered Ahijah: "Bring the ephod," because Ahijah had taken it with him. ¹⁹ But while Saul was talking to the priest, the confusion in the Philistine camp increased. Saul then told the priest, "Withdraw your hand," ²⁰ and after consulting his men, he went with them to the camp. They saw that there was complete confusion and the soldiers were striking each other with their swords. ²¹ Moreover, the Hebrews who had joined the Philistines turned around and sided with the Israelites under Saul and Jonathan. ²² When the Israelites who were hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they came out from hiding and pursued them. ²³ And so Yahweh delivered Israel that day in a battle that extended beyond Beth-horon.

²⁴ On that day, however, as the Israelites became weary, Saul took an oath putting the people under the ban, "Cursed be the man who takes food before evening, before I have avenged myself on my enemies." Because of this oath, no one dared touch any food. ²⁵ As the men wandered into the forest, they saw honey on the ground and ²⁶ although it was freely dripping from the honeycomb, no one tasted it for fear of the oath. ²⁷ But Jonathan, who had not heard of this oath, dipped the tip of the rod he was holding in the honeycomb and put it to his lips. And he felt fortified. ²⁸ At this, someone said, "Though the people were tired your father bound them with this oath: Cursed be the man who takes food today." ²⁹ Then Jonathan said, "My father did you wrong. See how I feel fortified for having tasted a little of this honey." ³⁰ If only our men had freely eaten today of the spoil of their enemies, the Philistine would have suffered an even greater defeat."

³¹ Nevertheless they pursued the Philistines all the way from Michmash to Ajalon. Then the people, extremely worn out, ³² rushed to the spoils and took sheep, oxen, and calves and, after they had slaughtered them on the ground, they ate over the blood. ³³ Saul was told that the people were sinning against Yahweh by eating over the blood. He said, "You have acted like pagan people! Roll a large stone here in front of me." ³⁴ Then he added, "Go around and tell the people to bring their oxen or their sheep to me. Slaughter them here and eat, but do not offend Yahweh by eating over the blood." So that night, everyone brought what he had of the spoils and slaugh-

tered it there. ³⁵ Then Saul built an altar to Yahweh – the first he ever built to Him.

³⁶ Then Saul said, "Let us attack the Philistines by night and finish them off by morning without leaving a single man alive." To this the people replied, "Do what you think is best." But the priest said, "We must consult Yahweh." ³⁷ So Saul asked, "Shall I attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into the hands of Israel?" But God did not answer him that day. ³⁸ Saul said, "Call all the army officers here. We must find out who is responsible for the sin that has been committed today." ³⁹ I swear before Yahweh, who has just saved Israel, that he shall surely die even if it happens to be my son, Jonathan." No one answered Saul. ⁴⁰ He told the people, "Go, stand on one side while I and my son Jonathan, stand on the other." The people answered, "Do what you think is good." ⁴¹ Then Saul said, "O Yahweh, God of Israel, why did you not answer your servant this time? If it is my son, Jonathan, or I who have sinned, O Yahweh, God of Israel, let the casting of lot show Urim; if it is your people Israel who have sinned, let the casting of lot show Thummin." The casting of lot pointed to Jonathan and Saul, not to the people. ⁴² Saul then said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." The lot singled out Jonathan.

⁴³ Saul then said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan replied, "All I did was to taste a little honey from the tip of the rod that I dipped in the honeycomb! Am I to die for this?" Saul said, ⁴⁴ "May God strike me down if you are not put to death, Jonathan." ⁴⁵ But the people protested, "By no means shall Jonathan die, he who has brought this resounding victory to Israel! Not at all! By Yahweh's life not one hair of his head will fall, for he has won this war today with God's assistance." So the people rescued Jonathan from certain death. ⁴⁶ After that, Saul ceased to pursue the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own country.

⁴⁷ When Saul felt secure as king of Israel, he began to fight against all his surrounding enemies, Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah and the Philistines, routing his enemies wherever he went. ⁴⁸ He crushed the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who were plundering them.

⁴⁹ The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua; his two daughters were Merab, his firstborn, and Michal. ⁵⁰ His wife was Ahinoam, daughter of Ahimaaz. The general of his army was Abner, son of Ner who was Saul's uncle. ⁵¹ Kish was the father of Saul:



and Ner, the father of Abner, was the son of Abiel.

²² There was continual war between Saul and the Philistines during Saul's entire rule, so whenever he discovered a stray or brave man, he recruited him into his service.

Saul is rejected as king

15 ¹ Samuel told Saul, "Yahweh sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel. So now listen to what ² he has to say to you: I will punish Amalek for having stood in the way of the Israelites when they were leaving Egypt. ³ Now attack Amalek and destroy completely all that he has. Do not spare them - man, woman, infant or suckling, ox or sheep, camel or ass."

⁴ Saul called his men to Telaim and reviewed two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. ⁵ He went to the city of Amalek, set an ambush in the valley and ⁶ proceeded to warn the Kenites, "Leave the Amalekites! I do not want to punish you with them since you showed kindness to the people of Israel when they left Egypt." After the Kenites had left, ⁷ Saul inflicted a heavy defeat on the Amalekites, from Havilah to Shur, east of Egypt. ⁸ He took Agag, king of the Amalekites alive, but put the rest of the people to the sword. ⁹ Saul and his men spared Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings and lambs and everything that was good, but destroyed all that was worthless.

¹⁰ Then Yahweh spoke to Samuel: "I feel sorry for having made Saul king because he has turned his back on me and has not kept my command." ¹¹ Samuel was troubled and cried to Yahweh all night. ¹² Early next morning, he went looking for Saul, but was told that Saul had set off for Carmel to erect a monument to Gilgal and then had gone on his way to Gilgal. ¹³ When finally they met, Saul greeted Samuel, "May Yahweh bless you," and added, "I have done what Yahweh told me to do."

¹⁴ Samuel then asked him, "Why do I still hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen?"

¹⁵ Saul replied, "We have brought them from the Amalekites, because the people spared the best sheep and oxen to sacrifice to Yahweh, your God. But the rest have been destroyed."

¹⁶ Samuel then told Saul, "Enough! Let me tell you what Yahweh said to me last night." Saul replied, "Please tell me." ¹⁷ So Samuel went on and said, "Though you had no confidence in yourself, you became chief of the tribes of Israel, for Yahweh wanted to anoint you king

over Israel. ¹⁸ Now he has sent you with this command, 'Go. Completely crush the Amalekite offenders, engaging them in battle until they are destroyed.' ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of Yahweh and instead swoop down on the spoil, doing what was evil in his sight?" ²⁰ To this, Saul replied, "I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh and have carried out the mission for which he sent me. I have captured Agag, king of Amalek and completely destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹ If my men carried away the best sheep and oxen from among those to be destroyed, it was in order to sacrifice them to Yahweh, your God, in Gilgal."

²² Samuel then said,

"Does Yahweh take as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to his command? Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission, better than the fat of rams. ²³ Rebellion is like the sin of divination, and stubbornness, like holding onto idols. Since you have rejected the word of Yahweh, he too, has rejected you as king."

²⁴ Saul then told Samuel, "I have sinned in disobeying Yahweh's command and your instructions. I feared my own men and obeyed them instead. ²⁵ Please forgive my sin and return with me so I may worship Yahweh."

²⁶ Samuel refused and said, "I will not return with you because you have rejected the word of Yahweh and he has rejected you as king of Israel." ²⁷ As Samuel turned to leave, Saul held onto the end of his robe, which tore. ²⁸ Then Samuel said to Saul, "Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to someone better than you. ²⁹ The Glory of Israel does not change or repent as man does."

³⁰ Saul then said, "I have sinned. But please honour me now before the elders of my people and before Israel. Return with me so that I may worship Yahweh, your God." ³¹ And Samuel returned with Saul who went to worship Yahweh.

³² Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, king of the Amalekites." Agag stood before him with a cheerful face, thinking that he was now out of danger. ³³ But Samuel told him, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." Then Samuel dealt a mortal blow to Agag before Yahweh in Gilgal.

³⁴ Samuel left for Ramah while Saul went home to Gibeath of Saul. ³⁵ From that day Samuel did not see Saul again until he died, but he was grieving over Saul because Yahweh regretted having made him king over Israel.

Samuel anoints David

16 ¹Yahweh asked Samuel, "Until when will you be grieving over Saul if I am the one who rejected him as king of Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way to Jesse the Bethlehemite for I have chosen my king from among his sons."

²Samuel asked, "How can I go? If Saul hears of this, he will kill me!" Yahweh replied, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to Yahweh.' ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice and I will let you know what to do next. You shall anoint for me the one I point out to you."

⁴Samuel did what Yahweh commanded and left for Bethlehem. When he appeared, the elders of the city came to him asking, fearfully, "Do you bring us peace?" ⁵Samuel replied, "I come in peace and I am here to sacrifice to Yahweh. Cleanse yourselves and join me in the sacrifice." He also had Jesse and his sons cleansed and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶As they came, Samuel looked at Eliab the older and thought, "This must be Yahweh's anointed." ⁷But Yahweh told Samuel, "Do not judge by his looks or his stature for I have

rejected him. Yahweh does not judge as man judges; man sees the appearance; Yahweh sees the heart."

⁸Jesse called his son Abinadab and presented him to Samuel who said, "Yahweh, has not chosen this one either." ⁹Jesse presented Shammah and Samuel said, "Nor has Yahweh chosen this one." ¹⁰Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel who said, "Yahweh has chosen none of them." ¹¹But are all your sons here?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, tending the flock just now." Samuel said to him, "Send for him and bring him to me; we shall not sit down to eat until he arrives." ¹²So Jesse sent for his youngest son and brought him to Samuel. He was a handsome lad, ruddy and with attractive eyes. And Yahweh spoke, "Go, anoint him for he is the one." ¹³Samuel then took the horn of oil and anointed him in his brothers' presence. From that day onwards, Yahweh's Spirit took hold of David. Then Samuel left for Ramah.

o ¹⁴The spirit of Yahweh had left Saul and an evil spirit sent by Yahweh tormented him. ¹⁵Saul's servants said to him, "We know that an evil spirit sent by God is tormenting you. ¹⁶If you so wish, your servants who stand

1. 2 K 9, 1; Is 11, 1; Mi 5, 1; Rut 4, 17
15. 19, 9

3. Dt 17, 15

11. 16, 19; 17, 15

14. 18, 10

■ *How long will you mourn for Saul?* Sometimes, we remain grounded, immobile, longing for the past, when events in life are pushing us forward to change plans and forecasts.

Samuel goes to Bethlehem to meet the one whom God chose. Bethlehem is the city of David's family. There, Jesus will be born ten centuries later.

David, Jesse's son, is tending the flock when they send for him. He is a shepherd before he becomes king. In the Bible, the shepherd is the image of the perfect king who, rather than being an important man, has to attend to persons and serve them as the shepherd does his sheep. Jesus, King and Saviour, will introduce himself as the good Shepherd whom the prophets were dreaming of. (See Ez 34 and Jn 10)

Man sees the face; Yahweh, the heart. In the

adolescent David, there is yet no evidence of the moral qualities, intelligence and courage which he will display as military chief and politician. Still, God knows whom he chooses. In order to bring his work to completion, God does not choose those who pretend to be greater than they are (See 1 Cor. 1:28).

In any human group, it is necessary to discover the values of each person and not allow oneself to be deceived by appearances. It is very important for Christian communities that those with responsibility know how "to look into the heart" of brothers and sisters, whether they be the quiet ones or those who show much zeal. Then it will not be long before they find the persons needed to animate the community, and can by-pass the ambitious ones.

o *We find in the Bible different traditions*

before you will look for someone who can play the lyre so when the evil spirit from God comes over you, he will play and you will feel better."

¹⁷ So Saul answered them, "Get someone who can play the lyre well." ¹⁸ One of them said, "A son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, plays very well. He is moreover, a courageous man, intelligent and pleasant to talk with and Yahweh is with him."

¹⁹ So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and asked for his son David who tended the sheep.

²⁰ Jesse loaded an ass with bread, a wineskin and a kid and had David take all these to Saul.

²¹ David then left and entered Saul's service. Saul grew very fond of David and made him his armour-bearer. ²² Then he sent word to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service for I am very pleased with him."

²³ So, whenever the evil spirit from God overpowered Saul, David would play on the lyre and Saul would feel better for the evil spirit would leave him.

17 ¹ The Philistines prepared their forces for battle and gathered together at Socoh, a territory of Judah. They encamped between Socoh and Azekah in Ephesdammim. ² Saul and the Israelites meantime, assembled and pitched camp in the valley of Elah, ready for their encounter with the Philistines. ³ The Philistines took their position on one hill while the Israelites took theirs on another hill, with a valley separating the two forces.

David and Goliath

◆ ⁴ Then a champion named Goliath came out from the Philistine camp. He was from Gath and was about three meters tall. ⁵ His armour was made of bronze, his helmet and coat weighed sixty kilos. ⁶ He had bronze greaves strapped on his legs and a bronze spear slung between his shoulders. ⁷ The shaft of his spear was the size of a weaver's rod; its head weighed seven kilos. His shield-bearer went before him.

⁸ He stood in front of the Israelite ranks and shouted, "Why have you

come out in battle array? I am a Philistine and you are Saul's men! Choose a man from among yourselves who can challenge me. ⁹ If he fights better and kills me, we shall be subject to you; but if I overpower him and kill him, you shall be subject to us."

¹⁰ The Philistine added, "This is my challenge to the Israelite troops this day. Give me a man who can fight with me alone!" ¹¹ When they heard this challenge of the Philistine, Saul and his men were afraid and greatly terrified.

¹² Now, David was the son of Jesse, an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah who had eight sons. Jesse was already old during Saul's reign but he had sent men to the army. ¹³ Three of his eldest sons had joined Saul in battle: Eliab, the firstborn, Abinadab, the second and Shammah, the third. ¹⁴ David was Jesse's youngest and, while the three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵ he would alternate his goings and comings to the army with the care of his father's flock in Bethlehem.

¹⁶ Every day in the morning and again at evening, the Philistine would come out to throw his challenge; this he did for forty days. ¹⁷ One day, Jesse told his son David, "Bring a measure of this roasted grain and these ten loaves to your brothers; ¹⁸ and take these ten cheeses to the field officer. Find out how your brothers are and bring me back some token from them." ¹⁹ David's brothers and the field officer were with Saul and the Israelites in the valley of Elah, facing the Philistines.

²⁰ David woke up early the next morning and entrusted the sheep to a shepherd. Taking the food along with him, he left in obedience to Jesse's command and arrived at the encampment just when the army was leaving for the battleground, shouting out their battle cry. ²¹ Israel and the Philistine drew up facing one another. ²² On seeing this, David entrusted his

10. 2 S 2, 14

with respect to David's promotion: 16:1, 3:16-14-23:17-17:58. What is history and what legend, in each of these?

An evil spirit from God (14). This is an ancient way of saying that God allowed Saul to suffer some psychological disorder.

◆ David's challenge delighted the Israelites down through the centuries and still delights us today as well. We should not be surprised there-

fore, that the redactors have elaborated with generous details David's fight with "the Philistine" who was later called Goliath.

Those who redacted these books were inspired by God; they understood that David's struggle with Goliath symbolized the struggle between good and evil.

You come to me with spear and sword; but I come against you in Yahweh's name. In the world, victory will not come to those who are



load to the baggage keeper and rushed to the ranks to greet his brothers. ²³ While he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion of Gath, came up from the ranks of the Philistines and shouted out the same challenge as before, this time reaching David's ears.

²⁴ When the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him terrified ²⁵ and one of them said, "Have you seen this man who comes up challenging Israel? Whoever succeeds in killing him will be richly rewarded by the king. He will give him his daughter in marriage and set his family free of every contribution."

²⁶ David asked those who were around him, "What will be the reward for the person who kills this Philistine and lifts this disgrace from Israel? And who is this uncircumcised Philistine who defies the armies of the living God?" ²⁷ The people answered him in the same way, "This will be the reward of whoever kills him."

²⁸ When he saw David talking to the men, his eldest brother Eliab was angry and said, "Why did you come here? With whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know your pretensions: the only reason for which you came is to enjoy the sight of this battle."

²⁹ David asked, "What have I done this time? I was merely asking something!" ³⁰ Leaving his brother, David turned to another man and asked him the same question, and the people answered him the same way as before.

³¹ David's remarks spread around and reached Saul, who asked for him.

³² David said to Saul, "Let no one be discouraged on account of this Philistine for your servant will engage him in battle." ³³ Saul told David, "You cannot fight with this Philistine for you are still young whereas this man has been a warrior from his youth." ³⁴ But David said, "When I was tending my father's sheep, when-

ever a lion or bear came to snatch a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I would run after it, kill it and rescue the victim from its mouth. If it attacked me, I would hold it by its beard and slay it. ³⁶ I have killed lions and bears and will do the same with this uncircumcised Philistine, for he has defied the armies of the living God." ³⁷ David continued, "Yahweh, who delivered me from the paws of lions and bears, will deliver me from the hands of the Philistine."

Saul then told David, "Go and may Yahweh be with you!"

³⁸ Saul fitted his armour on David, put a bronze helmet on his head, clothed him with a coat of mail ³⁹ and secured his sword over his armour. David tried to walk but could not because he was not accustomed to the armour. So he said to Saul, "I cannot move with all these trappings on me because I am not accustomed to wearing them." David got rid of all this armour, ⁴⁰ took his staff, picked up five smooth stones from the brook and dropped them inside his shepherd's bag. And with his sling in hand, he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴¹ The Philistine moved forward, closing in on David, his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² When he saw that David was only a lad, (he was of fresh complexion and handsome) he despised him ⁴³ and said, "Am I a dog that you should approach me with a stick?" Cursing David by his gods,

25. 18, 27

44. Dt 28, 26

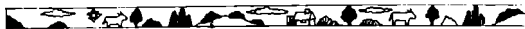
stronger or more heavily armed. Such people insult God by their pride and self-confidence. And they will not last long if they insult the people of God, especially the lowly.

Victory will belong to the weak who trust in God's help. Here the winner is a young man who personifies those who remain young in heart and maintain a clear conscience.

Some invite David to protect himself with Saul's armour and arms. David understands that if he uses arms similar to those of the Philistine, he will not know how to use them and the latter

will prevail over him. In the end, the Philistine dies, a victim of his own weapons.

David's fight can easily be compared to that of the Church. She leaves behind Saul's armour: when she looks for less organization, less worry over financing her works and buildings; when she frees herself from political support. In abandoning all these protections, she makes herself more free and younger. Like David, she goes to battle trusting "in the name of Yahweh, God of Israel's armies."



⁴⁴ he continued, "Come and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field!"

⁴⁵ David answered the Philistine, "You have come against me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come against you with Yahweh, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defiled. ⁴⁶ Yahweh will deliver you this day into my hands and I will strike you down and cut off your head. I will give the corpses of the Philistine army today to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, and all the earth shall know that there is a God of Israel. ⁴⁷ All the people gathered here shall know that Yahweh saves not by sword or spear; the battle belongs to Yahweh, and he will deliver you into our hands."

⁴⁸ No sooner had the Philistine moved to attack him, than David rushed to the battleground. ⁴⁹ Putting his hand into his bag, he took out a stone, slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead; it penetrated his forehead and he fell on his face to the ground. ⁵⁰ David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, felling him without using a sword. ⁵¹ He rushed forward, stood over him, took the Philistine's sword and slew him by cutting off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they scattered in all directions. ⁵² The men of Israel and Judah raised the battle cry and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. Wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim to

Gath and Ekron. ⁵³ Returning from their pursuit of the Philistines, the Israelites plundered their camp. ⁵⁴ David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem but left the armour in his tent.

⁵⁵ When Saul saw David come out to oppose the Philistine, he asked his general, Abner, "Abner, whose son is that young man?" Abner answered, "I swear, O king, I do not know." ⁵⁶ The king said, "Ask whose son that lad is." ⁵⁷ So when David returned after killing the Philistine, Abner took him to Saul. ⁵⁸ Saul asked David, who stood before him holding the head of the Philistine, "Whose son are you, young man?" David answered, "I am the son of your servant, Jesse the Bethlehemite."

David, Saul and Jonathan

o18 ¹ When David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan felt a deep affection for David and began to love him as himself. ² Saul kept David with him from that day and did not allow him to return to his father's house. ³ Then Jonathan made an agreement with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan, taking off the robe he was wearing, gave it to David; he also gave him his own armour, sword, bow and belt.

⁵ Wherever Saul sent David, he went and succeeded. For this reason, Saul put David in charge of the soldiers – a move which pleased Saul's men and his officers as well. ⁶ When he returned from his victorious battle with the Philistines, the women came out from the cities of Israel to meet King Saul singing and dancing with timbrels and musical instruments. ⁷ They were merrily singing this song to one another: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David, his tens of thousands."

47. 1 K 18, 37; 2 K 19, 19

3. 19, 1; 23, 16; 2 S 1, 26

6. Ex 15, 20; Jdg 11, 34

10. 16, 14

Jonathan gets to like David. The Bible describes for us this deep and loyal friendship as a gift of God, surpassing the rivalry with Saul. He gave David his own mantle, his sword, his bow and belt . . . spontaneity, frankness.

Although David and Jonathan were not children but young men, we can apply to them these words of a poet: "Remember that this horrible world is yet solely maintained by the sweet com-

placency, continually opposed, always renewed, of poets and children.

Never become an important person! There is a conspiracy of personalities against childlikeness and it suffices to read the Gospel to be aware of this. God said: 'Become like children.' Yet those who have become important say repeatedly to betray infancy: 'Become like us.'

• After his victory, David is the renowned

⁸ Saul was very displeased with this song and said, "They have given tens of thousands to David but to me only thousands! By now he has everything but the kingdom!" ⁹ From then on, Saul became very distrustful of David.

¹⁰ The following day, an evil spirit from God seized Saul, causing him to rave in his house. David then played on the lyre as he used to do, while Saul had his spear in hand. ¹¹ Then Saul pointed it at David thinking, "I will nail David to the wall." But David escaped on two occasions.

¹² Saul saw that Yahweh was with David and had left him. And he was afraid. ¹³ So he removed David from his presence by making him chief of a thousand men. David went ahead of his troops ¹⁴ and was successful each time because Yahweh was with him. ¹⁵ The more successful David was, the more afraid Saul became. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David because he led them in their expeditions.

¹⁷ Saul said to David, "You know my eldest daughter, Merab. I will give her to you as your wife; be brave and fight Yahweh's battles." For Saul thought, "Let the Philistines strike him instead of myself." ¹⁸ David answered Saul, "Who am I? And what is my father's family in Israel that I should be the king's son-in-law?" ¹⁹ Yet when it was time for Merab to be married to David, she was given instead to Adriel the Meholahite.

²⁰ Now, Saul's daughter, Michal, fell in love with David. When this came to Saul's knowledge, he was very pleased ²¹ for he thought, "I shall promise her to him and for her sake he will lose himself, and I will have the Philistines kill him." So, Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." ²² Then he commanded his servants to talk to David privately and say, "The king and all his servants like you. You should become the king's son-in-law!" ²³ Saul's servants repeated these words to David who replied, "Do you think it is a light thing for me to become the king's son-in-law, considering that I am a man with neither wealth nor fame?" ²⁴ When Saul's servants repeated to the king what David had said, ²⁵ Saul ordered them to tell David, "The king wants no marriage gift other than a hundred Philistine foreskins to take revenge on his

enemies." For Saul wanted David to fall into the hands of the Philistines. ²⁶ Saul's servants told this to David and it seemed to him that he could easily become the king's son-in-law. Even before the appointed time was over, ²⁷ David and his men set out and killed two hundred Philistines. And they brought the king the foreskins so that David could become the king's son-in-law. So Saul had to give his daughter Michal to David to become his wife.

²⁸ Saul feared David for he knew that Yahweh was with him. But Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him. ²⁹ Saul feared David more and more and was his enemy until the end.

³⁰ Whenever the Philistine chiefs engaged David in battle, he succeeded more than any of Saul's officers, in earning great fame for himself.

+19 ¹ Saul told his son Jonathan and his servants of his intention to kill David. But Jonathan, who liked David very much, ² said to David, "My father Saul wants to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning and hide yourself in a secret place. ³ I will go out and keep my father company in the countryside where you are and I will speak to him about you. If I find something, I will let you know." ⁴ Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul and said, "Let not the king sin against his servant David for he has not sinned against you. On the contrary, what he has done has benefited you." ⁵ He risked his life in killing the Philistine and Yahweh brought about a great victory for Israel. You yourself saw this and greatly rejoiced. Why then sin against innocent blood and kill David without cause?" ⁶ Saul heeded Jonathan's plea and swore, "As Yahweh lives, he shall not be put to death." ⁷ So Jonathan called David and told him all these things. He then brought him to Saul and David was back in Saul's service as before.

⁸ War broke out again and David set out to fight the Philistines. David crushed them so badly that they had to flee. ⁹ Then an evil spirit from Yahweh seized Saul as he sat in his house holding his spear while David was playing on the lyre. ¹⁰ Saul made an attempt to pin David to the wall with his spear. David, however, dodged the blow and the spear hit the wall instead. David fled and escaped.

man of the kingdom. But he immediately earns Saul's envy.

Saul feared David. The subsequent chapters show us how, as David rises in people's estimation Saul's mind is ravaged by jealousy. Saul is guilty, the book tells us, since he departed from his obedience to God. His fault is that of many

rulers and his punishment is the same: he becomes a prisoner of his office which he cannot, or knows not how to, give up. He guesses that David is God's choice, but he cannot share power with him and does not see any solution but to kill him.

+ Chapters 19-25 are about the life of David!



¹¹ That night Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep an eye on him as he intended to kill him the following morning. ¹² But David's wife, Michal, told him, "If you do not run for your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." ¹³ So Michal let David down through the window, allowing him to escape.

¹⁴ Next Michal took the household idol, laid it in the bed and put a bundle of goat's hair on its head. She then covered this with a blanket. ¹⁵ When Saul sent messengers to capture David, Michal told them, "He is sick." ¹⁶ Saul sent messengers back to David and said, "Bring him up to me on his bed for me to kill him." ¹⁷ But when the messengers entered, they saw the household idol in the bed with the bundle of goat's hair at its head. ¹⁸ Saul, therefore, asked Michal, "Why did you deceive me and allow my enemy to escape?" Michal answered, "He threatened to kill me if I did not let him go!"

Saul and the prophets

■ ¹⁸ David had fled and was in safety. He went to Samuel at Ramah and related all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel then went to live in Naioth. ¹⁹ Saul was told that David stayed at Naioth in Ramah, ²⁰ so he sent messengers to capture David. But when they saw the band of prophets prophesying (signifying that they

had fallen into a trance) with Samuel leading them, the spirit of Yahweh came upon them and made them prophesy.

²¹ Upon hearing what happened, Saul sent more messengers who also began to prophesy. Saul sent more the third time and the same thing happened.

²² Then Saul himself went to Ramah and arrived at the deep well in Secu. He asked, "Where can I find Samuel and David?" The people answered, "They are at Naioth in Ramah." ²³ So Saul proceeded to Naioth in Ramah but the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him as well. And he walked along prophesying until he reached the entrance of Naioth in Ramah. ²⁴ He took off his clothes and prophesied in Samuel's presence. Then he fell down naked, remaining in that position all day and all night. Hence sprang the saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

20 ¹ David fled from Naioth in Ramah and went to Jonathan to ask him, "What have I done? What am

12. Jos 2, 15; 2 Cor 11, 32

20. 10, 5

as a fugitive. He becomes chief of a band of not very desirable companions and will live with them in the marginal parts of the country.

David is no "saint," as we would actually imagine one. He is God's friend in the way people could be in a primitive society. In spite of his defects, he becomes an example of what God can do with a man who allows himself to be judged by him.

The Bible highlights David's magnificent soul and his generosity amidst a life with outlaws and everything that this implies. David is always conscious of his mission. He faces dangers without fear, acts as an educator of his companions and is a man with prophetic intuitions.

When God wants to entrust a great mission to someone he sets him apart from his usual environment for a time. Like Moses, David also goes into the desert.

■ Israel lives its faith with songs and dances, celebrating Yahweh's deeds. This is why they need those groups of prophets. Here, they are mentioned for the first time in the Bible. These men excited themselves to the point where they

fell into a frenzy very similar to a state of hysteria. At that time, nevertheless, such manifestations were considered to be the work of the Spirit of Yahweh. In their beginnings, the prophets of Israel were not very different from the "prophets" of other neighbouring pagan peoples. Later in the Bible other prophets will appear who are very different, and are called by God in view of an exceptional mission. These prophets will retain only a semblance of that primitive religious frenzy.

It is good to compare these actions of the prophets with others manifested in the early Church (See Acts 21), and to read what Paul says with respect to the manifestation of the Spirit, in 1 Cor 12-14. No manifestation of the Spirit is solely the work of the Spirit of God. It depends also on the capabilities of those in whom the Spirit acts, just as the light of the sun takes on the colour of the glass through which it passes. In groups consisting of simple and uneducated people, the Spirit of God acted (and still acts) by arousing ecstatic manifestations which are also observed in other non-Christian religions. But these things strengthened them in their faith.

I guilty of? What sin have I committed against your father that he wants to kill me?" ² Jonathan, however, assured him, "No! You shall not die. My father does nothing small or great without informing me. Why should he hide this from me? No, this cannot be."

³ But David replied, "Your father knows very well that we are friends, so he thinks it is better not to tell you and grieve you. But I swear there is but one step between death and me!"

⁴ Then Jonathan told David, "What can I do for you?" ⁵ David answered, "Tomorrow is the new moon and I should be dining with the king. But let me hide myself in the open country until the evening of the third day. ⁶ If your father looks for me, say to him: 'David asked me to let him go over to Bethlehem because they have their yearly sacrifice there with the entire family.' ⁷ If he says, 'Good' then I am in no danger. But if he gets angry, then you can be certain that he wants to harm me. ⁸ Do this for me according to our agreement. But if I am guilty, kill me yourself. Why hand me over to your father to be killed?"

⁹ Jonathan answered, "Nonsense! If I knew that my father wanted to harm you, would I not warn you?"

¹⁰ David then asked him, "Who will tell me if your father answers you angrily?" ¹¹ Jonathan said, "Come, let us go into the open country." So they both left for the open country.

◆ ¹² Then Jonathan said to David, "Yahweh, the God of Israel, be our witness. About this time tomorrow or the following day, I shall be sounding out my father. If he is well-disposed toward you, I shall send you word. ¹³ But if my father intends to do you harm, may Yahweh punish me if I do not warn you. Surely Yahweh will be with you as he has been with my father.

¹⁴ If I live, always be my friend. But if I die, ¹⁵

¹⁶ never cut off your friendship with my family even when Yahweh takes vengeance on David's enemies and wipes them out from the face of the earth."

So Jonathan made a covenant with David.

¹⁷ And he made David swear once more because of the affection he felt for him for he loved David as himself.

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said, "Tomorrow is the new moon. Your absence will be noticed because your seat will be vacant. ¹⁹ On the third day it will be noticed all the more. So go and hide yourself where you hid before and stay beside the heap of stones there. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows to the stone as if I were aiming at a target. ²¹ I will then send a lad with this instruction: 'Go, look for the arrows.' If I say to the lad: 'The arrows are on this side, pick them up', then you may come out for, I swear, you are not in danger. ²² But if I say to the lad: 'The arrows are beyond you,' leave, for Yahweh is sending you away. ²³ But as to our covenant, Yahweh is our witness forever."

²⁴ So David hid himself in the open country. On the day of the new moon the king came to dine. ²⁵ He took his usual place on the seat against the wall while Jonathan sat facing him and Abner was beside him. David's seat remained vacant.

²⁶ Saul did not say anything on that day, thinking that something may have happened and David was unclean. ²⁷ On the second day of the new moon, David's seat was still vacant and Saul asked his son Jonathan, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to table yesterday and today?" ²⁸ Jonathan answered, "David asked leave to go over to Bethlehem for he said, ²⁹ 'Our family is offering a sacrifice in the city and my brothers insisted that I be present. So please allow me to go and visit my brothers.' This is why he has not come to the king's table."

³⁰ Saul became very angry at Jonathan and told him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Do I not know that you prefer the son of Jesse to your shame and your mother's shame?" ³¹ For as long as the son of Jesse lives, you shall have no chance to rule. Send for him and bring him to me for he is doomed to die!"

³² Then Jonathan asked his father, "Why should he die? What has he done?" ³³ At this, Saul pointed his spear at him and Jonathan understood that his father intended to kill David. ³⁴ Jonathan rose angrily from the table and did not eat that second day of the month

8. 18, 3

15. 2 S 9; 21, 17

33. 19, 3; 18, 11

◆ Here follows the account of David and Jonathan's friendship. The Bible shows how

David never forgot his pact with Jonathan. (2nd Sam 20:7)

grieving for David, because of what his father said against him.

³⁶ The next morning, Jonathan went to the open country with a young man, according to what he and David had agreed on. ³⁶ He told the lad, "Run, fetch the arrows." While the lad was running, Jonathan shot an arrow that flew beyond the lad. ³⁷ When the lad reached the spot where Jonathan had shot the arrow, Jonathan called after him and said, "The arrow is beyond you!" ³⁸ Run quickly and do not waste time! The lad picked up the arrow and ran back to his master. ³⁹ The lad knew nothing of Jonathan and David's agreement.

⁴⁰ After that, Jonathan gave his weapons to the lad and commanded him to take them to the city. ⁴¹ When the lad had gone, David came out from behind the mound and lay on the ground. The two embraced each other and wept until David regained his composure. ⁴² Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we shall stand by the oath we have made to one another in Yahweh's name when we said: Yahweh shall be between you and me and between your descendants and mine forever."

David and the priest Ahimelech

21 ¹ David went on his way while Jonathan returned home. ² David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech came to meet him and asked trembling, "Why are you alone?" ³ David replied, "The king sent me on a mission and strictly ordered me not to tell anyone about it. Because of this I have decided on a place where I shall meet my men. ⁴ What do you have here? Can you give me five loaves of bread or what-

ever you have?" ⁵ The priest answered David, "I do not have ordinary bread at hand, only holy bread. If your men have had no relations with women, I can give you that." ⁶ David answered, "Whenever we are on an expedition, we do not touch women. Even in an ordinary journey, our men are not unclean; all the more so today!" ⁷ So the priest gave him holy bread for there was no other bread. This was the Bread of Presence which had been replaced by fresh bread the day it was removed.

⁸ Yet one of Saul's men was in the temple. He was Doeg, the Edomite, and Saul's chief henchman.

⁹ David asked Ahimelech, "Do you have a spear or a sword with you? I did not take my arms with me because the king's order was urgent." ¹⁰ The priest replied, "I have here, wrapped in a piece of cloth behind the ephod, the sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah. You can take this if you wish, for I have nothing else here." David said, "There is none like it. Give it to me."

+ ¹¹ That same day, David fled far from Saul. He went to Achish, king of Gath. ¹² Achish's servants remarked, "O King, is this not David? Did the people not dance on his account and sing: Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?" ¹³ David

7. Mt 12, 1; Mk 2, 25

12. 18, 7

o The loaves of presence represented the twelve tribes of Israel. They were offered every sabbath and remained on the altar for the entire week, signifying thereby the people's loyalty to Yahweh. Only the priests could eat of them (Lev 24:5-9).

Jesus refers to this text when his disciples do not observe the rules about the Sabbath (see Mk 2:13). Jesus wants to free us from the slavery of the "sacred," because man is more sacred than anything else.

In fact Jesus was emphasizing a point of far-reaching importance. For God, respect for the sacred bread is not as important as each one's fidelity to his assigned task. Believers have to understand that their daily tasks are made sacred

by the simple fact that they are God's children and the Holy Spirit's dwelling-place. Doing laundry at home, working in a factory, carrying out a commitment to improve conditions in the community - these and all our tasks should be turned into a sacrifice to God (1 Pet 2:9).

+ David has to pretend madness. The Bible shows how this chosen one of Yahweh was humiliated before he could sit on his throne, thereby mysteriously foretelling Christ's humiliations. He loved us to the point of madness when he humbled himself to the extent of living in the condition of a servant and undergoing an ignominious and painful death on the cross (See Phil 2:7-9).

understood these words and began to fear Achish, king of Gath. ¹⁴ So he pretended to be mad, making marks on the doors of the gate as he let his spittle run down his beard. ¹⁵ At this Achish told his servants, "Look, it is a madman. Why did you bring him to me?" ¹⁶ Am I short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow to act foolishly in my presence? Will this fellow come into my house?"

David begins his wanderings

22 ¹ David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adulam where his brothers and his father's family came down to him. ² Then those who had problems or debts or were embittered joined him there. Thus he became their chief; he had with him about four hundred men.

³ From there, David went to Mispheh in Moab and asked the king of Moab to let his father and mother stay with him until he found out what God would do for him. ⁴ So David left there with the King of Moab and they stayed there as long as David remained in the refuge.

⁵ The prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the refuge; go to the land of Judah." So David left and entered the forest of Hereth.

⁶ Saul heard that David and his men had been seen. Saul was in Gibeah at the time, sitting under the tamarisk tree on the High place, his spear in hand, while his servants were standing by. ⁷ Saul addressed them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields of vineyards? Will he make each one of you a commander over a thousand or over a hundred men that you should all be conspiring against me?" ⁸ Why, then, did no one tell me that my son made an agreement with the son of Jesse? No one among you had mercy on me and told me that my own son had stirred up my servant against me as is the case today."

⁹ At this, Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with the officers of Saul, spoke up. "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, in Nob. ¹⁰ Ahimelech consulted

Yahweh for him, provided him with food and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine as well."

¹¹ On hearing this, the king sent for Ahimelech the priest, son of Ahitub, and all his family who were priests in Nob. They all came to the king. ¹² Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub." He replied, "Yes, my Lord." ¹³ Saul asked him, "Why did you conspire with the son of Jesse, giving him food and a sword and consulting Yahweh for him so that he could rebel against me as is the case today?" ¹⁴ Ahimelech answered the king, "Who among all your servants is as faithful as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and honoured in your house?" ¹⁵ Is today the first time that I have consulted Yahweh for him? By no means! Let not the king accuse me or any member of my family of such a thing for I knew nothing at all about the entire matter."

¹⁶ But the king said, "You and your entire family shall die. Ahimelech." ¹⁷ And the king at once commanded the guards who were standing by, "Turn and kill the priests of Yahweh for having assisted David. They knew very well that David was a fugitive but they did not tell me anything at all." The king's servants, however, refused to lift their hands against the priests of Yahweh. ¹⁸ And so the king turned to Doeg and commanded him, "Turn and kill the priests." And so Doeg the Edomite drew near and killed the priests.

On that day he killed eighty-five persons who were wearing the linen ephod. ¹⁹ After that, Saul put Nob, the city of priests, to the sword, killing men and women, children and infants, oxen, asses and sheep.

²⁰ A son of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to David. ²¹ Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of Yahweh. ²² David said to him, "I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. So I am responsible for the death of all your family. ²³ Stay with me and do not be afraid for he who wants to kill you must also kill me. You will be safe with me."

How David consulted God

23 ¹ David received a report that the Philistines were attacking Keilah and

7. 8, 12

9. 21, 8

20. 15, 3

■ Chapter 22:2 does not hide the fact that those who went to David were those who found themselves in straits, in debt or embittered. The wars that made it possible for the people of God to live and progress were not the doings of pure saints. The same happens with struggle waged anywhere else in the world for the sake of justice.

In the best causes are found doubtful or corrupt elements. It will be fortunate if leaders have, like David, a very elevated sense of their mission and of solidarity with their people.

This text refers to the practice of consulting Yahweh by using the *ephod*, an object which

lundering the threshing floors. ²He, therefore, consulted Yahweh and asked, "Shall I go and fight with these Philistines?" The answer was, "Go and attack the Philistines and rescue Keilah." ³But David's men protested and said, "Look, here in Judah we are in danger and afraid. What then if we go to Keilah and face the Philistines?"

⁴So David consulted Yahweh again and got this answer, "Go down to Keilah for I will deliver the Philistines into your hands." David went with his men to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, seizing their cattle and using a great slaughter among them, and scouring the inhabitants of the place.

⁵When Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, fled to David at Keilah, he took along the ephod. When Saul was told that David had come to Keilah he said, "God has delivered him into my hands for he has shut himself in by entering the city with gates and bars." ⁶He then called on the people to go down to Keilah and engage David and his men in battle. ⁷When David found out that Saul meant to harm him, he told the priest Abiathar to bring the ephod. ⁸Then he consulted Yahweh. "O Yahweh, God of Israel, listen to your servant for I have heard that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the city on my account. ⁹Will Saul come down to fight me here?" ¹⁰Yahweh, God of Israel, speak to your servant." Yahweh answered, "He will come down." ¹¹Then David asked, "Will the men of Keilah hand me and my men over to him?" Yahweh answered, "They will hand you over to him." ¹²So David set out with his six hundred men. He left Keilah and wandered from one place to another. When Saul was informed that David had escaped from Keilah, he abandoned the expedition. ¹³Meanwhile David stayed in the strongholds in the hill country of the desert of Ziph. Saul, however, kept on searching for him but God did not deliver David into his hands.

¹⁴David knew that Saul had come out to kill him. And he remained at Horesh in the desert of Ziph. ¹⁵Saul's son, Jonathan, went to him and encouraged him in God's name with these words, ¹⁶"Have no fear, for my father Saul will not harm you. Even my father Saul knows that you shall be king over Israel and

that I shall be second to you." ¹⁷The two made an agreement before Yahweh in Horesh, after which David remained there while Jonathan returned home.

¹⁸Some of the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and told him, "David is hiding among us in the strongholds, or at Horesh or on the hill of Hachilah, south of Jeshimon." ¹⁹Come down, therefore, O king, whenever it may please you and we shall deliver him into your hands."

²⁰Saul replied, "May Yahweh bless you for you have had mercy on me." ²¹Go and make sure where he has been and who has seen him there for I am told that he is very cunning.

²²Check all the places where he may be hiding and come back to me, and I will go with you. If he is in the region, I will search him out among all the villages of Judah."

²³So they went off to Ziph ahead of Saul. At this time, David and his men were in the desert of Maon, in the valley south of Jeshimon.

²⁴When David learned that Saul and his men were looking for him, he went down to a ravine in the desert of Maon. Saul heard of this and pursued David into the desert of Maon. ²⁵Saul moved along one side of the mountain, and David along the other. David was hurrying to escape Saul who with his forces was closing in on him and his men. ²⁶It was then that a messenger came to Saul and said, "Come quickly because the Philistines have invaded the land!" ²⁷Saul then left off pursuing David and went to face the Philistines. This is how that place came to be called the Ravine of Parting.

David spares Saul

• 24 ¹David then went up from there and stayed in the hiding place at Engedi. ²When Saul returned

4. 2 S. 19

contained lots. This was an ancient practice, in ordinary use among the priests of Israel. Later, this practice fell into disuse when prophets ceased to make predictions (See chap. 9).

"For those who are holy, everything is holy," this superstitious practice was the means by which David had familiar dealings with Yahweh. Nowadays, in the same manner God makes himself known to people of little instruc-

tion in the faith through means that are often "hardly catholic." If they are better educated, God uses other means.

◆ David's respect for "the anointed one," of the Lord (since Saul had been anointed by Samuel), gives evidence of his faith.

Persons instructed in the Scriptures know that leaders share with God duties and power

from his pursuit of the Philistines, he was told that David was in the desert of Engedi. ³ So Saul took three thousand picked men from all Israel and went in search of David and his men in the direction of the Wild Goat crags. ⁴ When he came to the sheepfolds along the way, he entered a cave to relieve himself.

⁵ Now David and his men were far back in the cave. David's men said to him, "This is the day which Yahweh spoke of, 'Look, I will deliver your enemy into your hands and you will do with him as you see fit.'" So David moved up and stealthily cut off an end of Saul's robe. ⁶ But afterward, David regretted having cut off an end of Saul's robe, ⁷ and he said to his men, "Let me not lay my hands on my master, for he is Yahweh's anointed." ⁸ With these words, David restrained his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. Saul then left the cave and went on his way.

⁹ Then David himself stepped out of the cave and called after Saul, "My master, the King!" When Saul looked back, David knelt and then bowed to the ground in homage and asked him, ¹⁰ "Why do you listen to those who say that I want to harm you?" ¹¹ Look, today you have seen that Yahweh delivered you into my hands in the cave, and I was told to kill you but I held myself back and I said: 'I will not lift my hands against my master who is Yahweh's anointed.' ¹² My father,

look at this end of your robe which I am holding! I cut off the end of your robe but did not kill you. Now you may know that I mean you no harm or treason. I have done you no wrong and yet you are hunting me down to kill me. ¹³ May Yahweh be judge between you and me and may he exact justice from you in my case, but I shall do you no harm.

¹⁴ As the saying goes, 'From the wicked comes wickedness'; as for me, my hand shall not harm you. ¹⁵ But who is it you are after, O king of Israel? Are you pursuing a dead dog? A flea? ¹⁶ May Yahweh be judge between you and me. May he see and uphold my cause and deliver me from your hands."

¹⁷ After David had spoken these words, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, my son David?" He wept aloud ¹⁸ and said to David, "You are right and I am wrong, for you have repaid kindness for the harm I have inflicted on you. ¹⁹ This day you have shown your righteousness with me by not taking my life when Yahweh put me into your hands. ²⁰ For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go unharmed? May Yahweh reward you for what you have done for me today. ²¹ Now I know for certain that you shall be king over Israel. ²² Now swear to me by Yahweh that you will not wipe out my descendants and erase the name of my family."

²³ David swore to this before Saul after which Saul went home while David and his men went up to the hiding place.

David and Abigail

o25 ¹ The day Samuel died, all Israel gathered together to mourn him; after which they buried him at his home in Ramah.

² Then David went down to the desert of Maon. A very rich man, owner of three thousand sheep and a thousand goats lived there and had his farm in Carmel.

7. 9. 16. 31.4. 2 S 1. 14 1. 28. 3

which exceed the capabilities and the rights of the human being. Though we have to replace evil or inefficient leaders, we have to respect their person and the fearful responsibility God has delivered into their hands.

God will do me justice. This is not the grudging complaint of a man who did not even try to defend himself but the certainty of one who, in fighting for what seems to him to be just, recognizes that God alone is the master of history. In particular cases, he renounces his rights as a way of showing his full confidence in

God. This is what Jesus says in Mt 6:38-42.

o The incident we read here puts two men and two mentalities in opposition to one another: the person with possessions has no advantage over the other. This means that wealth has to be shared.

The role of the woman is highlighted. Her wisdom is able to ward off a disaster provoked by men. David is humble enough to see that his impulsive temperament leads him to violence and injustice.

³ This man was named Nabal; his wife, Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful; but the man himself a Calebite, was rough and ill-mannered. He was at the time shearing his sheep in Carmel.

⁴ When David heard in the desert that Nabal was shearing his sheep, ⁵ he sent ten young men to the farm with this instruction, 'Go to Nabal in Carmel and greet him for me in these words: Peace be with you and your family; peace be with all that is yours.' ⁷ I hear that you have shearers with you. Now when your shepherds were with us, we did not harm them; neither did they miss anything while they were in Carmel. ⁸ Ask your servants and they will tell. So be kind to my servants since we come on a festive day; please give them and your son David whatever you can."

⁹ When David's young men arrived, they delivered this message to Nabal in David's name and then waited. ¹⁰ But Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? Many nowadays are the servants who run away from their masters. ¹¹ Must I take my bread, my wine, my meat which I have slaughtered for my shearers and give it to men who come from I don't know where?" ¹² At this, David's young men left and returned to him, reporting everything Nabal said. ¹³ David then said to his men, "Let every man strap on his sword!" And every one of them, including David, strapped on his sword. About four hundred men followed David while two hundred remained with the baggage.

¹⁴ One of Nabal's servants told Abigail, his wife, "David sent messengers from the desert to greet our master but he shouted at them. ¹⁵ Yet these men were very good to us. We suffered no harm and did not miss anything while we were living among them during our stay in the open country. ¹⁶ They were like a wall for us night and day while we were tending the sheep in their midst. ¹⁷ Now think over what you should do: for our master and his entire family are surely doomed to die but he is so wicked no one can speak to him."

¹⁸ Abigail hurriedly prepared two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five measures of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of pressed raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs and loaded them on asses. ¹⁹ Then she said to her servants, "Go on ahead and I shall follow you." But she told her husband nothing of this.

²⁰ As she rode on her ass down the mountain, David and his men were coming down from the other direction. When she met them, ²¹ David was reflecting, "It was useless guarding all that this fellow has in the desert. Al-

though he lost nothing belonging to him, he has returned me evil for good. ²² May God do so to David and more if by morning I leave a single male alive among those who belong to him."

²³ On seeing David, Abigail quickly dismounted from the ass and threw herself on the ground before him. ²⁴ As she fell at his feet she said, "My Lord, let the blame be on me! Let your handmaid speak to you; listen to her words. ²⁵ Let not my Lord pay attention to this ill-mannered man, Nabal, for he is just what his name says: He is a fool. I, your handmaid, did not see the young men whom you sent.

²⁶ Now, my lord, as Yahweh lives and as you live, it is Yahweh who prevents you from shedding blood and avenging yourself. Let your enemies and those who seek to harm my lord become like Nabal! ²⁷ And now let this present which I have brought you, my lord, be given to the young men who follow you, ²⁸ and please forgive me.

Yahweh will certainly give you a lasting family because you are fighting the battles of Yahweh and no evil shall come upon you as long as you live. ²⁹ Should anyone make an attempt on your life, may the life of my lord be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of Yahweh, your God. May he hurl away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling.

³⁰ So when Yahweh fulfills his promises and appoints you as commander over Israel, ³¹ you shall have no reason to grieve or to feel any grief or regret for having unrightfully shed blood or taken revenge yourself. May Yahweh bless you, and you, my lord, remember your handmaid."

³² David then said to Abigail, "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! ³³ Blessed be your good judgment and may you yourself be blessed, for you have prevented me from shedding blood and avenging myself today! ³⁴ For as Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, he has prevented me from hurting you. If you did not hurry to meet me, not a single male belonging to Nabal would have been alive by morning." ³⁵ David accepted what she had brought him and told her, "Go back home in peace. I have listened to you and granted your request."

³⁶ Abigail went back to Nabal and found him holding a feast, in his house.

He was joyful and very drunk so Abigail did not mention anything to him until the following day. ³⁷ When morning came and Nabal had slept it off, his wife spoke to him about all these things. On hearing it Nabal had a stroke and remained paralyzed. ³⁸ Ten days later, Yahweh let him die.

³⁹ When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be Yahweh who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal and has prevented me from doing wrong. Yahweh himself has made Nabal's wrongdoings fall on his own head."

⁴⁰ David then sent his servants to Abigail in Carmel to propose marriage to her saying, "David has sent us to you to say that he wants you to be his wife." ⁴¹ Rising and bowing to the ground, Abigail answered, "May I be as a slave to wash the feet of my lord's servants." ⁴² She quickly rose and mounted an ass and attended by five of her servants, she left with David's messengers and became his wife.

⁴³ David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, making both her and Abigail his wives. ⁴⁴ Saul, in the meantime, had given Michal, his daughter and David's wife, to Palti, son of Laish who was from Gallim.

+26 ¹ Ziphites came to Saul in Gibeath to tell him that David was hiding on the hill of Hachilah, east of Jeshimon. ² On hearing this, Saul went down with three thousand picked men of Israel to the desert of Ziph in search of David. ³ He encamped on the hill of Hachilah beside the road east of Jeshimon. ⁴ When David who was in the desert saw that Saul had come after him, he sent out spies who confirmed Saul's arrival. ⁵ David came to Saul's place of encampment and saw where Saul was resting with Abner, son of Ner, chief of his army. Saul was sleeping in the center and his men were around him.

⁶ David then asked Ahimelech, the Hittite and Abishai, son of Zeruiah and Joab's brother, "Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?" Abishai answered, "I will go down with you." ⁷ So, that night, David and Abishai went into the camp and found Saul sleeping in the center, his spear thrust into the ground at his head, while Abner and the rest of the soldiers were sleeping around him. ⁸ Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hands this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not repeat it." ⁹ But David answered Abishai, "Do not harm him. For who could harm Yahweh's anointed and not be punished?" ¹⁰ As Yahweh lives, only Yahweh may strike him; either he dies on the day appointed or is killed in battle. ¹¹ Don't let me harm Yahweh's anointed! Instead take the spear that is at his head and the water jug and let us be on our way."

¹² So David took the spear and the water jug from near Saul's head and they left. No-

body saw, nobody knew, nobody woke up. All remained asleep, for a deep sleep from Yahweh had fallen on them.

¹³ On the opposite slope David stood at a distance on top of the hill. ¹⁴ and called out to both Abner, son of Ner and the soldiers, "Why don't you answer, Abner?" Abner answered back, "Who are you to awake the king?" ¹⁵ David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then did you not guard closely your lord the king? An ordinary man has broken into the camp and made an attempt on the life of the king your lord. ¹⁶ Is this the way you fulfill your duties? You deserve to die because you did not guard your lord, Yahweh's anointed. Now look for the king's spear and the water jug that were at his head."

¹⁷ Saul recognized David's voice and asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" David answered, "It is my voice, my lord, O king!" ¹⁸ Why does my lord pursue me? What have I done? What am I guilty of? ¹⁹ Now, let my lord the king hear my words. If it is Yahweh who has incited you against me, may an offering appease him; but if men have done so, may they be cursed before Yahweh, for they have made me an exile to this day and have driven me from my share of the inheritance of Yahweh as if saying to me: 'Go and serve other gods.' ²⁰ Let not my blood flow to the ground far from the presence of Yahweh! For the king of Israel has come to seek out a flea as a man hunts a partridge in the mountains."

²¹ Then Saul said, "I have done wrong. Come back, David my son. I will not harm you anymore since you valued my life this day. I have acted like a fool and have made a great mistake." ²² David answered, "I have your spear with me, O king! Let one of your servants come over to fetch it. ²³ Yahweh rewards a righteous and loyal man. Today he delivered you into my hands but I refused to harm Yahweh's anointed. ²⁴ As I valued your life today, may Yahweh value my life and deliver me from all distress."

²⁵ Finally Saul told David, "Blessed are you, David my son! You shall succeed in everything you do." Then David went his way and Saul went home.

David among the Philistines

27 ¹ David thought, "Some day I shall die at the hand of Saul. It is better for me to escape to the land of the Philistines where I shall be beyond his reach and Saul will



get tired of searching for me within the borders of Israel." ² So David went with his six hundred men to Achish, son of Maach, king of Gath. ³ He and his men lived with Achish in Gath; each one had his family with him and David had his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. ⁴ When Saul was informed that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.

⁵ David said to Achish, "If I meet with your approval, let me have a place to live in one of the country towns. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" ⁶ That very day, Achish gave David Ziklag, which since then and up to the present time has belonged to the kings of Judah. ⁷ David lived one year and four months in the country of the Philistines.

⁸ David and his men raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites – all these lived in the land extending from Shur to the land of Egypt. ⁹ David would attack the land leaving neither man nor woman alive and carrying off their sheep, oxen, asses, camels and garments. Then he would come back to Achish. ¹⁰ Whenever Achish asked, "Whom did you raid this time?" David would answer, "The Negeb of Judah," or "The Negeb of the Irahmeelites," or "The Negeb of the Kenites." ¹¹ David left neither man nor woman alive. For he said, "If I brought them to Gath, they could talk against us and say: This is what David did." Such was his practice as long as he lived in the country of the Philistines. ¹² Achish trusted David and said to himself, "David is now hated by his own people. He shall be my servant forever."

Saul consults the witch of Endor

■ 28 ¹ In those days, the Philistines mustered their forces to fight against Israel, and Achish told David, "I want you to know that you and your men must join me to fight this battle." ² David answered, "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do." Achish said to David, "I will

make you my permanent bodyguard."

³ Now Samuel had died and when all Israel had mourned for him, they buried him in his own city, Ramah. Meanwhile, Saul had driven those who consult spirits of the dead and fortunetellers out of the land.

⁴ As the Philistines gathered together and encamped in Shunem, Saul also mustered the Israelite forces and encamped in Gilboa. ⁵ But on seeing the Philistine camp, Saul was afraid and his heart failed him. ⁶ Saul consulted Yahweh but Yahweh gave no answer whether in dreams or by the Urim or through prophets. ⁷ Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who consults the spirits of the dead, that I may go and consult her." His servants told him, "There is a medium at Endor."

⁸ Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and left with two men. He arrived at night and said to the woman: "Tell my fortune through a ghost and call the spirit I shall name." ⁹ But the woman answered him, "Do you not know that Saul has driven medium and fortunetellers out of the land? Why do you set a trap for me to bring about my death?" ¹⁰ But Saul swore to her by Yahweh, "As Yahweh lives, you will not be in trouble for this."

¹¹ Then the woman asked him, "Whom do you want me to call up?" Saul said, "Call up Samuel."

¹² When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed and said to Saul, "Why

28:7. Dt 18, 11

8. 1 K 14, 2

■ Nowhere else does Saul appear so human and so close to us. While David, trusting in Yahweh and loved by all, courts danger with the utmost serenity, Saul carries all by himself the burden of his anxiety. His opponent, Samuel, with whom he could at least discuss and quarrel no longer there. God himself does not speak, and the man remains alone facing hostile circumstances, tortured by his own doubts and anxieties.

Saul wanted to wrest from God a favourable response. He gets a death sentence from Samuel, and then leaves peacefully since what weighed on him was not so much the fear of death as the solitude which was his wage while he was in power. The man who "surpassed everyone in height from the shoulders upwards" has become like all the rest and depends on the assistance of a poor woman, a sinner according to God's law, but someone full of understanding.

have you deceived me? You are Saul!" ¹³ The king then told her, "Have no fear. What do you see?"

The woman said, "I see him rising from the ground. He is a god." ¹⁴ Saul asked her, "What does he look like?" She replied, "The one rising is an old man clothed in a mantle." Saul knew that it was Samuel. He knelt and bowed face to the ground in homage.

¹⁵ Samuel spoke to Saul, "Why did you disturb me by summoning me up?" Saul answered, "I am in great distress for the Philistines are waging war against me and God has abandoned me. He no longer answers me either through prophets or in dreams. Because of this I have called you to tell me what I should do."

¹⁶ Samuel said, "Why do you ask me, if Yahweh has abandoned you and turned against you? ¹⁷ Yahweh has done to you what he foretold through me. He has torn the kingdom from your hand and has given it to your neighbour, David. ¹⁸ Remember that you disobeyed Yahweh by not executing his fierce anger against Amalek; that is why Yahweh has done this to you today. ¹⁹ Now Yahweh will deliver Israel, together with you, into the hands of the Philistines. By tomorrow, you and your sons shall be with me when Yahweh delivers the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines."

²⁰ Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, terrified by what Samuel said. He had no strength left because he had not eaten anything all that day and night.

²¹ The woman drew close to Saul and, seeing how frightened he was, said to him, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed you and risked her life doing what you have asked her to do. ²² Now it is your turn to listen to me. Let me give you something to eat so

you may have strength when you go on your way." ²³ Saul refused and said, "I will not eat." But on the insistence of his servants and the woman, he agreed, rose from the ground and sat on the bed. ²⁴ The woman had a fattened calf in the house which she immediately butchered. She also took some flour, kneaded it and baked unleavened bread, ²⁵ and set it before Saul and his servants. They then ate and left that night.

29 ¹ Now the Philistines mustered all their forces at Aphek; the Israelites were encamped beside the spring in Jezreel. ² While the Philistine rulers went ahead of their groups of thousands and hundreds, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. ³ The Philistine chiefs asked, "Who are these Hebrews?" Achish replied to the Philistine chiefs, "This is David, servant of Saul, king of Israel. He has been with me for over a year and since he fled to me up to the present day I have found no fault in him." ⁴ But the Philistine chiefs were angered at this and said to him, "Send that man back! Let him return to the place where you assigned him. He must not go down into battle with us lest during the battle he turn against us. How better could this fellow regain his master's favour than by bringing him the heads of our men?" ⁵ Is this not the David for whom they danced and sang: Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands?"

⁶ So Achish called David and said to him, "As Yahweh lives, you are honest and I would like you to be with me in the camp for I have found nothing wrong in you since you came to me up to the present day. But you displease the lords. ⁷ So it is better for you to leave and go back quietly and do nothing to displease the Philistine lords." ⁸ David asked Achish, "But what have I done? Have I done anything since I entered your service until the present time that would bar me from joining the fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"

⁹ Achish replied to David, "I myself hold nothing against you, but the Philistine chiefs are determined not to allow you to join us in battle. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, get up early tomorrow morning and leave with the soldiers who came with you." ¹¹ So David and his men left early in the morning and returned to the land of the Philistines. The Philistines, in the meantime: went on to Jezreel.

The sack of Ziklag

◆ **30** ¹Before David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had raided the Negeb and Ziklag, storming it and burning it to the ground. ²They had taken captive the women and all who were in the city, young and old. They killed no one but carried them off when they left.

³When they reached the town, David and his men found it burned to the ground and their wives, sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴Then David and those with him wept aloud until they could weep no more. ⁵David's two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, widow of Nabal of Carmel had also been taken captive. ⁶Now David was greatly distressed because the people were talking of stoning him: for they were embittered because of what had happened to their sons and daughters. But David found strength in Yahweh his God.

⁷David told Abiathar the priest, son of Ahimelech, to bring him the ephod. So Abiathar brought the ephod to David ⁸who then consulted Yahweh, "Shall I go after these raiders? Can I overtake them?" The answer was, "Go after them for you shall surely overtake them and recover the captives."

⁹David set out with his six hundred men and they reached the brook of Besor. There, two hundred men stayed behind, for they were too exhausted to cross the brook, ¹⁰and David continued the chase with four hundred men.

¹¹They found an Egyptian in the

open country and brought him to David. They gave him food, which he ate, and water to drink. ¹²They gave him a piece of fig cake and two pieces of raisin cake. The Egyptian ate and recovered his strength, for he had been three days and three nights without eating and drinking. ¹³David then questioned him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He answered, "I am an Egyptian, slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me because I fell sick three days ago. ¹⁴We raided the Negeb of the Cherethites, the territory of Judah and the Negeb of Caleb and set Ziklag on fire." ¹⁵David then asked him, "Will you lead me to this raiding band?" He replied, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master and I will lead you to this raiding band."

¹⁶So the Egyptian led David to the raiding band whom they found scattered all over the ground, eating, drinking, dancing and feasting with the spoils they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. ¹⁷David fought them from early morning to the evening of the following day, allowing no one to escape except four hundred young men who mounted their camels and fled.

¹⁸David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken and rescued his two wives. ¹⁹Nothing and no one was missing, small or great, son or daughter, booty or anything the Amalekites had taken. David brought back everything. ²⁰He then gathered flocks and

7. 23, 8

9. 25, 13

◆ This is one of those events where David appears totally crushed.

But David found comfort in Yahweh, his God. Even when he has reached the bottom of the pit, he does not lose hope.

Those who fight and those who guard the

baggage will have equal share. David refuses to allow that kind of distribution which we sometimes make, distinguishing between those who serve and "those who do not serve." This concept of social solidarity is the very thing which animates all of Deuteronomy's legislation.

herds and the people drove them before him, saying, "These are David's spoils!"

²¹David reached the two hundred men who had been too tired to follow him, and were left behind at the Besor brook. These men came to meet David and those who were with him. David then drew near and greeted them. ²²But the malicious and worthless people among those who had accompanied David said, "Since they did not come with us, we shall not share the booty with them; let each of them take his wife and children and leave." ²³But David said, "My brothers, you shall not do that after what Yahweh has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the band that raided us. ²⁴Who would agree to what you have said? The share of those who go down to battle and of those who remain with the baggage shall be the same; they shall share alike." ²⁵From that day to the present, this has been a statute and custom for Israel.

²⁶When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent part of the booty to the elders of Judah, to each of his friends, saying, "This is a gift to you from the booty of Yahweh's enemies: ²⁷to those in Bethel, in Ramoth-negeb, in Jattir, ²⁸in Aroer, in Sipmoth, in Eshtemoa, ²⁹in Raca, in the Jerahmeelite cities, in the Kenite cities, ³⁰in Hormah, in Borashan, ³¹in Athach, in Hebron, and in all the places where David and his men had stayed.

Death of Saul

31 ¹Now the Philistines fought against the Israelites who, in their flight, fell mortally wounded on

Mount Gilboa. ²The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons and killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua, Saul's sons. ³The battle raged around Saul, and the archers wounded him badly.

⁴Then Saul commanded his armour-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through lest these uncircumcised men come and kill me themselves, making fun of me." But his armour-bearer did not move because he was greatly terrified. So Saul drew his own sword and fell upon it. ⁵Seeing that Saul was dead, the armour-bearer also fell upon his sword and died with him. ⁶Thus, Saul, his three sons, his armour-bearer and all his men died together on the same day.

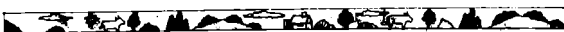
⁷When the Israelites on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. Then the Philistines came and occupied those cities.

⁸The following day, the Philistines came to strip the slain and found Saul and his three sons lying dead on Mount Gilboa. ⁹They cut off his head and stripped off his armour and then sent messengers throughout the Philistine lands to proclaim this good news in the temples of their idols and among the people. ¹⁰They put his armour in the temple of Ashtaroth and pinned his body on the wall of Bethshan. ¹¹When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²all their warriors set out, marched through the night and removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth-

25. Num 31, 27

o Saul will no longer be mentioned in the Bible. But it is a respectful silence; perhaps because all his people shared in the responsibility for his failure after having hardly helped

him. Perhaps they kept silent because they did not feel just in condemning Saul, nor did they dare to accuse God.



shan. They then returned to Jabesh and burnt the bodies there. ¹³ Then they took their bones and buried them

under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, after which, they fasted for seven days.

2 SAMUEL

INTRODUCTION

The books of Samuel are two parts of the same work. What has been said in the introduction to the first book holds true for the second.

In this second part, the deeds of King David are narrated to us. No history as sincere as this was ever written in ancient times – a story written by a man of God who could dig out David's real greatness. Great men are not always those who made the most impact during their life; nor are saints those who displayed greater piety or performed more miracles. Thus, what is exceptional about King David can be noted in a series of small things that perhaps seemed insignificant or even stupid to his contemporaries (See the differences between David and Joab – Joab the "achiever" and "effective" man). But these things did not pass unnoticed by him who narrated the story. After him, Israel understood that if they had had several understanding kings, only David provided them with some anticipated image of the true King, Christ.

To make easier our understanding of the events that follow, let us bear in mind that even before David, the tribe of Judah which settled in southern Palestine felt different from the tribes of Israel situated more to the north. Saul had more allies in the north; David instead was a Bethlehemite, from the tribe of Judah and found his support there.

David learns of Saul's death

1 It was thus that Saul died. As for David, he returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites. He was already two days in Ziklag ² when, on the third day, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dust strewn on his head. He went to David and fell to the ground in homage. ³ David asked him, "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I have escaped from the Israelite camp." ⁴ David then said, "Tell me what happened." And the man told him. "The soldiers fled from the battle

but many of them fell and died. Saul and his son Jonathan – they too are dead.

⁵ Then David asked the young man who reported this, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

⁶ The young man replied, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa and I saw Saul leaning on his spear while chariots and horsemen were closing in on him. ⁷ He turned around and, seeing me, called me. ⁸ I said, "Here I am." He asked, "Who are you?" and I replied, "I am an Amalekite." ⁹ He

o The first reaction of David, upon hearing of Saul's death, shows his qualities. From then on, he champions national unity and will strive to reunite around him both allies and enemies of

Mount of Gilboa. David is already known for his poetic talents (see 1 Sam 16:18). This poem attributed to him is one of the more ancient songs of the Bible.

then said to me, "Come here and kill me for I feel dizzy though I am fully alive." ¹⁰ So I went over and killed him, knowing for certain that he could not survive this disaster. Then I removed the crown from his head and the armlet from his arm, both of which I have here to give you, my lord."

¹¹ At this, David took hold of his clothes and tore them and his men did the same. ¹² And they mourned, weeping and fasting until evening, for the death of Saul and his son Jonathan, for the people of Yahweh and for Israel.

¹³ David asked the young man who told him this, "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I am the son of an Amalekite immigrant." ¹⁴ David said, "Why were you not afraid to lay your hands on Yahweh's anointed and kill him?" ¹⁵ He then called one of his men and ordered him, "Come and strike him down." He struck down the Amalekite, and killed him.

¹⁶ David declared, "You are responsible for your own death for you condemned yourself when you said, 'I have killed Yahweh's anointed.'"

¹⁷ David sang this song of lamentation for Saul and his son Jonathan, and had it taught to the people of Judah. It is called "The Bow" ¹⁸ and is found in the Book of the Just.

¹⁹ "Your glory, O Israel, is slain upon your mountains!

How the mighty ones have fallen!

²⁰ Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon
lest the Philistine women rejoice,
lest foreign maidens exult.

²¹ Mountains of Gilboa,
let neither dew nor rain visit you,
nor your waters rise!

For on you the shield of the valiant was defiled.

²² The shield of Saul was not anointed with oil;
but from the blood of the slain,
from the fat of the warriors,
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
nor did the sword of Saul return unstained.

²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and cherished,
neither in life nor in death were they parted;

*swifter than eagles they were
and stronger than lions.*

²⁴ Women of Israel, weep over Saul
who clothed you in precious scarlet,
who decked your clothes with ornaments of gold.

²⁵ How the valiant have fallen!
In the midst of the battle Jonathan lies slain on your mountains.

²⁶ I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan;
how dear have you been to me!
Your love for me was wonderful,
even more than the love of women.

²⁷ How the valiant have fallen!
The weapons of war have perished!"

David is anointed King over Judah

2 ¹ After this, David consulted Yahweh, "Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?" Yahweh answered him, "Go!" Then David asked, "Where shall I go?" He answered, "To Hebron." ² So David went up to Hebron with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³ David also brought up his men with their families and they settled in the towns of Hebron. ⁴ Then the men of Judah came and there they anointed David king over the nation of Judah.

David learned that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, ⁵ so he sent messengers to them with these words, "May Yahweh bless you for you have dealt kindly with Saul, your master, and have buried him. ⁶ May Yahweh show his love and fidelity to

14. 1 S 9, 26 18. Jos 10, 13 19. 1 Mac 9, 21 20. Mi 1, 10 21. 1 S 31, 9; Jdg 16, 23; Gen 27, 28;
22. 14, 47; 1 S 18, 4 24. Jdg 5, 30 2. 1 S 27, 3 4. 1 S 31, 11

+ Saul's death seems to undermine the recently acquired and still fragile unity of the tribes.

David is proclaimed king by the people of his own tribe of Judah. The north remains faithful to



you! I, in turn, will be kind to you for having done this. ⁷ Now be brave and strong for although your master Saul is dead, the people of Judah have anointed me their king."

⁸ Now Abner, son of Ner, Saul's general, had taken Ishbaal, son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim ⁹ where he made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin and the rest of Israel. ¹⁰ Ishbaal, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for two years. Only the people of Judah followed David. ¹¹ David was their king in Hebron and he ruled over them for seven years and six months.

Civil war

¹² Abner, son of Ner, and the men-servants of Ishbaal, Saul's son, left Mahanaim for Gibeon ¹³ where Joab, son of Zeruiah and the men of David met them at the pool of Gibeon. There they sat, one group on one side of the pool, the other on the opposite side. ¹⁴ Abner told Joab, "Let the young men rise and perform for us." Joab replied, "Let them rise!" ¹⁵ So they rose and were counted off: twelve of the Benjaminites of Ishbaal, Saul's son, and twelve of David's men. ¹⁶ Each one caught his opponent's head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, and all fell down together. Therefore, that place in Gibeon was called Helkath-hazzurim.

¹⁷ After a very fierce battle that day, Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's troops. ¹⁸ The three sons of Zeruiah-Joab, Abishai and Asahel were there. ¹⁹ Asahel, who ran as fast as a wild gazelle, pursued Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left. ²⁰ Abner turned around and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?" He replied, "Yes, it is I." ²¹ Abner

said to him, "Turn right or left, go after one of the young men and take his spoil." But Asahel refused to desist from following him, ²² so Abner again said, "Stop following me! I will surely strike you down and then, how could I face your brother Joab?" ²³ But Asahel would not heed, and Abner struck him in the belly with the butt of his spear which ran through him and came out his back. He fell and died on the spot and all who came to the place where Asahel fell dead, stopped there.

²⁴ Joab and Abishai, however, pursued Abner and, by sunset, arrived at the hill of Ammah which lies near Giah toward the desert of Gibeon. ²⁵ The Benjaminites then rallied around Abner, forming one band, and took their position on the hilltop. ²⁶ Then Abner called to Joab, "How long will you fight? Do you not realize that this will bring you more bitterness? When will you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?" ²⁷ Joab replied, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, my men would have continued pursuing their brothers until morning." ²⁸ So Joab blew the trumpet and the men desisted from pursuing the Israelites and fighting them.

²⁹ Abner and his men marched all night through the lowland, crossed the Jordan, and marched the whole morning until they reached Mahanaim. ³⁰ As for Joab, he stopped pursuing Abner and gathered all his men. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's servants were missing. ³¹ But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty of Abner's men from among the Benjaminites. ³² Asahel was taken and buried in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and reached Hebron at daybreak.

3 ¹ There was a long war between Saul's party and that of David, but David grew stronger while Saul's party grew weaker.

² Sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn, Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; ³ his second, Chileab, of Abigail, widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom, son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, ⁴ the

11. 5, 5 14. 1 S 17, 8 28. 18, 16; 20, 22

2. 5, 13-16

Saul's son. With the purpose of uniting them, David seeks the sympathy of Saul's allies, and praises the people from the north who gave Saul burial.

David, the man of God, has two wives, and will later have still more. David was a man of his times. God demanded no more than they could understand.

■ David will have no success in educating his children. His biggest trials will come from them.

It is a consequence of polygamy: with many wives and many children, the children are not given from infancy the personal attention which would give them real formation. Amnon will violate Absalom's sister and will die for this offence. Absalom and Adonias will try to unseat their father. Some of David's sons had not yet been born at this time (see 1 Chron 14:3), especially Solomon, son of Bathsheba, and Nathan, whom Luke mentions as one of Jesus' ancestors (Lk 3:31).

fourth, Adonijah, the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah, the son of Abital; ⁵ and the sixth, Ithream, of David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron.

⁶ While war was going on between the party of Saul and that of David, Abner was strengthening his position in Saul's family. ⁷ Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah on whose account Ishbaal chided Abner, "Why have you slept with my father's concubine?" ⁸ Abner was very angry because of Ishbaal's remark and exclaimed, "Am I a dog's head? Up to now I have been loyal to the family of Saul your father, to his brothers and friends, and have not delivered you into the hands of David, and you come accusing me because of this woman. ⁹ May God deal with me severely if I do not do for David what Yahweh swore to him – ¹⁰ to transfer the kingdom from the family of Saul to that of David and make him king of Israel and Judah to rule over all the land from Dan to Beer-sheba." ¹¹ Ishbaal could no longer say a word to Abner for he feared him.

¹² Abner then sent messengers to David at Hebron saying, "To whom does the land belong? Enter into an agreement with me and I shall help you obtain all Israel." ¹³ David replied, "I will make an agreement with you, but on one condition: you may appear before me when you bring me Saul's daughter, Michal."

◆ ¹⁴ Then David sent messengers to Ishbaal, Saul's son, to tell him, "Give me my wife Michal whom I married for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins." ¹⁵ Ishbaal sent for her and took her away from her husband Paltiel, son of Laish ¹⁶ who followed her weeping all the way to Bahurim. There Abner said to him, "Go back!" and he turned back.

¹⁷ Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and told them, "You have long wanted to have David as your king. ¹⁸ Well, make it come true; for Yahweh made a promise to David and said: By my servant David, I will save my people Israel from the Philistines and from all their enemies." ¹⁹ Abner also spoke to the people of

Benjamin; then he went to tell David at Hebron the proposals of Israel and the Benjaminites.

Joab murders Abner

²⁰ When Abner came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and the twenty men who were with him. ²¹ Then Abner said to David, "I will now go and assemble all Israel for my master the king, that they may enter into an agreement with you, and that you may reign over all those you want to rule."

²² Just then, David's men and Joab arrived from a raid taking along with them a great deal of booty. Abner was no longer with David at Hebron for he had departed quietly after David had dismissed him. ²³ When Joab arrived with his troops he was told, "Abner, son of Ner, came to see the king; then the king sent him on his way and he went in peace." ²⁴ Joab then went to the king and said, "What did you do? When Abner came to you, why did you allow him to leave?" ²⁵ You know what Abner, son of Ner is like; he came to you deceitfully to observe and find out what you are doing."

²⁶ Joab left David and sent messengers to go after Abner and they had him brought back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know of that. ²⁷ When Abner arrived at Hebron, Joab took him aside within the city gate as though to speak with him privately. There he stabbed him in the belly and he died. Joab did so in re-

7. 21, 8

10. 1 S 13, 14

13. 1 S 18, 25

27. 20, 8

◆ Sometimes, the Bible says that God intervenes to guide David and lead him to victory. This does not deny the fact that David is an intelligent and capable man, and is able to impose himself on Israel. God was not acting differently at that time than as he acts today. It is always man who writes history and, in so doing, writes it with light and shadow.

The new king strives to bring about a united and strong nation. This account shows us an attempt to achieve unity which fails because of

the mean and vindictive attitude of David's military officers.

The story highlights three characteristics of a closed mind in a politician:

- he believes that those who belong to his party are good and those, in turn, who belong to the opposition are bad;
- later, he ascribes bad intentions to everything the opposition does;
- finally he eliminates them by any means.

venge for the murder of his brother, Asahel.

²⁸ Later on, David heard about this. Then he said, "I and my kingdom are innocent before Yahweh of the murder of Abner, son of Ner. ²⁹ May justice for his blood fall on Joab and on all his father's family, and may there be forever among them some member who has discharge, or is sick with leprosy, or who is only fit to hold a spindle, or who falls by the sword or hunger!"

³⁰ Joab and his brother Abishai slew Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.

³¹ David then told Joab and those who were with him "Tear off your clothes, put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner." King David himself followed the corpse. ³² They buried Abner at Hebron; there the king wept aloud over his grave and all the people joined the lamentation.

³³ The king began the mourning song for Abner, with these words, "Should Abner die as a fool dies? ³⁴ Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered; as one falls at the hands of the wicked, so you have fallen." And all the people again wept over him.

³⁵ Then the people tried to persuade David to take some food while it was still day, but David swore, "May God do so to me and more if I touch food before sundown!" ³⁶ The people needed this and it pleased them; in fact, they were pleased at whatever the king said. ³⁷ This day they realized, as did all the people of Israel, that the king had no part in the murder of Abner, son of Ner. ³⁸ Then the king said to his servants "Do you realize that a general and valiant warrior passed away today in Israel? ³⁹ Although I am the anointed king, today I feel helpless for these sons of Zeruiah are too hard on me. May Yahweh repay the one who did evil."

Ishbaal is murdered

4 ¹ When Ishbaal, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, he was

stunned and the Israelites were disheartened. ² Saul's son had two men, captains of raiding bands: one was Baanah, the other Rechab, both sons of Rimmon, a Benjaminite from Beeroth. For Beeroth was still considered part of Benjamin; ³ the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have remained there as immigrants to the present day.

⁴ (Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son whose feet were crippled. He was five years old when the news came from Jezreel about the death of Saul and Jonathan. His nurse took him up and fled so hastily that the boy fell and became lame. He was called Mephibaal.)

⁵ Now Rechab and Baanah, sons of Rimmon, the Beerothite, went their way and arrived in the hot midday at the house of Ishbaal who was taking a nap. ⁶ His doorkeeper had been cleaning wheat, but feeling drowsy, she slept; Rechab and his brother Baanah got into the house. ⁷ They rushed into Ishbaal's bedroom as he lay asleep in his bed and struck him dead. They beheaded him, took his head and left, walking all night by the way of the Arabah. ⁸ They brought Ishbaal's head to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ishbaal son of Saul, your enemy who sought your life. This day Yahweh has avenged my lord the king, on Saul and his son."

⁹ But David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "Let Yahweh hear, he who has saved me from all adversities. ¹⁰ When somebody reported Saul's death to me, thinking he was bringing me good news, I took hold of him and killed him at Ziklag, instead of giving him a reward. ¹¹ Will I do less when wicked men have murdered a just one in his own house and on his bed? Shall I not now demand his blood from your hands and sweep you away?"

¹² So David commanded his young men to kill them. They cut off their hands and feet and hung them beside the pool at Hebron. Then they took Ishbaal's head and buried it in Abner's tomb on Hebron.

David is anointed King over Israel

5 ¹ All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your bone and flesh. ² In the past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led Israel out and brought her back. And Yahweh said to you, 'You shall be the shepherd of

29. 1 S 2, 33. 35. 1 S 31, 13. 39. 16, 10; 19, 23; 1 S 26, 6. 8. Ex 4, 19. 12. 1, 15; 1 S 31, 10. 2. 1 S 18, 5

o This is a great day for David and for Israel.

Those from the north acknowledge him as king

my people Israel and you shall be commander over Israel." ³ Before Yahweh, King David made an agreement with the elders of Israel who came to him at Hebron, and they anointed him king of Israel.

⁴ David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years: ⁵ he reigned over Judah, from Hebron, seven and a half years; and over Israel and Judah, from Jerusalem, for thirty-three years.

David captures Jerusalem

⁶ The king and his men set out for Jerusalem to fight the Jebusites who lived there. They said to David, "If you try to break in here, the blind and the lame will drive you away," which meant that David could not get in. ⁷ Yet David captured the fortress of Zion that became the "city of David."

⁸ That day David said, "Whoever wants to win over the Jebusites must go through the water shaft and attack these lame and blind who are David's enemies." From this came the saying, "The blind and the lame shall not enter the house." ⁹ David lived in the fortress, calling it the City of David, and proceeded to build the city around it from the Millo and inside as well. ¹⁰ And David grew more powerful, for Yahweh, the God of hosts, was with him.

¹¹ Hiram, King of Tyre, sent messengers to

David with cedar trees, carpenters and masons to build a house for David. ¹² David then understood that Yahweh had made him king over Israel and had exalted his reign for the sake of his people Israel.

¹³ After David had come from Hebron he took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him. ¹⁴ These are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, ¹⁵ Ibhah, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, ¹⁶ Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.

¹⁷ When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king of Israel, they went to search for him. On hearing this, David went down to the stronghold. ¹⁸ When the Philistines overran the valley of Rephaim. ¹⁹ David consulted Yahweh, "Shall I attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands?" Yahweh answered David, "Go ahead for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into your hands." ²⁰ So David came to Baalperazim where he defeated them. He said, "Yahweh has scattered my enemies before me like a sudden bursting flood." That is why that place is called Baalperazim. ²¹ There the Philistines left their idols and David and his men picked them up.

²² The Philistines went up again and overran the valley of Rephaim. ²³ David consulted Yahweh who said, "Do not go up straight but circle around and attack them from behind when you are in front of the balsam trees. ²⁴ Once you hear a marching sound on top of the balsam trees, act quickly for Yahweh is going ahead of you to attack the Philistine army." ²⁵ David obeyed Yahweh's command and struck down the Philistines from Giba to as far as Gezer.

The ark is brought to Jerusalem

6 ¹ David gathered together once more all the picked men of Israel, numbering thirty thousand in all.

11. 1 K 5. 15

Ps 132. 6

and the unity of all Israel is achieved. The tribes in the north were separated from those in the south by the district of Jerusalem, which was in the hands of the Canaanites. David conquers Jerusalem which becomes the capital of this united kingdom.

It is a definitive stage. When David conquers Jerusalem and makes it his capital, God turns it into the visible center of his presence among people.

From then on, the one and only temple of God will be in Jerusalem, and the true kings of the people of God will be those who rule in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the image of the

church and Christians will know that, after the Jerusalem of Palestine, God has promised them another Jerusalem – that of heaven (See Apoc 20 and 21).

Jerusalem is the image of heaven and, at the same time, of the church on earth. Often, in the Bible, Jerusalem is called Zion, since this was the name of the more ancient part of Jerusalem. It was also called the "City of David."

In the Bible, the unity achieved between the northern and southern tribes is a visible sign that they are living in God's grace: all unfaithfulness toward God leads to a division among men, and all division among men is a sin against God.

† Then he and all the people with him in Baala-Judah set forth to bring up from there the ark of God on which rests the Name of Yahweh of hosts, he who rests on the cherubim. † They blaced the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the cart † with the ark of Yahweh, with Ahio walking before it. † David and the Israelites were joyfully celebrating before Yahweh, singing and blaying on lyres, harps, tambourines, fastanets and cymbals.

† † When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled and Uzzah stretched his hand to the ark of God to hold it. † Yahweh's anger burnt against Uzzah and God struck him there because of this mistake; Uzzah died there beside the ark of

God. † David was angry because Yahweh had struck Uzzah, and that place was called Perez-Uzzah to the present day.

† David was afraid of Yahweh that day and said, "How can the ark of Yahweh come to me?" † So David refused to take the ark of Yahweh into the city of David but had it brought instead, to the house of Obededom the Gittite. † Yahweh's ark remained there for three months and Yahweh blessed Obededom and all his household.

† King David was told that Yahweh had blessed the family of Obededom and all that belonged to him because of the ark of God, so he went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David, rejoicing. † After those who carried the ark of Yahweh had walked

3. 1S 7, 1; 1K 8, 1

1S 6, 7-12

5. Ps 68, 25

7. 1S 6, 19

† + The Ark was very important to the Israelites. It contained the Law which Moses received from God on Mount Sinai. The Israelites imagined God to be present above the Ark whose golden cap served as a footstool for his feet. God wanted them to understand that he was with his people, in a friendly but demanding presence.

† But to whom did the Ark belong? It belonged to the twelve tribes and not to any one of them in particular. That is why it stayed in different locations: Shiloh, Gilgal, Bethel, depending on circumstances. And what is David's intention in bringing it to Jerusalem, his new capital? Will it be a political move to establish his own authority over Israel? Most surely. But it is also, and more so, a religious act.

† Until then, Israel was, as a whole, Yahweh's chosen one. God's firstborn. But no Israelite felt worthy of special attention from the God of their people. Now David knows that he is the chosen one of Yahweh, the "son of God," as the prophet Nathan says referring to David's descendants. That is why David aspires to have the Ark very close to him, and he wants God's presence in a temple that serves as a private chapel for his family.

† God certainly loves all people, but David is the first who lives by this truth in a very simple relationship with God. Later the prophets will understand that the promises made to David are for all of us who believe in Christ, his only son.

† In Israel only those of Levi's tribe, being espe-

cially consecrated to Yahweh, have the right to serve him and to approach sacred things. Abinadab and his sons have welcomed the Ark into their home. But they cannot touch the Ark without being affected by the awesome power emanating from the Holy God. It is said that Uzza was "punished." But this word conforms to the mentality of those people who confused sin with mistakes and disgrace.

Uzza's death was a sign that suited the thinking of the people at that time; it helped them to understand how great God is above all, yet, at the same time, that he is really present among his people.

David had the Ark brought to the house of Obededom. Why is it brought to the house of an alien? Because Yahweh will not ask for an accounting of this non-Israelite? Or because it is better that a foreigner suffer the risk of God's anger?

But if the Ark brings blessings on the one who welcomes it, its natural place is beside the King!

Luke's gospel discovers other imagery in this story. Like the Ark, and in a more wonderful way, the Virgin Mary carried for nine months God himself who, on becoming man, sealed the Covenant with all the peoples of the world. This is why some have given her the title, "Ark of the Covenant." Luke himself had this text before him when he was narrating the Virgin's visit to Elizabeth. (Pay attention to vv. 9 and 11 and compare with Lk 1:39-45 and 56-64.)

six paces, they sacrificed an ox and a fattened calf.

■ ¹⁴David whirled round dancing with all his heart before Yahweh, wearing a linen ephod, ¹⁵for he and all the Israelites brought up the ark of Yahweh, shouting joyfully and sounding the horn.

¹⁶As the ark of Yahweh entered the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked out of the window; and when she saw king David leaping and whirling round before Yahweh, she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷They brought in the ark of Yahweh and laid it in its place in the tent which David had pitched for it. Then David offered burnt and peace offerings before Yahweh. ¹⁸Once the offerings had been made, David blessed the people in the name of Yahweh of hosts, ¹⁹and distributed to each of the them, to each man and woman of the entire assembly of Israel, a loaf of bread, a portion of meat and a raisin

cake. With this, all the people left for their homes.

²⁰When David returned to bless his household, Michal, Saul's daughter, met him and said, "How the king of Israel honoured himself today, exposing himself before his servants' maids as uncouth men do!" ²¹But David said to Michal, "I did that before Yahweh who chose me instead of your father and his family, making me commander over Israel, Yahweh's people. By Yahweh's life I swear that I will dance and whirl again before him. ²²I will humble myself still more: and you may look at me, but I will not be rejected by the maids you spoke about." ²³And Michal, Saul's daughter, had no child to the day she died.

The prophecy of Nathan

◆ ⁷ When the king had settled in his palace and Yahweh had rid him of all his surrounding enemies, ²he said to Jonathan the prophet,

9. Gen 28, 17; Ex 14, 31 11. Gen 30, 30; 39, 5

14. 1 S 2, 18 17. 1 K 3, 4; 8, 63 2. 1 K 8, 1

■ Let us imagine the transfer of the Ark. It is a huge procession with thousands of people singing, dancing and playing music, with the king himself leading. Sacrifices beyond count are offered. It is a time of great joy, for the Lord is with his people. It is the triumphal entry of the Ark of the Covenant into its rightful place – in the capital of the country.

David whirled dancing before Yahweh. David understands very well that all this is very little to give thanks worthily to God. He does not care what others think of him, when he is showing his joy to the Lord; and so he sings and dances.

Michal despised David in her heart. Michal, Saul's daughter, understood nothing, being more concerned about "what people will say," than about praising God.

In this passage, a great king teaches us real greatness and brings to mind examples from daily life: a young man who having finished his studies goes back to his barrio, and remains as simple as he was before; a Christian who is not ashamed of his faith and practices it, whether people are looking or not.

◆ *I live in a cedar house while the Ark of Yahweh is housed in a tent.* David thinks that if the king has a palace, why should God not

have one? But God, who is greater, thinks otherwise and makes this known to his prophet Nathan. He will be the one to make David's house. *House* in the Bible refers to both person and things belonging to someone. David's "house" is his family, his servants, his people.

I will provide a place for my people Israel. God chooses this moment for a decisive step in the development of his people. Israel was people of twelve tribes from Moses' time. Now, it will be a nation organized in their own land with a central and stable authority: the kings descending from David.

Now I shall make your name great as the name of great ones. Yahweh has accompanied David in all his undertakings; but now he makes use of him and his works to build something permanent for the salvation of humankind.

The same thing happened with Abraham (Gen 17:7).

The same thing happens with Peter (Mt 16:18).

The Kingdom of God from now on will be the kingdom of David.

I will raise up your son after you. (See Lu 1:32.)

God's promise points to Solomon, David's son and successor, and also to those who will come after. The promise was apparently broke

"Look, I live in a house of cedar but the ark of God is housed in a tent."

³ Nathan replied, "Do as it seems fit to you for Yahweh is with you."

⁴ But that very night, Yahweh's word came to Nathan. ⁵ "Go and tell my servant David, this is what Yahweh says: Are you able to build a house for me to live in? ⁶ I have not dwelt in a house since I brought the Israelites up from Egypt to the present day, but I went about with a tent for shelter. ⁷ As long as I walked with the Israelites, did I say anything to the chiefs of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel? Did I say: Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

⁸ Now you will tell my servant David, this is what Yahweh of hosts says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the sheep, to make you commander of my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you went, cutting down all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great as the name of the great ones on earth. ¹⁰ I will provide a place for my people Israel and plant them that they may live there in peace. They shall no longer be harassed, nor shall wicked men oppress them as before. ¹¹ From the time when I appointed judges over my people Israel until now you are the one to whom I

give rest from all your enemies. Yahweh also tells you that he will build you a house.

¹² When the time comes for you to rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your son after you, the one born of you and I will make his reign secure. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name and I will firmly establish his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father for him and he shall be my son. If he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod, as men do. ¹⁵ But I will not withdraw my kindness from him as I did to Saul when I removed him out of your way. ¹⁶ Your house and your reign shall last forever before me, and your throne shall be forever firm."

¹⁷ Nathan repeated these words and related this vision to David.

¹⁸ Then King David went in, sat before Yahweh and said, "Who am I, O Yahweh God, and who is my family that you have brought me so far? ¹⁹ Yet this was not enough for you, O Yahweh God, for you have also spoken of your servant's house for a long time to come. Is this the way men act, O Yahweh God? ²⁰ What more can David say to you? You know your servant, O Yahweh God! ²¹ You fulfill your promise and carry out your plan, as you do now in bringing about all these great things and revealing them to your servant. ²² Therefore you are great, O Yahweh God, for there is no one like you, nor is there a God other than you from all that we ourselves have heard. ²³ Is there on earth another nation like your people Israel, whom God has come to redeem, and to make his people? Indeed you made yourself

5. Acts 7, 48; Ex 40, 34	6. Jdg 19, 30	8. 1 S 16, 11; 17, 15	9. Ps 89, 28
10. Ex 15, 17; Jer 24, 6; 32, 41	12. Acts 2, 30	13. 1 K 2, 24	14. Heb 1, 5
15. 1 S 13, 14; 15, 20	16. 2 S 23, 5; Lk 1, 32	18. 1 S 18, 18	20. Lk 12, 30

when, after four centuries, the kingdom of David was destroyed. Nevertheless, it is Jesus, one of his descendants, who, much later, will fully realize what Nathan announced. Several times in the Gospel, Jesus will be called *Son of David* (Mk 12:35).

Jesus will also be king, although not in the manner of this world's rulers. He will realize fully in his person what was merely sketched in the person of David.

- the shepherd who gathers together the scattered sheep;
- the conqueror who gives his people the

- peace he has won;
- God's deputy among men.

The way God gets ahead of David and answers him, gives us two remarkable lessons:

- As in David's case, very often people want to offer God something. In reality we can never anticipate him; he gives his favours even before we have begun to serve him.
- Besides, what pleases God is not so much the temples which we build for him, but the spiritual temple which he wants to build in people themselves - a project which he will realize after many centuries through his Church.

renowned by doing for them great and awesome things, and bringing them out from Egypt, from their people and their gods.²⁴ You have set apart your people Israel to become your people forever; and you, Yahweh, have become their God.

²⁵ Now, O Yahweh God, keep forever the promise you made and have now revealed to me regarding myself and my family, ²⁶ that your name may be honoured forever and people may say, 'Yahweh of hosts is God over Israel.' The house of your servant David will be secure before you ²⁷ because you, O Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel, have made it known to your servant and have said to him: 'Your family will last forever.' This is why I have dared to address this prayer to you.

²⁸ So now, O Yahweh God, since you are the faithful God, and have promised me this good thing, ²⁹ please bless my descendants, that they may continue forever before you. For you, O Yahweh God, have spoken and, with your blessing, my family shall be blessed forever."

David's victories

o 8 ¹ After this, David defeated the Philistines, crushing them in such a way that they were no longer in control of the land. ² Then he defeated the Moabites. He had them measured with a line and laid down on the ground; two thirds of them were to be executed, and one third to be spared. And so the Moabites became David's servants and paid tribute to him.

³ David also defeated Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he tried to take again the valley of the Euphrates. ⁴ David captured from him a thousand and seven horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstringed all the chariot horses but left a sufficient number for a hundred chariots. ⁵ The

Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, king of Zobah, but David won over twenty-two thousand of their men. ⁶ Then David set up governors in Aram of Damascus and the Arameans became David's servants, paying tribute to him.

Yahweh made David victorious wherever he went. ⁷ David took the golden shields carried by the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem; ⁸ he also took a great quantity of bronze from Betah and Berothai, cities of Hadadezer.

⁹ When Toi, king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, ¹⁰ he sent his son Joram to king David to greet him and thank him for having fought against Hadadezer and defeating him. For the latter had often been at war with Toi. Joram brought with him articles of silver, gold and bronze ¹¹ which King David consecrated to Yahweh together with the silver and gold which he consecrated from all the nations he subdued; ¹² from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, as well as the booty of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

■ ¹³ David became famous when he returned from an expedition where he killed eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. ¹⁴ He set up governors in Edom and the Edomites became his servants. So Yahweh made David victorious wherever he went.

¹⁵ David reigned over all Israel, decreeing rules and administering justice to all his people. ¹⁶ Joab, son of Zeruiah, was commander of the army; Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, recorder; ¹⁷ Zadok, son of Ahitub and Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, priests; Seraiah, secretary; ¹⁸ and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the Cherethites and the Pelethites. David's sons were priests.

1. Chron 18

4. Jos 11, 6

15. 1 K 4, 1

o This chapter narrates David's victories with pride. These wars were the very basis for the existence of David's kingdom, and a necessary step in the long preparation of God's Kingdom. The Israelites will remember David as the victorious warrior-king and, at the same time, will look forward to the Messiah, the son of David, as the king of Peace who will conquer all enemies. (See Is 9:5 and Mich 5:1-4)

At that time, primitive instincts were so powerful that the humble and merciful David does not hesitate to execute his prisoners. The Bible praises him for having saved some.

The fact is that faith does not replace culture; and all of us, faithful though we be, depend on the moral ideas of our surroundings. We know

that during many centuries of Christianity believers and saints, who were ready to give up their life for a sick brother, did not think of denouncing abuses which appear intolerable to us.

■ Neither Abraham nor Moses had secretaries or assistants: these wandered had no offices, not even an archives-bearing donkey. David forms the first nucleus of officials in the kingdom, and only with Solomon will sacred literature start.

David's sons were priests. At that time, two centuries after Moses, priesthood was not yet reserved to the Levites. Solomon himself will offer sacrifices and consecrate the Temple (1 K 8:64).

9 ¹ David asked, "Is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for the sake of Jonathan?" ² So they called a servant of Saul, named Ziba, and brought him to David who asked, "So you are Ziba?" He replied, "I am your servant." ³ Then the king asked him, "Is there still someone of the house of Saul to whom I can give God's favor?" Ziba answered the king, "A son of Jonathan whose feet are crippled still lives." ⁴ The king asked him, "Where is he?" And Ziba replied, "He is in the house of Machir, son of Ammiel, at Lodebar." ⁵ So King David sent for him and had him brought from the house of Machir, son of Ammiel, at Lodebar.

⁶ When Mepibaal, son of Jonathan, son of Saul arrived, he fell on the ground and paid homage to David who said, "Mepibaal!" He replied, "Your servant listens." ⁷ David then told him, "Do not be afraid. I will do you a favor for the sake of your father Jonathan and give you back all the land of Saul your father. Besides, you shall always eat at my table." ⁸ He bowed down and said, "What is your servant that you should show concern for a dead dog like myself?"

⁹ The King called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have turned over to your master's son everything that Saul and his family possessed. ¹⁰ You yourself, your sons and servants shall till the land for him and carry in the harvest so that your master's family may have food, although your master's son Mepibaal shall always eat at my table." Ziba, who had fifteen sons and twenty servants ¹¹ said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands. Yet Mepibaal ate at my table like a king's son." ¹² Mepibaal had a young son named Mica; and all who lived in Ziba's house became Mepibaal's servants. ¹³ But Mepibaal lived in Jerusalem for he always ate at the king's table. He was lame in both feet.

10 ¹ When the king of the Ammonites died and Hanun his son reigned in his place, ² David said, "I will be kind to Hanun son of Nahash as his father was kind to me." So David sent his servants to comfort him over his father's death. When David's servants arrived in the land of the Ammonites, ³ the Ammonite chiefs told Hanun their lord, "Do you think that, by sending men with condolences, David is honouring your father? Has not David rather sent his servants to you to explore the city, spy on it and overthrow it?"

⁴ At this, Hanun seized David's servants, shaved off half their beard, cut away the lower

halves of their garments even up to their hips and sent them away. ⁵ When this was reported to David, he sent messengers to meet these men who felt greatly ashamed and to tell them, "Stay at Jericho and return after your beards have grown."

⁶ The Ammonites saw that David could no longer bear with them, so they sent for and hired the Arameans of Beth-rehob and of Zobah numbering twenty thousand foot soldiers, the king of Maacah with one thousand men and also twelve thousand men of Tob. ⁷ On hearing this, David sent out Joab with all the warriors. ⁸ The Ammonites came out in battle formation at the entrance gate while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah grouped separately in the open country.

⁹ When Joab saw that there were two battlefronts, one in front of him and the other behind, he selected picked men of Israel and arranged them in battle formation against the Syrians. ¹⁰ Then he entrusted the rest of his army to Abishai his brother and arranged them in battle formation against the Ammonites. ¹¹ And he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, you shall help me; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come to your assistance. ¹² Take courage! Let us act like men for the sake of our people and God's cities; and may Yahweh do what seems good to him."

¹³ Joab and the people who were with him launched the attack against the Arameans and put them to flight. ¹⁴ When the Ammonites saw the Arameans fleeing, they too fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from his battle against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

¹⁵ When the Arameans saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered together. ¹⁶ Hadadezer sent for the Syrians and had them brought from beyond the Euphrates. They came to Helam with Shobach the commander of Hadadezer's army, leading them. ¹⁷ This was reported to David who, in turn, gathered together all Israel and came to Helam after crossing the Jordan. The Arameans then arranged themselves in battle formation and fought against David. ¹⁸ but they fled before Israel. David had seven hundred of the men in chariots and forty thousand horsemen killed. Shobach, too, the commander of their army was slain and died there. ¹⁹ After having been defeated by Israel, all the kings who depended on Hadadezer made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Arameans no longer dared to help the Ammonites.

David and Bathsheba

11 ¹In the spring of that year, when kings usually set out to fight, David sent out Joab, his officers and all the Israelite troops. They slaughtered the Ammonites and attacked Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem.

²One afternoon, David got up from his siesta and took a walk on the roof of the royal house. From the rooftop, he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful. ³David sent to inquire about the woman, and was told, "She is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah, the Hittite." ⁴So David sent messengers to have her brought to him; and he had intercourse with her after she had cleansed herself after her monthly period. Then she returned to her house.

⁵As the woman saw she was with child, she sent word to David, "I am with child."

⁶David then sent a message to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷When Uriah came, David asked him about Joab, how the people were and how the war was proceeding; ⁸then he told Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet."

Uriah left the palace and the king had a portion from his table sent to

him. ⁹Uriah, however, did not go down to his house but slept by the door of the king's palace with all the servants of his lord. ¹⁰David was told that Uriah did not go down to his house, and he said to him, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?"

¹¹Uriah replied, "The Ark, the Israelites and the Judahites are housed in tents while my lord Joab and the men are encamped in the open country. Shall I go to my house to eat and drink there and sleep with my wife? As you live, I will not do this!" ¹²So David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also and I will dismiss you tomorrow." Uriah therefore stayed in Jerusalem that day and the day after. ¹³David invited him to table and he ate and drank until he was drunk. When evening fell, however, he went to lie down on his couch with the guards of his lord instead of going down to his house.

¹⁴The next morning, David wrote Joab a letter to be taken by hand by Uriah, ¹⁵and in which was written, "Place Uriah in the front row where the fighting is very fierce and then withdrew from him so that he may be struck down and die." ¹⁶When Joab was attacking the City, he assigned Uriah to a place which he knew was being defended by strong warriors. ¹⁷In fact the defenders attacked the

1. 1 K 20, 22

4. Lev 15, 19

11. 1 S 21, 6

+ David's "sin" helps us to reflect on the weakness and wickedness of which even God's friends are capable.

We observe David's defects in several places. He is impulsive and deceptive. He is not perfectly docile to God's will. But here (in ch. 11) everything contributes toward making his crime more odious:

- Uriah is a foreigner who came to serve the king.
- Uriah observes strictly the religious laws concerning war (to abstain from sexual relations), and he observes solidarity with his companions, while David abandons

himself to passion far from danger.

David kills Uriah treacherously after having instructed him to bring the letter to Joab.

How could a book intended to preserve the memory of the model king dare to narrate this event with such frankness? It does not hide anything that makes David's crime more odious and wins greater sympathy for his victim. An official historian of another people would never have done this. Besides, at that time, the caprices of the king were not considered a sin or a crime. But the Bible wants us to be aware of our sins. The "saints" whom the Bible presents are sinful men who need a Saviour.



men of Joab. Some of David's soldiers and officers were killed; Uriah the Hittite also died.

¹⁸ Then Joab sent a messenger to tell David everything that had happened during the battle. ¹⁹ And he said to him, "When you have finished recounting to the king the outcome of the battle, ²⁰ perhaps he will get angry and ask you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know they would shoot from the wall?' ²¹ Who killed Abimelech, son of Jerubesheth? Was it not a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so close to the wall?"; then you shall say, "Your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead."

²² So the messenger went to tell David all that Joab instructed him. So he answered the king and explained, ²³ "These men had overcome us and pushed us in the field; then we drove them back to the entrance gate. ²⁴ But the archers aimed at your guard from the top of the wall, killing some of them. Your servant Uriah, the Hittite has also been killed."

²⁵ David said to the messenger, "Try to encourage Joab with this message: Do not let this thing disturb you for the sword devours one this time and another, at another time. Intensify your attacks against the city and overthrow it."

²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard of the death of her husband, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After her mourning was over, David had her brought to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son. But Yahweh was displeased with what David had done.

12 ¹ So Yahweh sent the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan went to the king and said to him, ² "There were two men in a city: one

was rich; the other, poor. ² The rich man had a lot of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb he had bought. He himself fed it and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and slept on his lap. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now a traveller came to the rich man but he would not take from his own flock or herd to prepare food for the traveller. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and prepared that for his visitor."

⁵ David was furious because of this man and told Nathan, "As Yahweh lives, the man who has done this deserves death! ⁶ He must return the lamb fourfold for acting like this and showing no compassion."

⁷ Nathan said to David, "You are this man! It is Yahweh, God of Israel, who speaks: 'I anointed you king over Israel and saved you from Saul's hands; ⁸ I gave you your master's house and your master's wives; I also gave you the nation of Israel and Judah. But if this were not enough, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of Yahweh by doing what displeases him? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife for yourself. Yes, you killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now the sword will never be far from your family because you have shown contempt for me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite for yourself.'

21. Jdg 9, 50

6. Ex 22, 1

■ David will be a model of the repentant sinner. *Why did you despise the word of Yahweh?* What has David done that God should choose him? Everything in his life has been the work of Yahweh's love. God chose a simple shepherd to make him king. Even more, he chose this "king" from a small nation, to establish the permanent kingdom. There are no excuses for David.

You did what displeases me. David easily forgets that Yahweh does not look for external ceremonies, but that he wants purity of heart

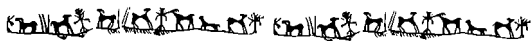
and justice to the neighbour.

You killed Uriah and took his wife. God brings into broad daylight what David hid from everyone and from his own conscience.

David's attitude: he humbly acknowledges his sin and accepts the consequences of his fault. In the Bible, Psalm 51, a moving prayer of a repentant sinner is attributed to him.

God's attitude:

— *God has forgiven your sin.* God remains faithful and keeps his promises to David's descendants. More than that, Solomon, son of



¹¹ Thus says Yahweh: Your misfortune will rise from your own house! I will take your wives from you and give them to your neighbour who shall lie with them in broad daylight. ¹² What you did was done secretly, but what I do will be done before Israel in broad daylight."

¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Yahweh." Nathan answered him, "Yahweh has forgiven your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ However, because you have dared to despise Yahweh by doing such a thing, the child that is born to you shall die." ¹⁵ Then Nathan left and went to his house.

◆ Yahweh struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David and it became sick. ¹⁶ David entreated God for the child; he kept a strict fast and lay on the ground the whole night. ¹⁷ The elders of his house asked him to rise from the ground but he refused. Nor did he join them to eat. ¹⁸ On the seventh day, the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead for they said, "When the child was still alive, we spoke to him but he would not listen to us. What will he do if we tell him the child is dead?"

¹⁹ When David saw his servants whispering to one another, he realized that the child was dead and asked them, "Is the child dead?" They replied, "He is dead." ²⁰ Then David rose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his

clothes. He entered the house of Yahweh and worshipped.

After that, he went to his own house, asked for food and ate. ²¹ Then his servants asked him, "Why are you acting like this? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but after it died, you got up and took food." ²² David answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept thinking: Who knows? Perhaps Yahweh will be kind to me and let my child live. ²³ But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back to life? I can go to him but he cannot return to me."

²⁴ David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He went in and slept with her and she bore a son whom he named Solomon. Yahweh loved him ²⁵ and made it known through Nathan the prophet, who named him Jedidiah on Yahweh's behalf.

²⁶ Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and conquered the King's City. ²⁷ Then he sent messengers to David and told him, "I have fought against Rabbah and conquered the city of waters. ²⁸ Gather then the rest of the people to attack and capture the city lest I myself do it and the city be called by my name." ²⁹ So David mustered the people, attacked and captured Rabbah. ³⁰ He took the crown of their god Milkom from his head, the weight of which was a talent of gold, and which had a precious stone embedded in it. This they put on David's head. He carried off an amount of booty ³¹ and brought away the people whom he set to labour with saws, iron picks and iron axes, making them work at the brick-kilns. David dealt like this with all the Ammonite cities, then he returned to Jerusalem with all the people.

13, 24, 10: 1 S 15, 24: Ps 51

16, 15, 31

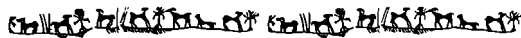
Bethsheba and David, will be the beneficiary of the promises mentioned: God will let grace pass through where sin had passed.

Your misfortune will rise from your own house. In pardoning, God does not erase the consequences of the crime.

◆ The child born out of love between David and Bethsheba falls sick and dies. The king

realizes that this is another sign for him to understand the gravity of his sin. But God is not vindictive nor does he bear grudges. His heart is not like that of men. He is "slow to anger and not one surpasses him in kindness."

Another child is born of the same woman, now his wife, the future king Solomon, whom God chooses to succeed David. In spite of his sin, God has not abandoned David.



Amnon and Tamar

o13 ¹ Now David's son, Absalom, had a beautiful sister named Tamar. It happened that Amnon, another of David's sons, loved her. ² Amnon was so obsessed that he became ill and, as Tamar was a virgin, he could not do anything. ³ Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab, who was a very shrewd man, said to him, ⁴ "Oh son of the king, why do you look so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon replied, "I love Tamar, sister of my brother Absalom." ⁵ So Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come to give me bread to eat and let her prepare the food in my presence so that I may eat it from her hand.'" ⁶ So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, he told the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come to make some cakes in my presence; I will eat from her hand."

⁷ So David sent for Tamar and said to her, "Go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare him some food." ⁸ Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made and baked cakes before him. ⁹ But when she took the pan and set the cakes before him, he refused to eat and said, "Send everyone outside." After they had all left, ¹⁰ Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the bedroom and let me eat from your hand." Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to her brother Amnon in the bedroom. ¹¹ But when she brought them to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come, lie with me, my sister." ¹² She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me. No such thing is done in Israel. Do not commit this foolishness. ¹³ Where will I hide my shame? And you yourself would be regarded as a foolish man in Israel. So please, talk to the king for he will not keep me from you." ¹⁴ But he refused to listen to her and, being stronger than she, forced her and lay with her.

¹⁵ Afterwards, Amnon hated her with a hatred exceeding the love he had had for her; and he said to Tamar, "Get up and leave." ¹⁶ But

she answered him, "No, my brother. Sending me away is a greater offense than what you did to me." But Amnon refused to listen. ¹⁷ He called his servant and said, "Get this woman out and bolt the door behind her." ¹⁸ (Now Tamar was wearing a long robe with sleeves like the virgin daughters of the king used to wear.) So the servant brought her out, bolting the door behind her. ¹⁹ Tamar then put ashes on her head and tore the long robe she was wearing. Laying her hand on her head, she went away crying aloud.

²⁰ Her brother Absalom spoke to her, "Has your brother Amnon been with you? Be calm and do not take this to heart for he is your brother." Desolate as she was, Tamar stayed in her brother Absalom's house.

²¹ When King David heard of these, he was very angry but he did not like to scold Amnon because he loved him as his first born. ²² Absalom, for his part, no longer spoke to Amnon. He hated him for having raped his sister Tamar.

²³ Two years later, when Absalom had celebrated the shearing of his flock at Baalhazor near Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons. ²⁴ He himself went to the king and said, "I have shearers; so please let the king and his servants accept my invitation." ²⁵ But the king answered Absalom, "No, my son, not all of us should go lest we be a burden to you." As Absalom urged him the king refused to go personally but gave him his blessing. ²⁶ Then Absalom said, "If you will not go, please let my brother Amnon come with us." The king replied, "Why should he go with you?" ²⁷ But Absalom insisted until the king allowed Amnon and all the king's sons to go with him. Absalom prepared a royal feast. ²⁸ Then he commanded his servants, "Watch until Amnon gets drunk and when I tell you, 'Strike Amnon,' kill him. Have no fear for I myself have given you this order. Be brave and determined." ²⁹ So Absalom's servants did to Amnon what he had commanded. On seeing this all the sons of the king hastily mounted their mules and fled.

³⁰ While they were on the way, a report reached David, "Absalom has slain all the king's sons, leaving no one alive." ³¹ At this, the king tore his garments and lay on the ground;

12. Gen 34, 7; Dt 22, 21

20. Gen 38, 11

28. Est 1, 10; 1 Mac 16, 1; 1 K 16, 9

o Amnon's crime and assassination appear to be a repetition of David's sin in his own family a thing which hurts his feelings deeply.

Such incidents were common occurrences in any place in ancient times. Other religions of that time demanded cult and sacrifices; they did

not talk, or scarcely talked of moral uprightness. On the contrary, from the beginning of the Bible one sees how Yahweh demands moral behavior and justice on the part of men. The people of the Bible are not always better than other peoples who do not know God, but they know better what sin is.



and all his servants around him also tore their garments. ³² But Jonadab, son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "Don't imagine that they have killed all your sons. Only Amnon is dead, for Absalom had decided to kill him from the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. ³³ So let not my lord, the king believe that all his sons are dead: Amnon alone is dead."

³⁴ Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. Then the young watchman saw many people coming from the Horonaim road by the side of the mountain. ³⁵ Jonadab said to the king, "Was it not true what I said to you? It is your sons who are coming." ³⁶ As soon as he had spoken, the king's sons came, crying aloud; the king, too, and all his servants wept bitterly.

^{37,38} As for Absalom, he fled to Talmai, son of Ammihud, king of Geshur where he remained for three years. All this time King David mourned for his son. ³⁹ And when he had recovered from the death of Amnon he began to yearn for Absalom.

14 ¹ Now Joab, son of Zeruiah saw that the king was yearning for Absalom. ² So he sent a messenger to Tekoa to fetch a wise woman and he told her this, "Please pretend to be a mourner. Put on mourning garments and do not perfume yourself with oil that you may look like a woman who has been mourning for several days for the dead ³ and go to the king with this message." And Joab told her what to say.

⁴ When the woman of Tekoa appeared before the king, she fell on her face in homage and said, "Help me, O King!" ⁵ The king asked her, "What is wrong?" She answered, "Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶ I, your handmaid, had two sons who quarrelled with one another in the field. Since there was no one to part them, one struck the other and killed him. ⁷ Now the entire family demand that I give up the one who struck his brother. And they say: 'We will kill him and avenge his brother's death.' So they want to destroy the only heir and quench my remaining hope; with this they will leave my husband without name or posterity on the earth."

⁸ Then the king said to the woman, "Go home and I will give orders on your behalf." ⁹ But the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "Let me and my family be blamed, my lord the king, and let the king and his throne not be criticized for this." ¹⁰ The king said, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me and he shall never bother you again." ¹¹ Then she said, "Please let the king swear by Yahweh, his God, that the avenger of blood may not deepen

my disgrace by killing my son." The King replied, "As Yahweh lives, not one hair of your son shall perish."

¹² Then the woman said, "Please allow me to say something to my lord the king." The king told her, "Speak." ¹³ And she went on, "Why do you yourself act against the people of God? In giving this decision, the king condemns himself for not having brought his banished son back home. ¹⁴ We are all mortals and as water spilt on the ground cannot be gathered up again, so God does not raise the dead. So let the king find a way to bring back his banished son. ¹⁵ Now, if I have come to talk about this to my lord the king, it is because the people scared me and I thought, 'I will speak to the king; perhaps he will listen to me. ¹⁶ If he agrees to help me when I tell him about the man who seeks to cut off both me and my son from the inheritance God gave us, ¹⁷ he will surely give the decision which will bring us peace. For my lord the king is like an angel of God in understanding everything. Yahweh your God be with you!'"

¹⁸ Then the king said to the woman, "Do not hide anything from me when I question you." The woman replied, "Let my lord the king speak." ¹⁹ The king asked, "Is Joab behind you in all this?" The woman answered, "As you surely live, my lord the king, all is as my lord the king says. It was your servant Joab who ordered me and taught me everything I had to say. ²⁰ Joab did this to disguise the purpose. But my lord is as wise as an angel of God, knowing all things that happen on earth."

²¹ Then the king told Joab, "Well, I shall do it. Go, fetch the young man, Absalom." ²² Joab fell on his face to the ground in homage and blessed the king, saying, "Today I know that you look kindly on me, my lord the king, because you have granted this my request." ²³ Joab went on his way to Geshur to fetch Absalom and bring him to Jerusalem. ²⁴ The king, however, told him, "Let him stay in his own house for I shall not receive him." So Absalom stayed in his own house and was not received by the king.

²⁵ In all Israel, there was no one as praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom, from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head he was without defect.

²⁶ When he cut his hair (every year he cut his hair when it became too heavy for him), he weighed it, and it weighed two hundred shekels by the king's weight. ²⁷ There were born to Absalom three sons and a daughter named Tamar, a beautiful woman.



²⁸ For two years Absalom stayed in Jerusalem but the king did not receive him. ²⁹ Absalom called for Joab to send him to the king, but Joab refused to see him. He called for him a second time but Joab would not come. ³⁰ So Absalom said to his servants, "You know Joab's field which is next to mine, planted with barley. Go set it on fire." ³¹ Then Joab went to Absalom's house and asked him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" ³² Absalom replied, "Come over for I want to send you to the king with this message, 'Why did you let me return from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there yet.' Now I want to be received by the king. If I am guilty, let him send me to death!" ³³ Joab went to the king and brought him the message. So the king called for Absalom who appeared before the king, bowing down with his face to the ground. And the king embraced Absalom.

15 ¹ After this, Absalom got for himself a chariot and horses, as well as fifty men to run before him. ² Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the gateway. Whenever a man with a grievance came before the King's tribunal, Absalom would call to him and say, "From which city are you?" Should he say, "Your servant is from such and such a tribe in Israel," ³ Absalom would tell him, "Your cause is good and just but there is no one to hear you in behalf of the king."

⁴ Absalom added, "I wish I were judge in the land! Then every man with a grievance or cause could come to me and I would give him justice." ⁵ Whenever a man approached to pay him homage, he would stretch out his arms to hold and embrace him.

⁶ Absalom did this to all Israelites who came to the tribunal of the king, winning their hearts for himself.

⁷ After four years, Absalom said to the

king, "Please allow me to go and fulfill the vow I have to pay to Yahweh in Hebron. ⁸ For while I lived at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: 'If Yahweh will really bring me back to Jerusalem, I shall go there to worship him!'" ⁹ The king said to him, "Go in peace," and he left for Hebron.

Absalom's rebellion

+ ¹⁰ Absalom sent spies throughout the tribes of Israel with this instruction, "As soon as you hear the trumpet sound proclaim: Absalom is king in Hebron!"

¹¹ Two hundred men from Jerusalem had left with Absalom as invited guests. But nothing of his purpose dawned on them. ¹² While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahitophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city Giloh. Meantime, the conspiracy grew strong and the number of people with Absalom kept increasing.

¹³ A messenger came to report to David that the Israelites were siding with Absalom. ¹⁴ Then David said to all his servants who were with him in Jerusalem, "Let us flee for we cannot resist Absalom. Go quickly, lest he come hurriedly and overtake us. Surely he will put the city to the sword if he can bring us disgrace." ¹⁵ The king's servants answered him, "Your

8. Gen 28, 2

12. 16, 23

+ God wanted the Israelites of the period before Christ to have an image of him in the person of David, their first king. Those happy and glorious days of the young ruler, beloved by all, were followed by days of sorrow for the old king. During those years the countenance of Christ appears more clearly through King David.

The sword shall never be far from your house. Nathan has announced the consequence of David's adultery. But in the trial, what emerges is only the humble loyalty of David who, without complaint, accepts Yahweh's will.

The manner in which David bears with the curses of Semei astonishes us. How much more puzzling it was to people of those times who could only understand revenge. David knows that God will never leave him; his present misfor-

tune is like an invitation from Yahweh to have greater trust. He refuses to defend himself or to take revenge in order to attract Yahweh's mercy.

In Chapters 15-17, what happens to David is like an announcement of the image of the Messiah in his passion and resurrection. Even the details are suggestive:

15:12: a traitor from David's council... who hangs himself (see 17:23).

15:23: the crying, the river of Kidron.

15:30: the Mount of Olives.

15:32: the small group of followers on the hilltop.

16:9: the general wants to defend his king with the sword: David prohibits him.

16:13: the insults, the brief flight that ends with the death of the rebel.



servants are with you in whatever my lord the king decides."

¹⁶ The king departed with all his household but left ten concubines behind to take care of the house. ¹⁷ The king left on foot and the people followed him. They stopped at the last house of the city and ¹⁸ his servants marched past him, as well as the Cherethites, the Pelethites and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath and went ahead of him.

¹⁹ Then the king said to their commander, Ittai, the Gittite, "Why are you also coming with us? Go back and stay with your king, for you are a foreigner, an exile from your home."

²⁰ Are you setting out when you have just arrived? Shall I make you wander about with us? Go back, take your brothers with you and may Yahweh show you kindness and faithfulness. ²¹ Ittai, however, answered the king, "As Yahweh lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether in life or in death, there also will your servant be."

²² Then David said to Ittai, "Go then, march on." So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the children who were with him. ²³ Meanwhile, all those in the countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. Then the king crossed the brook Kidron and all the people moved on to the desert.

²⁴ The priest Abiathar came with all the Levites bearing the ark of the Covenant of God. They set down the ark of God until the people had all gone out of the city; ²⁵ after which the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If Yahweh looks kindly on me, he will bring me back and allow me to again see the ark and its lodging place. ²⁶ But if he says,

"I am not pleased with you," I am here; let him do to me what seems good to him."

²⁷ The king also said to the priest Zadok, "Go back to the city in peace and take with you your son Ahimaaz, and Jonathan, son of Abiathar. ²⁸ I will wait in the desert fords until you send word for me." ²⁹ So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem and remained there.

³⁰ David himself went up the Mount of Olives, weeping. He was barefooted and had his head covered, and all the people who were with him had their heads covered and wept as they went.

Humiliation for David

³¹ When David was informed that Ahitophel was among the conspirators with Absalom, he said, "O Yahweh, turn the counsel of Ahitophel into folly."

³² When David reached the summit where God is worshipped, Hushai the Archite met him with his coat torn and dust strewn on his head. ³³ David said to him, "If you come with me, you will be a burden to me. ³⁴ It would be better for you to return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king! Just as I have been your father's servant in the past, I will now be your servant.' In that way you will be useful to me in thwarting the counsel of Ahitophel. ³⁵ The priests Zadok and Abiathar are there to help you. Report whatever you hear from the king's house. ³⁶ Both their sons are there, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son, and you shall report to me through them everything you hear." ³⁷ So David's friend Hushai arrived in the city just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

16 ¹ When David had gone a little beyond the summit, Ziba the steward of Mepibaal met him with saddled asses laden with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred summer fruits and a skin of wine. ² The king then asked Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" Ziba answered, "The asses are for the king's household to ride on. The bread and summer fruit are for your servants to eat while the wine is drink for those who faint in the desert."



³ Then the king asked him, "Where is your master's son?" Ziba replied, "He is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the Israelites will give me back my father's kingdom!'" ⁴ To this, the king said, "Everything that belongs to Mepibaal is now yours." And Ziba said, "I pay homage to my lord the king. May I always find favour with you."

⁵ When King David came to Bahurim, a man from the clan of Saul's family named Shimei, son of Gera, came out cursing him. ⁶ He threw stones at David and his officers although the king's men and warriors flanked the king on the right and left. ⁷ Shimei said as he cursed, "Go away! Go away! You bloodthirsty good-for-nothing!" ⁸ Yahweh has brought down on your head all the blood of the family of Saul. You became king in his place, but God has now placed the kingdom in the hands of your son Absalom. Ruin has come upon you because you are a bloodthirsty man."

⁹ Then Abishai, son of Zeruiah, said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go and cut his head off." ¹⁰ But the king said, "Why should I listen to you, sons of Zeruiah? If Yahweh has ordered him to curse me, who shall ask him why he acts like this?" ¹¹ Then David said to Abishai and his officers, "If my own son wants to kill me how much more this Benjaminite! Leave him alone and let him curse me if Yahweh has ordered him." ¹² Perhaps Yahweh will look on my affliction and turn to good things the curses heaped on me today." ¹³ So David and his men went their way while Shimei, following on the hillside opposite him continued to curse as he threw stones and flung dust at him. ¹⁴ The king, together with his men, arrived exhausted at the Jordan where he refreshed himself.

¹⁵ Now Absalom, accompanied by Ahito

phel entered Jerusalem with all the Israelites. ¹⁶ When Hushai, the Archite, David's friend, appeared before Absalom and exclaimed, "Long live the king!" ¹⁷ Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" ¹⁸ Hushai said to Absalom, "No, I will be with the one Yahweh and this people and the Israelites have chosen, and with him I will remain. ¹⁹ Whom am I now to serve? Are you not his son? As I have served your father, so will I serve you."

²⁰ Then Absalom said to Ahitophel, "Have a meeting to decide what we shall do." ²¹ Ahitophel said to Absalom, "Go and be with the concubines your father has left to keep his house. When the Israelites hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, all those of your party will be strengthened." ²² So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the terrace and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of the Israelites. ²³ In those days, Ahitophel's counsel was deemed as sound as the oracle of God, and so it was deemed by both David and Absalom.

17 ¹ Ahitophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men that I may set out and pursue David tonight. ² I will attack him while he is tired and discouraged and throw him into a panic. All those who are with him will flee so I will strike down only the king. ³ Then I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. Seek the death of only one man and then all the people will be unharmed." ⁴ The advice pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

⁵ Then Absalom said, "Call in Hushai the Archite to hear what he has to say." ⁶ When Hushai came before Absalom, Absalom asked him, "Ahitophel has given this advice. Shall we follow it? If not, you speak." ⁷ So Hushai said to Absalom, "This time, Ahitophel's advice is not good. ⁸ You know that your father and his men are warriors. When enraged, they are like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert enough in war not to spend the night with his men. ⁹ Right now he is hiding in one of the pits or in some other place. If only some of your men fall in the first attack, whoever hears of it will say, 'There has been a slaughter among the men who follow Absalom.' ¹⁰ Then even the valiant man whose heart is like that of a lion will utterly melt with fear for all Israel knows that your father is a warrior as are the men who are with him. ¹¹ My advice is for you to gather all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba, as many as



the sands of the sea, and go to battle in person.

¹² Then we shall find him wherever he is and fall on him as the dew falls on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive.

¹³ If he withdraws into a city all Israel will bring ropes and drag it into the valley until not even a pebble of it remains." ¹⁴ Absalom and all the Israelites said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahitophel." For Yahweh had decreed that the good counsel of Ahitophel be defeated, so that he might bring evil upon Absalom.

¹⁵ Then Hushai reported to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, "Ahitophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel in this way; but I have advised them in this manner. ¹⁶ Therefore send word to David quickly, 'Do not lodge tonight at the desert fords. Go beyond them lest the king and all the men with him be trapped!'"

¹⁷ Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at Enrogel where a maidservant regularly went to report to them so they could go and tell king David, for they themselves must not be seen in the city. ¹⁸ But a lad saw them and reported to Absalom. The two hurriedly left the place and entered the house of a man of Bahurim who had a well in his courtyard, and they got down into it. ¹⁹ The woman took a covering and spread it over the well's mouth then scattered grain over it without anyone noticing. ²⁰ When Absalom's servants came to the woman's house, they asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" The woman answered them, "They left following the brook." They looked for them but could not find them; and so they returned to Jerusalem.

²¹ After they had gone, the men came up out of the well and went to tell David, "Hurry and cross over the river, for this is what Ahitophel has counselled against you." ²² So David and all those who were with him crossed over the Jordan; and by daybreak, not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

²³ When Ahitophel saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled his ass and rode back home to his own city. After setting his house in order, he hanged himself and died. He was then buried in the tomb of his father.

²⁴ David had already entered Mahanaim when Absalom crossed over the Jordan with all the Israelites. ²⁵ Absalom had put Amasa in

charge of the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of Ithra, an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail the daughter of Nahash, Zeruiah's sister and Joab's mother. ²⁶ The Israelites and Absalom pitched camp in the land of Gilead.

²⁷ When David arrived at Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lodebar, and Bar-zillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, ²⁸ brought beds, basins, earthen vessels, wheat, barley, meal, roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep and cheese from the herd. All this was for David and the people with him to eat ²⁹ for they said, "The people are hungry, weary and thirsty in the desert."

18 ¹ David then mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of a thousand men and commanders of a hundred men. He sent forth the army of which one third was under the command of Joab; ² one third, under the command of Abishai, son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third, under the command of Ittai, the Gittite. Then the king said to the men, "I myself will go out with you." ³ But the men replied, "You shall not go out. They could not care less if we flee or if half of us die. But you are worth ten thousand of us and it is better if you are able to send us assistance from the city." ⁴ So the king said to them, "I will do whatever seems best to you." Then the king stood by the side of the gate while the entire army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. ⁵ The king ordered Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake." All the army heard the king giving orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

Defeat and death of Absalom

■ ⁶ The army of David went out into the field against Israel. The battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim ⁷ where the Israelites were defeated by the men of David. The slaughter there on that day was great, numbering twenty thousand men. ⁸ The battle spread over the entire country and

13. Lev 26, 25

14. 15, 34; Ne 4, 9

17. 15, 27

19. Jos 2, 4

3. 21, 17

■ This account, very lively and beautiful, is difficult to abridge.

The scene, doubtless, reminds us of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Even though the son left his father's house and did him much harm, the

father does not lose hope. Moreover, so much love has he that he stands at the gates of the city waiting for word, like the father in the parable who was the first to see his son as he returned.

Joab is right from the political standpoint, but David is closer to God's thinking.



more people perished in the ravines of the forest than were killed by the sword that day.

⁹ Absalom was riding a mule and happened to meet the guards of David. As the mule passed under the thick branches of a big oak tree, his head was caught in the oak tree and he was left hanging between heaven and earth while the mule he was riding went its way. ¹⁰ Someone reported to Joab, "I saw Absalom hanging from an oak tree." ¹¹ Joab said to the man who reported this, "What! You saw him but did not strike him at once? I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt." ¹² But the man answered Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not raise my hand against the king's son for we heard the king command you. Abishai and Ittai: For my sake, spare the young man Absalom." ¹³ If I had not done my duty, the king would come to know about it and you yourself would have kept your distance." ¹⁴ Joab replied, "I will not hesitate before you." So he took three spears in his hand and thrust them into Absalom's heart while he was still alive in the oak tree. ¹⁵ Then ten guards, Joab's armour-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him down.

¹⁶ Joab blew the trumpet and the troops stopped pursuing the Israelites as Joab restrained them. ¹⁷ They then took Absalom, threw him into a deep pit in the forest and covered him with a great heap of stones. In the meantime all the Israelites fled, each one to his own home.

¹⁸ During his lifetime Absalom had a memorial created for himself in the king's Valley for he said, "I have no son by whom my name may be remembered." He called the pillar after his own name and, to this day, it is called Absalom's monument.

¹⁹ Then Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, said, "Let me run and report to the king that Yahweh has delivered him from the power of his enemies." ²⁰ But Joab said to him, "You must not tell him today. This is not good news because the king's son is dead." ²¹ Joab then said to a Cushite, "Go tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab and ran. ²² But Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run behind the Cushite." Joab asked, "Why must you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for this news?" ²³ Ahimaaz insisted, "It does not matter. I will run." So Joab allowed him to go, and Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain, outrunning the Cushite.

David is told of Absalom's death

²⁴ David was sitting between the two gates. The watchman placed over the roof of the gate, on the wall, saw a man running alone. ²⁵ So he called out and reported to the king who said, "If he is alone, he brings good news." As he was drawing near, ²⁶ the watchman saw another man running. So he called to the gatekeeper and said, "Look, another man is running alone!" The king said, "He also brings good news." ²⁷ The watchman said, "The first man runs like Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok." The king replied, "He is a good man, so he comes with good news."

²⁸ Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." Bowing before the king with his face to the ground, he said, "Blessed be Yahweh your God who has delivered up the men who rebelled against my lord the king!"

²⁹ The king asked him, "How is the young Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent your servant, I saw a great tumult but did not know what it was all about." ³⁰ So the king said, "Move away and stand here." He moved aside and stayed there.

³¹ The Cushite arrived and said, "Good news for my lord the king!"

Yahweh has done you justice today and saved you from all those who rebelled against you." ³²The king asked the Cushite, "How is the young Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rebel against you end up like that young man."

19 ¹The king was greatly disturbed and, going up to the room over the gate, he wept and said, "O, my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

²It was reported to Joab, "The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." ³So the victory that day turned into mourning for all the people when they heard that the king was grieving over his son. ⁴The people quietly entered the city that day like those fleeing from battle in shame. ⁵The king covered his face and was crying aloud, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

⁶Joab then came to the king's house and said, "You have today put to shame all your servants who saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, and of your wives and concubines. ⁷Yes, you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that your commanders and guards mean nothing to you. I know that if Absalom were alive today and all of us, dead, you would be pleased. ⁸You must now show yourself and say a good word to your guards for, I swear by Yahweh, if you do not, no one will stay with you tonight, and this will be worse than all the evil that has happened to you from your youth to the present day."

⁹So the king took his seat at the gate and as

the people were informed that the king was sitting at the gate, they came before him.

The people of Israel had fled, each man to his own home. ¹⁰Yet throughout all the tribes of Israel, the people were arguing. "The king who delivered us from the Philistines has had to flee because of Absalom. ¹¹We ourselves anointed Absalom to rule over us. But if he died in battle, what prevents us from bringing back the king?"

David returns to Jerusalem

¹²King David heard what the Israelites said. So he sent this message to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, "Say to the elders of Judah: 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house?' ¹³You are relatives, of my own race. Why should you be the last to bring back the king?' ¹⁴Say also to Amasa, 'Are you not of my own family? I swear before God that I will make you general of my army in place of Joab.'

¹⁵The men of Judah agreed as one man and sent word to the king, "Please return with your servants." ¹⁶So the king came back and the men of Judah went over to Gilgal to welcome him and help him cross the Jordan.

¹⁷Shimei, son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, hurried down with the people of Judah to meet King David. ¹⁸He had taken with him a thousand men from Benjamin. Ziba also, the steward of Saul's family, hurried down to the Jordan to meet the king with his fifteen sons and twenty servants, ¹⁹and to help the king's household cross the ford and to attend to his needs.

²⁰Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan, and said to him, "Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember the wrong your servant did when my lord the king left Jerusalem. Let not the king remember this, ²¹for I confess that I have sinned; and therefore I have come today, the first from Joseph's tribes to welcome my lord the king."

²²Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for having cursed Yahweh's anointed?" ²³But David said, "Far be it from me to listen to you, you sons of Zeruiah! This is bad advice; no one shall be put to death in Israel today. Do I not know that I am ruling again over Israel this day?" ²⁴So the king assured Shimei with an oath, "You shall not die."

²⁵Mepibaal, the son of Saul, came down from Jerusalem to meet the king. He had not



ashed his feet, or trimmed his beard, or changed his clothes since the king departed. (When he arrived to meet the king, the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mepibael?"²⁷ He answered, "My lord, O king! My steward deceived me. For I said to him, 'I will saddle an ass for me so that I may ride on it and go with the king,' since I am lame."²⁸ But he has ordered me to my lord the king. And yet my lord the king is like an angel of God. Do, therefore, what seems good to you."²⁹ My lord's family was doomed to die before my lord the king, but you counted your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right do I have to complain to the king?" The king said to him, "Why talk more? I have decided – you and Ziba shall divide the land." Mepibael answered, "Oh, let him take it all, since my lord the king has come home safely."

³⁰ Now, Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim joining the king as he crossed over the Jordan. ³¹ Barzillai was a very old man of eighty, who, being a very wealthy man, had provided the king with food when he remained in Mahanaim. ³² The king said to Barzillai, "Come, join me and stay with me, and I will take care of you in Jerusalem."³³ But Barzillai said to the king, "How many more years will I live that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?" ³⁴ Today, I am eighty years old and can discern neither what is pleasant nor what is not. Can your servant still taste what he eats or drinks; or listen to the voice of men and women singing? Why then should my servant be an added burden to my lord the king? ³⁵ Your servant will accompany the king at a little past the Jordan. Why should the king reward me for this? ³⁶ Please allow me to return to my own city where I may die and be buried near the graves of my father and mother. But let this my son Kimham, your servant, continue with my lord the king. You can do for him whatever it may please you."³⁷ The king answered, "Kimham will come with me, and I will give him whatever seems fit to you. Besides, I will do for you whatever you desire of me."³⁸ The king embraced and blessed Barzillai who then returned to his own home; and the people crossed over the Jordan with the king.

◆ ³⁹ The king went on to Gilgal accompa-

nied by Kimham, together with the men of Judah and some Israelites. ⁴⁰ Then the Israelites came to the king and asked, "Why have our brothers, the men of Judah, grabbed you? They have brought the king and his entire family over the Jordan together with all your soldiers?" ⁴¹ The men of Judah answered the Israelites, "Because the king is our immediate relative. But why does this rouse your anger? Have we fed ourselves at the king's expense or received any gift from him?" ⁴² But the Israelites answered the men of Judah, "We have more rights over the king than you because we are ten tribes. Why did you disregard us? Were we not the first to have the king brought back?" But the men of Judah argued more vehemently than the Israelites.

Sheba rebels against David

20 ¹ There happened to be there a base fellow named Sheba, son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, who sounded the trumpet and said, "We have nothing to do with David. What can we expect from the son of Jesse? Go back, O Israelites, each man to his home!" ² So all the Israelites left David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. The men of Judah, however, steadfastly followed their king from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

³ When David reached his house at Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines whom he had left to keep the palace and put them under guard. He provided for them but had no relations with them. So they were secluded until the day of their death and lived like widows.

⁴ The king said to Amasa, "Assemble all the men of Judah within three days; then come here to me." ⁵ So Amasa left to summon the men of Judah but he failed to show up at the appointed time. ⁶ David then said to Abishai, "Sheba son of Bichri, will do us more harm than Absalom. Take my guards and pursue him lest he flee to any fortified city and bring us trouble." ⁷ So Abishai, with the men of Joab, the Cherethites, Pelethites and all the warriors, left Jerusalem to pursue Sheba, son of Bichri. ⁸ When they reached the big stone in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing over his tunic a belt with a sheathed sword. The sword slipped out. ⁹ Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" And he

29. 1 S. 20, 15 35. 1 K. 2, 7 36. Eccl. 2, 8

1. 1 K. 12, 16 3. 16, 21

◆ David's victory does not really solve the problem, which is unity among the tribes, since Jerusalem only took advantage of and worsened the existing division among the people. The people of Judah are resentful of Israel, forgetting that in their own tribe many assisted Absalom; thus they prevent David from becoming

king over all and their victory is one more split in the recently gained unity.

Here the Bible reveals a kind of violence of which we are often unaware: the exclusion of others. We always give good reasons for excluding others or the other party. We forget that there is neither unity nor peace for as long as we



held Amasa's beard with his right hand as if to embrace him. ¹⁰ Amasa did not notice the sword which he held until Joab stabbed him, shedding his entrails to the ground. Amasa died on the spot without need of a second thrust.

Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba, son of Bichri. ¹¹ Meantime, one of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and said, "Let him who is for Joab and stands by David follow Joab." ¹² Amasa then lay bathed in his blood, lying on the highway; and all those who passed by, on seeing him, stopped. When the man saw the people stopping to look, he carried Amasa from the highway into the field and covered him with a garment. ¹³ When he was removed from the highway, the people followed Joab in pursuit of Sheba, son of Bichri.

¹⁴ Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel and entered Abel of Bethmaacah with all the Bichrites who had assembled to follow him. ¹⁵ Joab's men came and attacked him in Abel of Beth-maacah. They set up a mound against the city, and all the men of Joab dug under the wall to throw it down.

¹⁶ Then a wise woman called out from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here that I may speak to him." ¹⁷ As Joab approached, the woman asked, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." ¹⁸ The woman continued, "They used to say in olden days to settle a matter, ¹⁹ 'Seek advice at Abel if you want to know the ancient customs of Israel.' And you want to destroy a city which is a mother of Israel. Why do you want to destroy a heritage of Yahweh?" ²⁰ Joab answered, "By no means do I want to destroy it! ²¹ But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, named Sheba, son of Bichri, has rebelled against King David. Only surrender him and I will withdraw from the city." So the woman said to Joab, "We shall throw his head over the wall to you." ²² The woman then gathered the inhabitants and spoke to them so persuasively that they be-

headed Sheba, son of Bichri, and threw his head out to Joab who then sounded the trumpet for the people to depart from the city. Then everyone went home and Joab himself returned to the king in Jerusalem.

²³ Joab was in command of all the army of Israel while Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in command of the Cherethites and the Pel-ethites. ²⁴ Adoram was in charge of the forced labour, and Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, was the recorder. Sheva was secretary, ²⁵ and Zadok and Abiathar were priests, ²⁶ and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

The great famine

o 21 ¹ There was famine during the reign of David for three consecutive years and David consulted Yahweh. The answer was, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and his family because he put the Gibeonites to death."

² The Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but descendants of the Amorites. Although the Israelites had sworn to spare them, Saul had attempted to wipe them out on behalf of the people of Israel and Judah. ³ So David called the Gibeonites and asked them, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I repay you that you may bless the people of Yahweh?" ⁴ The Gibeonites answered him, "Our quarrel with Saul and his family is not over silver or gold, nor is it our task to put any Israelite to death." The king asked again, "Tell me then what I can do for you;" ⁵ and they replied, "That man slaughtered us and planned our destruction so that we would no longer occupy any place in Israel. ⁶ Surrender seven of his sons to us so that we may hang them up before Yahweh at Gibeon on the mountain of Yahweh." To this, the king said, "I will surrender them."

⁷ David spared Mepibal, son of Jonathan, Saul's son, because of the oath David and Jonathan took before Yahweh. ⁸ But he took the two sons of Rizpah, daughter of Aiah whom she-

23. 8. 16

2. 1 S 14. 24

5. Dt 7. 22

7. 1 S 20. 1

ourselves impose it. Within the church itself everyone should be welcomed for what he is, different as he may be from others.

o This episode shows us the most inhuman religious prejudices existing at that time.

David consulted Yahweh... The answer was... We have already seen this practice of consulting God by means of the Urim and Thummim, i.e., by casting lots. It is possible that Yahweh guided them through these means since they believed that this was authorized by God. But this episode confirms that magic used to seek a response from God can lead to worse

deviations: "those responsible for the famine are the descendants of Saul because he killed the Gibeonites..."

A disaster occurs and the people say it is God's punishment and, if it is a punishment, they have to find the one responsible. Possibly David himself shares the common belief: except that he uses his authority to save the son of his friend Jonathan.

We cannot say that this mentality has completely disappeared. If something goes wrong in society or in an institution, many search out whom to sacrifice before finding out if they themselves have a share in the fault.



bore to Saul – Armoni and Mepibaal; and the five sons of Merab, daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel, son of Barzillai the Meholathite.⁹ He delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites who hanged them on the mountain of Yahweh where all seven perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of the barley harvest.

¹⁰ Then Rizpah, daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens. She did not allow the birds of the air to come on them by day or the beasts of the field by night.¹¹ When David was told what Rizpah, Aiah's daughter and Saul's concubine, had done,¹² he asked the men of Jabesh-gilead for the bones of Saul and those of his son Jonathan. (They had taken them from the wall of Bethshan where the Philistines had nailed them when they killed Saul on Gilboa.)¹³ So David had brought up from there the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan, and also the bones of those who had been brought with them.¹⁴ All of them were buried in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish their father. When all that the king had commanded was done, God had pity on the land.

¹⁵ The Philistines waged war again with Israel, and David went down together with his servants to fight against them. When David was already tired,¹⁶ Ishbibenob, one of the descendants of the giants whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze and who had put on a new sword, thought of killing David.¹⁷ But Abishai, son of Zeruiah, came to his help, attacking and killing the Philistine. Then David's men urged him, "You shall no more join us in battle lest the lamp of Israel be extinguished."

¹⁸ After this, there was more fighting with the Philistines at Gob; there Sibbecai the Hushathite, slew Saph, one of the descendants of the giants.¹⁹ There was another battle with the Philistines at Gob where Elhanan, son of Jaareoregim, the Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was the size of a weaver's beam.²⁰ In another encounter at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, numbering twenty-four in all. He too was a descendant of the giants.²¹ When he taunted Israel, Jonathan, son of Shimei, David's brother, slew him.²² All four descendants of the giants fell by the hand of David and his guards.

David's song of praise

+22 ¹ David sang this song to Yahweh on the day Yahweh delivered him from his enemies and from Saul.² He said,

*The Lord is my rock, my rampart,
my deliverer³ and my God,
the rock in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield, my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge.*

⁴ *I call on the Lord, who is worthy of praise;*

he saves me from my enemies.

⁵ *Torrents of destruction on a violent rampage*

rushed at me in their vicious rage.

⁶ *Caught as by the cords of the grave,
I was utterly helpless before the snares of death.*

⁷ *But I called upon the Lord in my distress,*

to my God I cried for help;

*and from his temple he heard my voice,
my cry of grief reached his ears.*

⁸ *Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations of the heavens shook;
they trembled in his fury.*

⁹ *From his nostrils rose smoke,
from his mouth a devouring fire
throwing off live embers.*

¹⁰ *He bent the heavens and came down
with dark clouds under his feet.*

¹¹ *He rode on a cherub and flew,
he was seen on the wings of the wind.*

¹² *He dwelled in darkness
in the midst of rain clouds.*

¹³ *Then from the brightness of his presence*

flared up fiery embers.

¹⁴ *From heaven the Lord thundered;
the voice of the Most High resounded.*

¹⁵ *Sending out a hail of arrows,
he scattered them;*

*flashing forth bolts of lightning,
he routed them.*

¹⁶ *The beds of the seas lay uncovered
as the foundations of the world
were laid bare,*

*at your rebuke, O Yahweh,
at the blast from your nostril's breath.*

¹⁷ *Reaching down from above,
he drew me out of the deep water.*

¹⁸ *Too strong for me were my enemies,
but he rescued me from my adversaries.*



¹⁹ They have launched their attack
in an opportune day
but the Lord has been my stay.

²⁰ In the open he has set me free.
How great indeed is his love for me!

²¹ Yahweh rewarded me according
to his justice,
and also according to my righteous-
ness.

²² For I have kept faithful to Yahweh's
way

and his commands are before me.

²³ With his ordinances all before me,
I have always followed his statutes.

²⁴ Before him I have done uprightly
and kept myself from iniquity.

²⁵ Therefore Yahweh has given me
recompense

according to my righteousness.

²⁶ To the faithful you show yourself
faithful;

to the blameless you show yourself
blameless;

²⁷ to the pure you show yourself pure;
but to the crooked you show yourself
astute.

²⁸ For you raise up the humble
and humiliate the arrogant.

²⁹ Yahweh, you are my lamp.

O my God, you brighten up my
darkness.

³⁰ Yes, with you I can crush an armed
band,

and by my God I can leap over a wall.

³¹ This God - his way is perfect;

the word of the Lord is always fulfilled.

To those who seek refuge in him, he is a
shield.

³² There is no other God but Yahweh;
there is no other rock but our God.

³³ This God is my stronghold
and keeps my path unerring and safe.

³⁴ He has made my feet as swift as the
hinds';

he has set me secure on the heights.

³⁵ He trains my hands for war
and my arms to bend a bow of brass.

³⁶ You have given me your shield for
protection,

and your help has made me great.

³⁷ You have given wide room for my
steps,

so that they never faltered.

³⁸ I have pursued my enemies and wiped
them out,

I did not turn back till I had destroyed
them.

³⁹ Thrusting them through,
I did not give them time to rise
as they fell under my feet.

⁴⁰ You have given me strength
for the battle;
you have subdued my adversaries
beneath me;

⁴¹ you have put my enemies to flight
and destroyed those who opposed me.

⁴² They cried for help, but no one came.
They cried to the Lord;
he did not answer them.

⁴³ I pulverized them as dust of the earth;
like mud in the streets I trampled them.

⁴⁴ You have delivered me from
the people's assault
and have made me head over the
nations.

They came to serve me -
people I had not known.

⁴⁵ At the sound of my voice,
they rose to obey.

Foreigners approached me,
cringing and fawning.

⁴⁶ But they succumbed
or locked themselves in their fortresses.
⁴⁷ Yahweh lives! Praised be my rock!
Exalted be my saviour God -

⁴⁸ the God who grants me vengeance
and subdues the peoples for me.

⁴⁹ He brings me out from my foes;
he exalts me above my adversaries;
he rescues me from men of violence.

⁵⁰ For this I will extol you, Yahweh,
among the nations;

I will sing praise to your name.

⁵¹ You have given your king great
victory;
you have shown your love forever
to your anointed David, and to his
descendants.

23 ¹ These are the last words of David:
The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the
oracle of the man whom God has exalted, the
anointed of the God of Jacob, the singer of the
songs of Israel:

² "The Spirit of Yahweh speaks through
me, his word is on my tongue.

³ The God of Israel has spoken,
the Rock of Israel has said to me:
when one rules justly over men,
ruling in the fear of God,

⁴ he dawns on them like the morning
light,
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless
morning.



making grass sprout from the ground after the rain.

⁵ Yes, is not my family like this before God?

He has made with me an eternal covenant, orderly and secure.

Will he not complete my salvation and fulfill my desire?

* But godless men are like thorns that are thrown away.

They cannot be held with one's hand⁷ but are uprooted with iron and spear shaft,

and they are burned in fire."

David's champions

■ * These are the names of the warriors who were with David: the first of the Three was Josheb-basshebeth, a Tachemonite who wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he slew in a single encounter.

⁹ Next was Eleazar, son of Dodo, son of Ahohi, who was with David when they challenged the Philistines who were gathered there for battle. When he saw the retreat of the Israelites, ¹⁰ he fought and struck down the Philistines until his hand grew tired from holding the sword without pause. Yahweh brought about a great victory that day. The others returned after him, but only to strip the slain.

¹¹ Next was Shammah, son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground planted to barley, and the men fled from the Philistines. ¹² But Shammah stood in the middle of the plot to defend it and slew the Philistines. And Yahweh worked a great victory.

¹³ At about harvest time, three of the Thirty went down to David at the cave of Adullam while a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴ David was in the stronghold while the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. ¹⁵ David longed for water and said, "Who will give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem by the gate?" ¹⁶ At this, the three warriors broke through the Philistine camp, drew water out of the well of Bethlehem

by the gate and brought it to David. But David refused to drink of it and poured it out as an offering to Yahweh. ¹⁷ He said, "By no means, should I do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who risked their lives?" Therefore, he refused to drink it. These were the deeds of the three warriors.

¹⁸ Now Abishai, brother of Joab, son of Zeruiah, was chief of the Thirty. He wielded his spear against three hundred men and slew them, winning a name beside the Thirty. ¹⁹ Though he was the most popular of the Thirty and became their commander, he did not equal the Three.

²⁰ Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a warrior of Kabzeel, was a man of great achievements who killed the two sons of Ariel of Moab. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and slew a lion. ²¹ He slew a handsome Egyptian who held a spear. Benaiah went against him with a staff, snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. ²² Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, did these things and won a name beside the thirty warriors. ²³ He was popular among the Thirty but did not equal the Three. David put him in command of his bodyguard.

²⁴ Asahel brother of Joab, was one of the Thirty; Elhanan, son of Dodo of Bethlehem; ²⁵ Shammah of Harod, Elikah of Harod; ²⁶ Helez, the Paltite; Ira the son of Ikesh of Tekoa; ²⁷ Abiezor of Anathoth; Mebunnai, the Hushathite; ²⁸ Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai of Netophah; ²⁹ Jeleb, the son of Baanah of Netophah; Ittai, the son of Ribai of Gibeath of the Benjaminites; ³⁰ Benaiah of Pirathon; Hiddai, of the brooks of Gash; ³¹ Abialbon, the Arbathite; Azmaveth of Bahurim; ³² Eliahba of Shaalbon; the sons of Jashen, Jonathan; ³³ Shammah, the Hararite; Ahiam, the son of Sharar, the Hararite, ³⁴ Eliphelet, the son of Ahasbai of Maacah; Eliam, the son of Ahithophel of Gilo; ³⁵ Hezro of Carmel; Paarai the Arbite; ³⁶ Igal, the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani, the Gadite; ³⁷ Zelek the Ammonite; Naharai of Beeroth, the armour-bearer of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, ³⁸ Ira, the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; ³⁹ Uriah, the Hittite – thirty-seven in all.

2. Mr 22, 43

3. Dt 32, 31; Is 30, 29

20, 20, 23

21. 1 S 17, 43

■ In dedicating this chapter to the memory of David's "valiant men" (See also commentary in Sam 22), the Bible gives them what they deserved. These men lived their faith and accomplished their human mission through fighting and killing their enemies – which seems to us to be very far from Gospel values. Yet David became king because of them, their sword, their strength and their courage. Without them, the

kingdom of David would not have been realized, and neither would the "son of David," Christ, have come.

◆ The kingdom has grown very much in territories, animals and wealth. Israel is a numerous people and so David is tempted to count them and orders a census.

The census in itself is not bad. What is bad is

The census

•24¹ Again the anger of Yahweh blazed out against Israel. So he let David harm them in this way, "Count the people of Israel and Judah."² The king said to Joab and the commander of the army who were with him, "Go through all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and count the people that I may know how many they are."

³ Joab told the king, "May Yahweh your God multiply the people a hundred times and may my lord the king see this blessing. But why does my lord the king want to take a census?"

⁴ But the king's word prevailed so that Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the king's presence in order to count the people of Israel. ⁵ They crossed the Jordan and started with Aroer, the city in the middle of the valley, and went on toward Gad and to Jazer. ⁶ Then they proceeded to Gilead and to Kadesh in the land of the Hittites. They then went to Dan, and from Dan to Sidon, ⁷ and arrived at the fortress of Tyre and the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites. They went out through the Negeb of Judah at Beersheba and ⁸ after having gone through all the land, returned to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. ⁹ Joab gave the total count of the people to the king: eight hundred thousand sword-wielding

warriors in Israel and five hundred thousand men in Judah.

¹⁰ But after he had the people counted, David felt remorse and said to Yahweh, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done, but now, O Yahweh, I ask you to forgive my sin for I have acted foolishly."

¹¹ The following day, before David awoke, Yahweh's word had come to the prophet Gad, David's seer, ¹² "Go, and give David this message: I offer you three things and I will let one of them befall you according to your own choice." ¹³ So Gad went to David and asked him, "Do you want three years of famine in your land? Or do you want to be pursued for three months by your foes while you flee from them? Or do you want three days' pestilence in your land? Now, think and decide what answer I shall give him who sent me."

¹⁴ David answered Gad, "I am greatly troubled. Let me fall into the hands of Yahweh whose mercy is abundant; but let me not fall into the hands of men."

¹⁵ So Yahweh sent a pestilence on Israel from morning until the appointed time, causing the death of seventy thousand men from Dan to Beersheba. ¹⁶ When the angel stretched forth his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, Yahweh would punish no more and said to the angel who was causing destruction among

1. Num 25, 3; Jdg 2, 14

2. 2 K 13, 3

10. 12, 13; 1 S 13, 13

16. Ex 12, 23; 2 K 19, 35

to feel greater because one has so many people or soldiers, or to have an obsession for quantity, for numbers, forgetting the essential which is quality. David forgets that he is administrator and deputy of God in Israel: the sheep do not belong to him. In all levels of life, people like to count their animals, or recall their accomplishments. There are many ways of feeling oneself "owner" when, in reality, all belongs to God.

Here, the author presents the pestilence as God's intervention to punish the king. People of that time easily accepted an intervention of

Yahweh to kill the Israelites even if they were not responsible for the sin of their king. It seems more accurate for us to say that God intervened by sending the prophet Gad a few days before the pestilence broke out, a pestilence which, of course, was not miraculous in nature. Thus he wanted to impart to David a lesson and a sign of the gravity of his sin, using a language he could understand.

See what is said about collective punishment in Joshua 7, and about the Angel of Yahweh in Gn 16.

the people, "It is enough, hold back your hand." The angel of Yahweh was already at the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite.

¹⁷ When David saw the angel striking the people, he spoke to Yahweh and said, "I have sinned and acted wickedly, but these are only the sheep; what have they done? Let your hand strike me and my father's family."

¹⁸ Gad went to David that day and said to him, "Go, set up an altar to Yahweh on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." ¹⁹ So David left to follow Yahweh's command made through Gad. ²⁰ When Araunah saw the king and his officials coming toward him, he went forward, paid homage to the king with his face

to the ground, and said, ²¹ "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David answered, "I will buy your threshing floor in order to build an altar to Yahweh so that the plague may end among the people." ²² Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take the threshing floor and offer the sacrifice that seems good to him: here you have my oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges, and the oxen's yokes for the wood." ²³ All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king. May Yahweh your God hear you."

²⁴ But the king said to Araunah, "No, I will pay you for all this, for I will not offer to Yahweh my God something that costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. ²⁵ David built there an altar to Yahweh and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So Yahweh had mercy on the land and the plague ended in Israel.

17: Eek 34, 31: 1 S 5, 9



INTRODUCTION TO 1st KINGS

The period of the Kings is the third stage in Israel's history. It follows the period of the Patriarchs (Abraham in 1750 B.C.) and that of the Exodus and the Conquest (Moses in 1250 B.C.)

David captured Jerusalem around 1000 B.C. After Solomon's death in 932 B.C. The Kingdom of David and his son Solomon would be divided. The northern part, called the Kingdom of Israel, would cease to exist as a nation two centuries later. The southern part, called the Kingdom of Judah, would last until the year 587 B.C., the year of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and of the Exile to Babylon.

This period covers a total of four centuries. These four centuries of the Kings are the most important in sacred history because they are the period during which God raised up the prophets from among his people.

David's last years

1 King David was already a very old man who could no longer keep warm even in very thick clothing. ² So his servants said to him, "Allow us to get for my lord king a virgin girl to attend the king and nurse him. She could sleep with you, my lord king, and make you feel warm." ³ And so they looked for a beautiful girl throughout the territory of Israel. They found Abishag the Shunamite, a very beautiful girl and brought her to the king ⁴ to become the king's nurse. She attended to him; but the king had no intimate relations with her.

⁵ Now Adonijah, son of Haggith, had in mind that he would be king and so provided himself with chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. ⁶ His father had never interfered by questioning his conduct, "Why have you done this or that?" He was a very handsome man born of Haggith

after Absalom. ⁷ Adonijah conferred with Joab, son of Zuriyah, and with Abiathar, the priest. These two followed and assisted him; ⁸ but Zadok, the priest and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada; Nathan, the prophet; Shimei, Rei and David's warriors did not join Adonijah.

⁹ Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened calves at the Serpent's Stone, beside Engrogel, and invited his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah to join him; ¹⁰ but not Nathan the prophet or Benaiah, or the warriors, or his brother Solomon.

¹¹ Then Nathan spoke to Bathsheba, mother of Solomon, "Have you heard that Adonijah, son of Haggith, acts as a king unknown to David our lord? ¹² Let me then give you advice that could save both your life and your son Solomon's. ¹³ Go, see King David immediately and tell him this, 'Did you not, my lord king, swear

3. Song 7, 1

5. 2 S 3, 4

11. 2 S 11, 3; 12, 24

12. 1 K 15, 29

The greater part of the Bible was written in those four centuries. It was not only the major prophets who produced writings, e.g., Isaiah and Jeremiah, but groups of prophets of lesser importance wrote much of Israel's history: the greater part of the pages of Genesis and Exodus, the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

We can say that the period of the Kings is the most important period in sacred history; it is also the time which we know with the greatest precision.

These four centuries would appear to be the time of the Kingdom of Israel's decadence if we paid attention only to its wealth and power. But during these four centuries, through trials, persecutions and difficulties of all kinds, Israel's faith matured to the point of reaching, in the great prophets, a sublimity and clarity which only Christ bring still farther.

The Book of Kings

In the beginning, the actual books of Kings formed a single book. This work is the fruit of the prophet's reflection and was edited during the Exile in Babylon.

It is a religious history; events which other historians would consider important are deliberately omitted: it hardly discusses the important reign of Omni and of Jeroboam II in Samaria. Its judgement on the Kings is remembered, making him responsible for the division. Only a few kings of Judah are praised for their loyalty to Yahweh.

We can easily note three parts:

- the grandeur of Solomon's reign and of the Temple.
- the history of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah after their division;
- after the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel, the formation of the history of Judah until Jerusalem's destruction in 587.

The chapters referring to Elijah and Elisha form a unit apart: 1 K:17-19 and 2 K: 2-8.

to your servant that Solomon, my son, would reign after you and sit on your throne? Why then does Adonijah act as king?" ¹⁴Then, while you are still speaking with the king, I will come in and confirm what you say."

¹⁵So Bathsheba went to the king, right into his room. (Now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunamite was attending to him). ¹⁶Bathsheba bowed in homage to the king who asked her, "What do you want?" ¹⁷She answered him, "My lord, you swore to your servant by Yahweh your God that Solomon, my son, would reign after you and sit on your throne. ¹⁸But now, Adonijah acts like a king without you knowing it, my lord king. ¹⁹He has sacrificed oxen, fattened calves and plenty of sheep, inviting all the king's sons, Abiathar, the priest, and Joab, commander of the army; but he did not invite Solomon your servant. ²⁰And now, my lord king, all Israel is waiting for your decision as to who shall reign as your successor. ²¹If this is not known when my lord the king passes away, I and my son Solomon will be numbered among the criminals."

²²While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived ²³and was announced to the king. "Here is Nathan the prophet." When Nathan came in before the king, he bowed before him with his face to the ground, ²⁴and said, "My lord king, have you decided that Adonijah shall reign after you and sit on your throne?" ²⁵For indeed, today he has gone down to sacrifice oxen, fattened calves and plenty of sheep. He has invited all the king's sons, Joab, the commander of the army, and Abiathar, the priest. They are now eating and drinking with him and proclaiming, 'Long live King Adonijah!' ²⁶But he has not invited myself, your servant, Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, nor your servant Solomon. ²⁷Has my lord king decided this without having told us, your servants, who is to sit on your throne after you?"

David makes Solomon king

²⁸King David then answered, "Call Bathsheba to me." So she came to the king. As she stood before him, ²⁹the king swore an oath and said, "As Yahweh lives, he who has delivered me from all adversity, ³⁰so will I fulfill today the oath I swore to you by Yah-

weh, the God of Israel, when I said: 'Solomon, your son, shall reign after me; he shall sit on my throne in my place.'" ³¹Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king as she said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

³²King David then said, "Call Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." So they came to the king ³³who said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord and make my son Solomon ride on my own mule. Then bring him down to Gihon ³⁴and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there as king of Israel. Once this is done, sound the trumpet and proclaim, 'Long live King Solomon!' ³⁵Then he shall sit on my throne in your presence. From now on he will be king in my place for I have made him ruler of Israel and Judah."

³⁶Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, answered the king, "Amen! May Yahweh, the God of my lord king, confirm this. ³⁷As Yahweh has been with my lord king, may he also be with Solomon and make his reign even greater than that of my lord King David's."

³⁸So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, together with the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and made Solomon ride on King David's mule to Gihon. ³⁹There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil that was in the Holy Tent and anointed Solomon. ⁴⁰They then sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" They all went up after him playing on pipes; and their shouts were so great that the noise seemed to split the earth.

⁴¹Adonijah and all his guests heard

this as they finished feasting; on hearing the sound of the trumpet, Joab asked, "What is all this commotion in the city?" ⁴² While he was still speaking, Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest arrived and Adonijah asked, "Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news." ⁴³ Jonathan answered Adonijah, "Not at all, for our lord King David has made Solomon king. ⁴⁴ The king sent him with Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and Pelethites who made him ride on the king's mule.

⁴⁵ Then Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed him king at Gihon. As they returned, all the city cheered; this is the noise that you have heard. ⁴⁶ Solomon already sits on the royal throne ⁴⁷ and the king's servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying: 'May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours and his reign greater than yours.' At this, the king bowed in worship on his bed and said, ⁴⁸ "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who has granted one of my offspring to sit on my throne this day when I can still see it."

⁴⁹ All the guests of Adonijah trembled and left, each going his own way.

⁵⁰ In his fear of Solomon, Adonijah went and held on to the horns of the altar. ⁵¹ This was reported to Solomon, "Adonijah is so afraid of King Solomon that he has held on to the horns of the altar, and he says, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not slay me with the sword'."

⁵² Solomon replied, "If he proves to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head shall perish. But if he acts like a wicked man, he shall die." ⁵³ So King Solomon sent for him and they brought him down from the altar. He came before King Solomon and paid him homage; after that, Solomon sent him home.

David's testament

2 ¹ When David was about to die, he charged his son Solomon with this instruction, ² "I am about to go the way of all creatures. Be strong and show yourself a man. ³ Keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in his ways. Keep his statutes, his commands, his ordinances and declarations written in the law of Moses, that you may succeed in whatever you do and wherever you go. ⁴ If you do so, Yahweh will fulfill the promise he made to me: 'If your sons take care to walk before me faithfully with their whole heart and their whole soul, you shall always have one of your family on the throne of Israel.'

⁵ Now you know what Joab, the son of Zeruiah did to me — how he dealt with the two

2. Jos 23, 14

4. 2 S 7, 12

o The first two chapters relate the succession of King David.

David's life comes to an end in what seems to be extreme weakness from old age. Adonijah plans to impose himself as ruler as his elder brother Absalom had done. But Solomon, whom the prophet Nathan had designated to succeed David, and whom his mother Bathsheba supports, gains the throne.

Fulfill the laws of Yahweh your God. This is the wisdom of the prophets: if the king and his people fulfill these laws, they will be prosperous.

Joab...Shimei... (5 and 8) David had pardoned them; why did he now ask Solomon to kill them? This has nothing to do with David's holding grudges against them but with his being as superstitious as the people of his time. For them, the curse uttered by Shimei (2 Sam 16:6)

or by anybody else remains suspended in the air and can suddenly fall on David's descendants. The most effective way to prevent the curse from harming them is to have it fall on Shimei himself and thus spare David's descendants. In the same way, the blood shed by Joab (2 Sam 3:28) *cries to heaven*, and it is better to eliminate him so that God's justice may fall on him and not on David's children.

Solomon will be the example of a man gifter by God with everything that could be desired. David, with his victories, left him a strong people. The economy was healthy and the people dynamic. *Solomon the magnificent* will squander everything, being in this matter, the figure of his people: heaped with favours by God, "he satiates himself, fattens himself like a bull and then resists God and spurns him" (1 K 32:15).



³⁶ Then the king sent for Shimei and told him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and stay there, and do not leave the place to go anywhere. ³⁷ On the day you leave and cross the brook Kidron, you shall surely die and you shall be responsible for your own death."

³⁸ Shimei answered the king, "What you say is good. Your servant will do as my lord the king has commanded." So Shimei stayed in Jerusalem for many days.

³⁹ Three years later, two of Shimei's slaves ran away to Achish, son of Maacha, king of Gath. When it was reported to Shimei that his slaves were in Gath, ⁴⁰ he saddled an ass and went to Achish in Gath in search of his slaves.

⁴¹ When Solomon was informed that Shimei had left Jerusalem for Gath and returned, ⁴² the king sent for Shimei and said to him, "Did I not make you swear by Yahweh and warned you severely that, on the day you left to go anywhere you would surely die? And you answered me: 'What you say is good; I shall obey!' ⁴³ Why then did you not keep your oath to Yahweh and obey the command I gave you?" ⁴⁴ The king told Shimei, "Remember the evil you did to David my father. Now Yahweh will repay you for what you did. ⁴⁵ But King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall stand firm before Yahweh forever." ⁴⁶ Then the king commanded Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, who went out and struck Shimei and killed him.

In this manner, the kingdom grew stronger in the hands of Solomon.

+ 3 ¹ Solomon entered into a marriage alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He took Pharaoh's daughter and

brought her to the city of David until he had finished building his own palace, Yahweh's House and the wall around Jerusalem. ² Meantime, the people were sacrificing at the high places because the house for the Name of Yahweh had not yet been built.

³ This is why Solomon also sacrificed and burnt incense at the high places although he loved Yahweh and followed the commands of David his father.

Solomon's dream

◆ ⁴ The king used to sacrifice at Gibeon, the great high place; on the altar there he had offered a thousand burnt offerings. ⁵ It was in Gibeon, during the night, that Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask what you want me to give you."

⁶ Solomon answered, "You have shown your servant David my father a great and steadfast love because he served you faithfully and was righteous and sincere towards you. You have given him proof of your steadfast love in making a son of his sit on his throne this day. ⁷ And now, O Yahweh my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father although I am but a little child who does not know how to con-

1. 2 S 5, 7

3. 2 K 18, 4

8. Dt 7, 7

+ The book shows Solomon in three activities which made a king famous:

- His wisdom, chaps. 3-5
- His constructions, chaps. 6-8
- His enterprises, chaps. 9-10

The story concludes in chap. 11 with God's judgement on the kingdom: divisions and reversals are underway.

We already know that Solomon had among his wives the daughter of Pharaoh: proof of the fame which the small country of Israel had in those years, since the daughters of Pharaoh were not given in marriage to just anyone.

It is said that he went to worship in the sanctuaries called High Places. This was to be prohibited later when the Temple of Jerusalem would be the only one acceptable to Yahweh. For the moment, there is no such rule, and Solomon goes to Gibeon where there is a very ancient sanctuary. He himself sacrifices the victims - a thing which, before long, will be the privilege of the priests of Levi's tribe.

◆ Solomon's "dream" is very famous. Perhaps this dream is only a parable by which the author of the book describes Solomon's disposition when he began his reign.

Ask what you want. This is God's offer to the young Solomon, his beloved one. It is God's offer to any young person who is faced with responsibilities for the first time. His life will not be a destiny imposed upon him; rather, one way or another, God will give him what he himself desires. What do you seek? (Jn 1:38)

You have shown great love to my father, David. The young king does not start from scratch. He owes everything he has to his ancestors, and everything he has from his ancestors came from God. Solomon knows that Yahweh committed himself to David forever: "I shall never reject your children."

Give me an understanding mind in governing your people. Solomon is concerned about carrying out his responsibilities and does not



duct myself. ⁸ Meantime, your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen — a people so great that they can neither be numbered nor counted.

⁹ Give me, therefore, an understanding mind in governing your people that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to govern this multitude of people of yours?"

¹⁰ Yahweh was pleased that Solomon had made this request. ¹¹ And he told him. "Because you have requested this rather than long life or wealth or even vengeance on your enemies; indeed, because you have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² I shall grant you your request. I now give you a wise and discerning mind such as no one after you shall ever have.

¹³ I am also giving you what you have not asked for, both wealth and fame; and no king shall be your equal during your lifetime. ¹⁴ Moreover if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and commands, as your father David did, I shall give you long life."

¹⁵ Solomon awoke and knew that this was a dream. So he went to Jerusalem and, standing before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, he offered up burnt offerings and peace offer-

ings, and gave a feast for all his servants.

The judgement of Solomon

◆ ¹⁶ Then two harlots came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷ One of the two women said, "Oh, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and I gave birth to a child while she was there with me. ¹⁸ Three days after my child was born, this woman also gave birth. We were alone, and there was no one in the house but the two of us. ¹⁹ Then this woman's son died during the night because she lay on him. ²⁰ So during the night, she got up, took my son from my side while I slept, laid it beside her and her dead son beside me. ²¹ When I got up in the morning to nurse my child, I saw it was dead. But when I looked at it closely in the morning, I saw that it was not my child."

²² The other woman said, "No, the living child is mine; the dead child is yours." To this, the first replied, "Not so, but the dead child is yours; the living child is mine." And they quarrelled this way in the king's presence.

²³ Then the king said, "One says: 'This is my son who is alive; your son is dead'; the other says: 'That is not so, your son is dead; my son is the live one'. ²⁴ And the king said, "Bring me a

9. Wis 8, 9; Pro 2, 6

12. 2 K 18, 5; 23, 25; Ecl 1, 16; Sir 47, 14

14. Dt 5, 33

variant the people to be robbed of their expectations.

Nevertheless, Solomon has in mind other forms of "wisdom" that were appreciated in those days:

- to prepare for himself a long and quiet life, not to have problems or troubles, and to spare the sacrifices required by a noble life;
- wealth, enjoyment of life, "to be comfortable";
- the death of his enemies, i.e., strength that leads to victory, satisfaction of one's personal pride.

I now give you a discerning mind; besides, I am giving you what you have not asked for. This is the same teaching of Jesus in Mt. 6:33.

◆ Here, the well-known judgement of Solomon gives evidence of the wisdom he received for the good of his people.

Let us look closer into Solomon's conduct. He could have dismissed the two women, saying to himself "These people are not interesting. Let them settle their quarrel themselves." Solomon did not regard their condition as prostitutes, but sought a mother among them. So he invented a solution which was not provided by law.

His action shows that justice cannot be rendered through mere juridical texts. Those with responsibility must look at a person with the same understanding with which God probes the depth of everyone's heart.



sword." When they brought the king a sword, ²⁵ he gave this order, "Divide the child in two and give half to one, half to the other." ²⁶ Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king out of pity for her son, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child but spare its life." The other woman, however, said, "It shall be neither mine nor yours. Divide it!"

²⁷ Then the king spoke, "Give the living child to the first woman and spare its life. She is its mother."

²⁸ When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had given, they marvelled at him, seeing that God's wisdom was in him to render justice.

Solomon's grandeur

4 ¹ King Solomon was king over all Israel ² and had the following for his high officials: Azariah, son of Zadok, was the priest; ³ Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha, were secretaries; Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, was recorder; ⁴ Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was general of the army; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; ⁵ Azariah, son of Nathan, was head of the officers; Zabud, son of Nathan, was priest and the king's personal adviser; ⁶ Abishar was in charge of the palace; and Adoniram, son of Abda was in charge of forced labour.

⁷ Solomon had twelve governors over all Israel who provided food for the king and his household; each one of them making provisions for one month during the year. ⁸ These were their names: Ben-hur, in the hill country of Ephraim; ⁹ Bendeker, in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth-shemesh, and Elonbeth-hanan; ¹⁰ Ben-hesed, in Arubboth (to him belonged Socoh and all the land of Hepher); ¹¹ Ben-abinadab, in all of Naphath-dor (he had Taphath, daughter of Solomon, for his wife); ¹² Baana, son of Ahilud, in Taanach, Megiddo and all of Bethshean beside Zarethan below Jezreel, and from Beth-shean to Abelmeholah, as far as Jokmeam and beyond; ¹³ Ben-geber, in Ramoth-gilead (he had the villages of Jair, son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead, as also the region of Argob in Bashan, sixty big towns, walled and barred with brazen bars); ¹⁴ Ahinadab, son of Iddo, in Mahanaim; ¹⁵ Ahimaaz, in Naphtali (he had taken Basemath, daughter of Solomon, for his wife); ¹⁶ Baana, son of Hushai, in Asher and Bealoth; ¹⁷ Jehoshaphat,

son of Paruah, in Issachar; ¹⁸ Shimei, son of Ela, in Benjamin; ¹⁹ Geber, son of Uri, in the land of Gilead, the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and of Og, king of Bashan. And there was also an attendant in the land of Judah.

²⁰ Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore, eating and drinking, and making merry. ²¹ Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and on to the frontiers of Egypt. All these paid tribute and served Solomon during his lifetime.

²² Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of fine flour, sixty cors of meal, ²³ ten fat oxen, twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides harts, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl. ²⁴ He ruled over all the region west of the Euphrates, from Tiphsah to Gaza and over all its kings, and he had peace on all frontiers. ²⁵ Judah and Israel lived in security, from Dan to Beersheba, and every man was safe under his vine and under his fig tree, for as long as Solomon lived.

²⁶ Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots and twelve thousand horsemen.

²⁷ All these governors supplied provisions for King Solomon and for all his guests at table, each one providing during his assigned month and seeing that nothing was lacking.

²⁸ They also brought barley and straw for the horses and swift studs wherever the king stayed, each one doing this during his appointed month.

²⁹ God gave Solomon great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sand on the shore, ³⁰ so that his wisdom surpassed that of all the people of the east and of the Egyptians. ³¹ He was wiser than any man: wiser than Ethan, the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol and Darda, sons of Mahol; and his fame spread among all the surrounding nations. ³² He composed three thousand proverbs and knew a thousand and five songs. ³³ He took his examples from all the trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of the beasts and birds, and reptiles and fish.

³⁴ People from all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon; all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom sent messengers to listen to him.

5 ¹ Now, Hiram King of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon when he heard that he had been anointed king in place of his father. For David had always been Hiram's



friend. ² Solomon then sent this message to Hiram. ³ "You know that David my father could not build a temple for Yahweh his God because his enemies were at war with him until the time when Yahweh gave him victory over them. ⁴ But now Yahweh my God has given me peace on all sides and there is no enemy or calamity that afflicts us. ⁵ And so I intend to build a temple for Yahweh my God as Yahweh told David my father. 'Your son, whom I will set upon your throne, shall build the House for my Name.' ⁶ Now, therefore, give orders to have cedars of Lebanon cut for me. My servants will join yours and I will pay your servants the wages you set, for you know that none of us can cut timber like the Sidonians."

⁷ When Hiram heard the answer of Solomon, he was exceedingly glad and said, (Blessed be Yahweh this day who has given David a wise son to rule over this great people.) ⁸ Then Hiram sent a messenger to Solomon with these words, "I have heard the message you sent me and I am ready to do whatever you want concerning the cedar and cypress timber. ⁹ My servants shall have it sent down to the sea from Lebanon. I will make it into rafts and deliver them by sea to the place you choose. I will have the rafts broken up here and you can take the timber away. You, for your part, will provide food for my household." ¹⁰ So Hiram supplied Solomon with all the cedar and cypress timber that he wanted, ¹¹ while Solomon gave Hiram every year twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty thousand cors of pure oil. ¹² Yahweh gave wisdom to Solomon as he had promised him, and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon who bound themselves by a treaty.

¹³ King Solomon conscripted thirty thousand men from all Israel for forced labour. ¹⁴ He sent them to Lebanon in relays of ten thousand a month, so that they would be in Lebanon for a month and at home for two months. Adoniram was in charge of the draft

of labourers. ¹⁵ Solomon had seventy thousand carriers and eighty thousand stone cutters in the hill country, ¹⁶ in addition to three thousand three hundred overseers in charge of the people engaged in the work. ¹⁷ By order of the king, they quarried large and expensive stones to give the temple a foundation of hewn stones. ¹⁸ Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders, along with the Gēbalites did the hewing and prepared both timber and stone to build the temple.

Solomon builds the temple

6 ¹In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, Solomon began to build the temple of Yahweh. ² The House which King Solomon built for Yahweh was sixty cubits long, twenty wide, and thirty high. ³ The vestibule fronting the Sanctuary was twenty cubits long from side to side, the width of the temple, and ten cubits deep in front of the House. ⁴ He made windows with recessed frames for the House.

⁵ Solomon had a structure built adjoining the walls all around the House and enclosing both Sanctuary and Inner Sanctuary. He also made lateral rooms all around. ⁶ The lowest story was five cubits wide; the middle, six cubits wide; and the third, seven cubits wide. Around the exterior of the temple, he made offsets on the wall so that the supporting beams need not be inserted into walls of the temple.

⁷ The House was built with stones prepared at the quarry so that no hammer, or axe,

13. 1 S 8.11

• Wise in his judgement, wise in administering his territory, wise in composing proverbs, re-
mains and psalms: from him comes the nucleus
of the book of Proverbs. Later, whoever would
write a book on Wisdom would attribute the
work to Solomon: hence, in the Bible, Eccle-
siastes, the Song of Solomon. Wisdom are at-
tributed to Solomon though they were in fact
written by other people.

Solomon brings writers together in his court
to gather and write down the traditions of Israel
which until this time were scattered or transmit-
ted merely by word of mouth. This was the time

when the most ancient books of the Bible were
written. (See Introduction to Genesis).

+ Solomon's first construction is the House of
Yahweh, that is, the Temple of Jerusalem,
which will be counted among the wonders of
ancient times.

The tent of the Ark in the desert had been the
centre of worship as practised by nomadic
tribes. From now on, the Temple, somehow
similar to the Canaanite temples, would be the
centre of an urban and sedentary culture. The
sacrifices and feasts celebrated there are in-
spired by Canaanite cults. Israel takes a new step



or any iron implement was heard in the temple during the construction.

⁸ The entrance to the lowest story was on the right side of the House. A staircase led up to the middle story; and from the middle story, to the third. ⁹ So, Solomon built the House and finished it, making the ceiling of the House from cedar beams and planks. ¹⁰ Each story of the structure which he built surrounding the House was five cubits high joined to the House with cedar timber.

¹¹ The word of Yahweh was directed to Solomon, ¹² "If you observe my statutes, obey my ordinances, keep all my commands and follow them, I will fulfill everything I said to David your father regarding this House. ¹³ There I will be in the midst of the Israelites and not forsake my people Israel."

■ ¹⁴ So, Solomon built the House and finished it. ¹⁵ He covered the interior walls of the temple with cedar boards; so that in the interior from the floor of the House to the rafters of the ceiling only wood could be seen. The floor also was covered with cypress boards. ¹⁶ Solomon covered twenty cubits of the rear of the House with cedar boards from floor to rafter to serve as an inner sanctuary — the Most Holy Place. ¹⁷ The front of the house, that is the Sanctuary, was forty cubits long. ¹⁸ In all the interior of the

House, the cedar was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers; all was of cedar and no stone was to be seen.

¹⁹ The inner sanctuary in the innermost part of the building had been destined to house the ark of the covenant of Yahweh. ²⁰ It was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, overlaid with pure gold. He also made an altar of cedar. ²¹ Solomon overlaid the interior of the House with pure gold. He closed the inner sanctuary with golden chains, and overlaid it with gold. ²² Solomon overlaid the entire House with gold. He also overlaid with gold the whole altar in the inner sanctuary.

²³ In the inner sanctuary, Solomon made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. ²⁴ The length of the wings of each cherub was five cubits each, hence, ten cubits from tip to tip. ²⁵ Both cherubim had the same measurement and the same form. ²⁶ Both being ten cubits high. ²⁷ When the cherubim were put in the innermost part of the House their wings were so spread out that a wing of one touched one wall, while a wing of the other touched the other wall. Their other wings touched each other at the center of the House. ²⁸ The cherubim were also overlaid with gold.

22. Ex 30, 1

forward in its culture, and worship is also adapted to a new situation.

Not God, but people need the Temple. (See 2 Sam 7:7)

- There is the sincere desire to honour Yahweh by giving him the most beautiful house of all. Hence, the Temple is always called in the Bible, the House of Yahweh. On the other hand, the people want to show their prosperity and they feel proud to have a temple that can compete with those of other people.
- There is also the desire to have something beautiful which can be a visible image of the Glory of the invisible God. For the Israelites, the Temple of Jerusalem was the pedestal of the invisible Temple where Yahweh is in his glory. He prohibited them from representing him by images of creatures; but at least the House could be adorned with gold and precious wood.
- Finally there is the concern to have God present to protect his people. Though Yahweh says that he has no temple but the

entire universe (8:27), he wants to be present in the midst of his people (Dt 12:5). In Jerusalem, Yahweh is "in his holy dwelling" (Jer 25:30), to defend his people (Is 31:5).

Like Solomon, the Christian kings and authorities of past centuries wanted to adorn their churches with gold and silver; they believed that the House of God ought to be much more beautiful than their own. Let us respect their piety; but today we understand that the city of God is governed by criteria different from those of men. The richness of temples does not always help us to discover God's greatness.

■ The most sacred part of the Temple, the most Sacred Place, contained only the Ark with the stone slabs on which the covenant of Yahweh with his people had been confirmed. Before this room was the Holy Place where the sacred candlesticks burned and incense was kindled. Here, too, were placed the twelve loaves that were offered every week. (See 1 Sam 21:5). An entrance hall completed the house.



²⁹ Solomon had all the surrounding walls of the House carved with figures of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers both in the interior and exterior rooms. ³⁰ He also had the floor of the House, in both the interior and exterior rooms, overlaid with gold.

³¹ Solomon had doors made of olive wood or the entrance to the inner sanctuary of which he lintel and doorposts formed the fifth part. ³² He covered the two olive wood doors with carvings of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers. He then overlaid them with gold and spread gold on the cherubim and the palm trees.

³³ He did the same for the olive wood doorposts at the entrance to the sanctuary, which formed the fourth part of the door. ³⁴ Both the right and left side of the door had two folding panels of cypress wood. ³⁵ He had cherubim, palm trees and open flowers carved on them and overlaid the carvings with gold evenly applied.

³⁶ As for the interior court, Solomon had it built with three courses of hewn stone and one course of cedar beams.

³⁷ In the month of Ziv of the fourth year, the foundation of Yahweh's House was laid. ³⁸ In the month of Bul, the eighth month of the seventh year, the House was finished, complete and according to all specifications. It took Solomon seven years to build it.

The palace and the temple

7 ¹ Solomon took thirteen years to build his own palace. ² He built the House of the Forest of Lebanon which measured one hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. It was built on three rows of cedar pillars with cedar beams on the pillars.

It had a cedar ceiling above the beams that were on the forty-five pillars, fifteen in each row. ⁴ There were three window frames at either end, each window corresponding to another opposite it. ⁵ All the doorways and windows had square frames and each window corresponded to the one opposite it.

⁶ The Hall of Pillars measured fifty cubits long and thirty cubits wide. It had a porch in front with pillars and a canopy over them. ⁷ The hall of the Throne where Solomon was to pro-

nounce judgment — the Hall of Judgment was finished with cedar from floor to rafters.

⁸ His own house, where he was to live, and which was in the other court behind the hall, was built in like manner. Solomon also made a house similar to this for Pharaoh's daughter whom he had taken in marriage.

⁹ All these were made of costly stones, hewn according to measure, sawed on their inner and outer faces even from the foundation to the coping, and from the court of Yahweh's House to the big court.

¹⁰ The foundation was of huge, costly stones of eighty and ten cubits. ¹¹ Above were costly stones, hewn according to measure, and cedar wood. ¹² The great court was surrounded by a wall of hewn stones and a course of cedar beams, like the interior court of Yahweh's House and its vestibule.

¹³ King Solomon sent for and brought from Tyre, Hiram ¹⁴ who was the son of a widow of Naphtali's tribe. His father was from Tyre and an artisan in bronze-work, and he himself was very knowledgeable and skilled in all kinds of bronze-work. Hiram came and did all the work that Solomon asked of him.

¹⁵ He cast two brazen pillars, both of which measured eighteen cubits high and had a circumference of twelve cubits. Both were hollow and measured four fingers in thickness.

¹⁶ He also made two capitals of molten bronze to set on the tops of the pillars, both measuring five cubits high. ¹⁷ He also made two pieces of network with a chainlike mesh for each of the capitals on top of the pillars. ¹⁸ Likewise, he made pomegranates arranged in two rows encircling each piece of network to cover each capital on top of the pillars. ¹⁹ The capitals on top of the pillars in the vestibule had a lotus design measuring four cubits. ²⁰ They were on the two pillars above the nodes and beside the network, encircled by two hundred pomegranates arranged in two rows.

²¹ Hiram set up the pillars at the vestibule of the temple: one to the right called Jachin, and one to the left called Boaz. ²² In this way the work on the pillars was completed.

²³ Hiram then cast the great round bowl called the "Sea" measuring ten cubits from one brim to the opposite; it was five cubits high and had a circumference of thirty cubits. ²⁴ Under

35. Gen 3, 24; Exk 10

and all around were wide and spacious courtyards where the people stood praying.

This arrangement of several rooms leading into the most sacred place is a common thing in many ancient religions. It teaches that man cannot approach God without the required preparation. Even though Yahweh remains in

the midst of his people, his mystery continues to be inaccessible.

This arrangement reflects in some way what is in him himself, the true Temple of God. There is, in us, a very intimate place where God is present. (See Jn 14:23). When Jesus asks us to "meet the Father in secret" (Mt 6:6), it means not



its brim, it was encircled with gourds, ten for each cubit, arranged in two rows and cast along with the Sea.²⁵ This rested on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east, with their haunches towards the center.²⁶ It was a handbreadth in thickness, its brim resembling a cup or a lily flower, and had a capacity of two thousand baths.

²⁷ Hiram also made ten brazen stands, each measuring four cubits long, four cubits wide and three cubits high;²⁸ and this was how the stands were constructed: they had framed panels²⁹ on which were lions, oxen and cherubim. On the frames above and below the lions and oxen were wreaths in relief.³⁰ Each stand had four brazen wheels and axles; its four feet had shoulderings under the basin.³¹ Its mouth measured one and a half cubits from where the shoulderings met the top; its mouth was round like a rest for a vessel; and on the mouth there were engravings, too. The crosspieces, however, were rectangular, not round.³² The four wheels were below the panels; their axles being one piece with the stands. Each wheel was a cubit and a half high.³³ The wheels were made like chariot wheels; their axles, rims, spokes and hubs were all of cast metal.

The four legs of each stand had cast braces supporting a basin and had wreaths on each side.³⁴ These four braces, extending to the corners of each stand, were of one piece with the stand.

³⁵ On top of the stand was a round band half a cubit high, with supports and panels which were of one piece with the stand. This was topped by a crown one cubit high within which was a rounded opening, the way a pedestal is made, a cubit and a half deep. Its opening had carvings and its panels were square and not round.³⁶ On the surface of its supports, as also on its panels, and wherever there was space, were carvings of cherubim, lions and palm trees, with wreaths all around.³⁷ This was how the ten stands were made – all of them with the same cast, same measurement, and same form.

³⁸ Hiram also made ten brazen basins, each holding forty baths and measuring four cubits. There was a basin for each of the ten stands.³⁹ He placed five of the stands on the south side of the House, and five on the north side. The Sea he placed at the southeast corner of the temple.

⁴⁰ Hiram also made the bowls, shovels and basins, and thereby finished all the work that

he had undertaken for King Solomon on Yahweh's House.⁴¹ Hence, two pillars, two bowls on the capitals at the top of the pillars,⁴² four hundred pomegranates for two networks, two rows of pomegranates for each network to cover the two bowls of the capitals at the top of the pillars,⁴³ ten stands, ten basins on the stands,⁴⁴ the Sea, and twelve oxen underneath the Sea.

⁴⁵ Now the bowls, shovels and basins – all these vessels which Hiram made in Yahweh's House for King Solomon – were of burnished bronze.⁴⁶ The king had them cast in the plain of Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarethan.⁴⁷ Solomon left all the vessels unweighed since there were so many of them. And so the weight of the bronze was not known.

⁴⁸ So Solomon made all the vessels that were in Yahweh's House: the golden altar, the golden table for the bread of Presence,⁴⁹ the lampstands of pure gold, five on the right side and five on the left in front of the inner sanctuary; the flowers, lamps and tongs of gold;⁵⁰ the cups, snuffers, basins, dishes for incense, and firepans of pure gold; and the golden hinges for both the doors of the innermost part of the House, the Most Holy Place, and the doors of the Sanctuary of the House.

⁵¹ When all the work that King Solomon did on Yahweh's House was completed, he brought in the things which David his father had dedicated – the silver, the gold, and the vessels – and stored them in the treasures of Yahweh's House.

8 ¹ Then Solomon assembled before him in Jerusalem the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, as well as the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, to bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh from the city of David, which is Zion.

The ark is brought into the temple

◆ ² All the Israelites assembled in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.³ When all the elders of Israel arrived, the priests carried the ark of Yahweh⁴ and brought it up together with the Tent of Meeting and all the holy vessels that were in the tent. After the priests and Levites had brought them up,⁵ King Solomon with the en-

only to pray in a place apart, but to seek within our own selves the Most Sacred Place where the Spirit communicates his way of being felt.

◆ On the day of the Temple's inauguration God makes his presence felt by means of the cloud. In the Exodus, this was the visible sign c

38. Ex 30, 17 40. Ex 27, 3 48. Ex 25, 23 50. Lev 10, 1 51. 2 S 8, 11 3. 2 S 6



tire congregation of Israel that had assembled before him and were with him before the Ark, sacrificed so many sheep and oxen that they could neither be counted nor numbered. ⁶ Then the priests laid the ark of the covenant of Yahweh in its place in the inner sanctuary of the House — the Most Holy Place — underneath the wings of the cherubim. ⁷ The cherubim had their wings spread out over the lace of the ark, providing a covering above the ark and its poles.

⁸ The poles were so long that their ends were seen from the Holy Place in front of the inner sanctuary but not from the outside; and they remain there to this day. ⁹ There was nothing in the ark except the two tables of stone which Moses placed there at Horeb where Yahweh made a covenant with the Israelites when they came out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁰ And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, such a cloud filled Yahweh's House ¹¹ that the priests could not continue to minister. Indeed, the glory of Yahweh filled his house.

¹² Then Solomon said, "Yahweh has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. ¹³ So the house I have built

you will be your house, a place for you to dwell in forever."

¹⁴ The king turned and blessed the entire assembly of Israel, as they stood, ¹⁵ saying, "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who has fulfilled by his hand what he promised personally to David my father when he said, ¹⁶ 'Since the day I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city in all the tribes of Israel in which to build a resting place for my Name, but now I have chosen Jerusalem for my Name to be there, as I chose David to be the king of my people Israel.' ¹⁷ Now David my father wanted to build a House for the Name of Yahweh, the God of Israel; ¹⁸ but Yahweh told David my father, 'You meant well to build a House for my Name. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, not you but your son who shall be born to you shall build this House for my Name.'"

²⁰ Yahweh has fulfilled his promise, for I have succeeded David my father and am sitting on the throne of Israel; and, as Yahweh promised, I have built this House for the Name of Yahweh, the God of Israel. ²¹ There I have provided a place for the Ark with the Covenant which Yahweh made with our fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt."

Solomon's prayer

o ²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of Yahweh in the presence of all the assembly of Israel. He raised his hands towards heaven ²³ and said, "O Yahweh, God of Israel, there is no God like you either in heaven or on earth! You keep your covenant and show loving-kindness to your servants who walk before you

8. Ex 25, 13

9. Ex 25, 16; Dt 10, 1; Heb 9, 4

11. Ex 40, 34; Ezk 43, 4; Rev 15, 8

12. Ps 18, 12; 1 Tim 6, 16

13. 2 S 7, 13; Ps 132, 14

Yahweh's presence to Israel. (See Ex 14:19 and 40:34) Later the Israelites continued to be incident in this presence of God which protected them (Jer 7) from Jerusalem.

In the course of time, many indecent things occurred in the courtyards of the Temple: they even built up altars to idols and practised sacred prostitution according to pagan customs. (See 2 Kgs 23:4-7) Yet it is not said that Yahweh abandoned his Sanctuary where he remained out of idleness to his Covenant.

It was only in the last years of the Kingdom that the prophet Ezechiel had a vision where the cloud left the Temple: this meant that Yahweh would now live among his faithful ones exiled in Babylon (Ez 9:3).

Much later, the apostle John will see this cloud in the heavenly temple (Rv 15:8) after having seen it over the person of Jesus during his transfiguration.

o Yahweh has fulfilled his promise (20 and 25).

David had two promises from God. The first was that his son would build the Temple; the second, that his descendants would keep the throne of Israel.

It is worth noting how God, being the invisible God and Creator of the Universe, wants to be, in some way, in a definite place, Jerusalem; and among a definite people, David's descendants. This visible centre of divine presence is now the Church. The Kingdom of God is universal, yet the Church relates with Christ through a well-defined series of people: the bishops and the pope.

■ After making a request for his descendants, Solomon makes a request for his people. Let us underline some points:

Vindicate the righteous. The first petition is



wholeheartedly. ²⁴ You have foretold this day to your servant David, my father, and this day you have fulfilled your promise. ²⁵ Now, O Yahweh, God of Israel, keep this other promise you made to David when you said, 'You shall always have someone from your family on the throne of Israel provided that your sons are careful to serve me as you have done.' ²⁶ Now, therefore, O God of Israel, confirm the promise you have given to David my father.

²⁷ But will God really live among men on earth? If neither heavens nor the highest heavens can contain you, how much less can this House which I built! ²⁸ Yet, listen to the prayer and supplication of your servant, O Yahweh my God; hearken to the cries and pleas which your servant directs to you this day. ²⁹ Watch over this House of which you have said, 'My name shall rest there.' Hear the prayer of your servant in this place.

■ ³⁰ Listen to the supplication of your servant and your people Israel when they pray in this direction; listen from your dwelling place in Heaven and, on hearing, forgive.

³¹ When people come charged with a crime against their neighbour, and take their oath before your altar in this temple, ³² then hear from Heaven and do justice. Condemn the guilty and let his evildoing fall upon him, but vindicate the righteous and reward him according to his righteousness.

³³ When your people Israel are defeated by the enemy for having sinned against you, and when they turned back to you and acknowledge their sins, praying and making supplications to you in this House; ³⁴ then hear from heaven and forgive your people

Israel. Bring them back to the land which you gave to their fathers.

³⁵ When the heavens are shut and no rain falls because they have sinned against you, and they pray in this place, acknowledging and repenting of their sin because of their affliction, ³⁶ then listen from Heaven and forgive your servants, your people Israel, and teach them the way to live; and send rain on your land which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

³⁷ If there is famine in the land, or pestilence such as blight or mildew, locust or caterpillar; if their enemy attacks them in any of their cities; if they suffer from any plague or sickness; ³⁸ whatever be one or all of the prayers or supplications of the Israelites showing repentance as they raise their hands in the direction of this House, ³⁹ then listen from Heaven, your dwelling place, and forgive. Do to each, whose heart you know, according to his conduct (for you alone know the hearts of all men) ⁴⁰ so that they may fear you as long as they live in the land which you gave our fathers.

⁴¹ Likewise, when a foreigner who is not from your people Israel, comes from a far country because of your Name ⁴² (for they shall hear of your great Name, your mighty hand and outstretched arm), and prays in this House, ⁴³ hear from the heavens your dwelling place, and do for the for-

27. Is 66, 1; Acts 17, 24 29. Dt 12, 11 33. Lev 26, 14 35. Dt 11, 17; Jer 3, 2 37. Dt 28, 1

in line with a custom of that period. (See Num 5:11). If the truth in some crime could not be established, the accused had to swear that he was innocent and that he would accept any punishment from God if he had perjured himself. The people were convinced that God would not leave the liar unpunished.

If no rain falls because they have sinned against you. Prayer is for people who are sinners and who know themselves to be such. They fear God's punishment but believe that God forgives; they believe that God cannot be

won over by prayers and ceremonies but by repentance.

So that they may fear you (v. 40). In the Bible, *to fear God* means: to take him seriously and to respect him. But it is also true that, at that time, the perfect worship "in spirit and in truth" was not known (Jn 4:18), and people were afraid of God and his punishments.

When a foreigner comes from a far country. This prayer was written centuries later: when the missionary efforts of the Jews had already brought many pagans to their faith.



eigner whatever he asks you for, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your Name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and may know that your name rests on this House which I have built.

⁴⁴ If your people go to war wherever you send them, and they pray to Yahweh in the direction of the city which you have chosen and the House which I have built for your Name, ⁴⁵ then from Heaven hear their prayers and supplications and defend their cause.

⁴⁶ If they sin against you (and there is no man who does not sin), and, in your anger, you deliver them to an enemy who takes them captive into enemy territory, whether near or far off; ⁴⁷ yet if, in the land where they have been carried captive, they sincerely repent and plead with you and say, "We have sinned and have acted wrongly and wickedly"; ⁴⁸ if they do repent with sincerity while in the land of their captors and pray to you turning towards the land which you gave to their fathers, the city which you have chosen, and the House which I have built for your Name; ⁴⁹ then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, their prayer and supplication and defend their cause. ⁵⁰ Forgive your people who have sinned against you; forgive all their offenses, and make their captors have compassion on them. ⁵¹ (For they are your people —your heritage which you brought out of Egypt from the midst of the iron furnace).

⁵² Open your eyes to the pleadings of your servant and to those of your people Israel, and listen to them whenever they call on you. ⁵³ For you took them from among all the peoples of the earth to be your heritage, as you declared through Moses your servant when you brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Yahweh God."

⁵⁴ When Solomon finished offering all this prayer and entreaty to Yahweh, he rose from before the altar of Yahweh where he had knelt with hands raised towards heaven and, ⁵⁵ standing, blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice. ⁵⁶ "Blessed be Yahweh who has given rest to his people Israel as he promised: for not one of his promises, given to Moses his servant, has been broken. ⁵⁷ May Yahweh our God be with us as he was with our fathers. May he not leave or forsake us; ⁵⁸ may he incline our hearts towards him and make us walk in all his ways keeping his commands, his statutes and regulations which he commanded our fathers. ⁵⁹ Let my prayer to Yah-

weh be with our God day and night. May he deal with me and with his people Israel each day according to what is right; ⁶⁰ in this way all the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh is God and there is no other. ⁶¹ As for you, let your heart be wholly true to Yahweh our God, following his laws and keeping his commands as at this time."

⁶² Then the king and all the Israelites with him offered sacrifices before Yahweh. ⁶³ Solomon offered twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep as peace offerings to Yahweh. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated Yahweh's House. ⁶⁴ That same day, the king consecrated the middle of the court in front of Yahweh's House, for it was there that he offered the burnt offerings, the cereal offerings and the fat of the peace offerings since the bronze altar that was before Yahweh was too small to receive the burnt offering, the cereal offering and the fat of the peace offerings.

⁶⁵ So at this time Solomon, together with a large assembly of Israelites that gathered from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt, celebrated the festival before Yahweh for seven days. ⁶⁶ On the eighth day, Solomon dismissed the people.

After bidding farewell to the king, they went home rejoicing and happy because of all the kindness that Yahweh had shown to his servant David and to his people Israel.

Solomon's activities

9 ¹ After Solomon had finished building Yahweh's House, the royal palace, and everything he wanted to build, ² Yahweh appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. ³ Yahweh said to him, "I have heard the prayer and supplication you made before me. I have consecrated this House you have built, that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there forever. ⁴ As for you, if you will live in my presence, the way your father David did, with sincerity and uprightness, doing all that I have commanded you and keeping my decrees and laws, ⁵ I will affirm your kingship in Israel forever, as I promised your father David when I said, 'You shall always have someone from your family on the throne of Israel.'

⁶ But if you or your children refuse to follow me, disobey my commands and laws which I have set before you; if they serve and worship other gods, ⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them and I

46. Dt 28, 63

3. Dt 12, 5

51. Dt 4, 20; 53. Dt 7, 6; 56. Dt 12, 10; 60. Is 45, 6; 63. Num 7, 1; Ezr 6, 15

6. Dt 6, 2; Jn 16, 4

7. Dt 28, 37; Jer 19, 8



will remove from my sight this House I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. ⁸ Everyone passing by this House reduced to a heap of stones will be astonished and jeer: 'Why has Yahweh done such a thing to this land and to this House?' ⁹ Then people will answer: 'Because they abandoned Yahweh their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and they followed other gods, worshipping and serving them. That is why Yahweh has brought all this evil on them.'"

¹⁰ During these twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses — Yahweh's House and the royal house, ¹¹ Hiram king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with as much cedar, cypress, timber and gold as he wanted. Then King Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. ¹² But when Hiram left Tyre to visit the cities which Solomon had given him, he was displeased ¹³ and said, "What kind of cities have you given me, my brother?" And this is why, to this day, they are called the land of Cabul. ¹⁴ Hiram, however, had sent the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold.

¹⁵ This is the account of the forced labour which King Solomon ordered for the building of Yahweh's House and his own palace, the Millo as well as the wall of Jerusalem; the cities of Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer. ¹⁶ (Pharaoh king of Egypt had captured and burnt Gezer, putting to death the Canaanites who dwelt there. Then he had given the city as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife.) ¹⁷ So Solomon rebuilt Gezer, Lower Beth-horon, ¹⁸ Baalath and Tamar in the desert, in the land of Judah; ¹⁹ all the store-cities that Solomon had, the cities for his chariots and those for his horsemen; and whatever Solomon wanted to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon and in all the land of his dominion.

²⁰ On all the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel — ²¹ their descendants who were left in the land and whom the Israelites were unable to completely destroy — on all of these Solomon imposed forced labour and it re-

mains so to this day. ²² Of the people of Israel, however, Solomon made no slaves. These were the soldiers, his officials, his commanders, his captains, his chariot commanders and horsemen.

²³ The overseers of Solomon's work in charge of those who were working, were five hundred and fifty. ²⁴ When Pharaoh's daughter went up from the city of David to her own house that Solomon had built for her, he began building the Millo.

²⁵ After Solomon had finished the House, he came three times a year to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar which he built to Yahweh, burning incense before Yahweh. ²⁶ King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. ²⁷ Hiram sent his servants, seamen who were familiar with the sea, to serve in the fleet together with the servants of Solomon. ²⁸ They sailed for Ophir and brought back to King Solomon gold amounting to four hundred and twenty talents.

The queen of Sheba visits Solomon

◆ **10** ¹ The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's fame, and she came to test him with difficult questions. ² She arrived in Jerusalem with a vast retinue and with camels loaded with spices, an abundance of gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she told him all that she had on her mind ³ and Solomon answered all her questions. There was nothing that the king could not explain to her. ⁴ And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the palace he had built, ⁵ the food on his table, the residence of his officials, the attendance of his servants and their clothing, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings which he offered at

◆ Solomon undertakes business. He acquires a fleet of Tarshish ships for long journeys and he sends them to get gold and perfume from Africa. He sells Egyptian chariots to the Hittites in the north, and to the Egyptians, Hittite horses. The fame of his wealth and his wisdom reaches the queen of Sheba in the south of Arabia.

In reality, Israel was a very small people be-

tween the two big empires of Egypt and Babylon. Incidentally, during the period of David and Solomon, these empires were peaceful and practically asleep. This was enough to allow the Israelites to think that they were the first country of the world, and they saw in Solomon the most magnificent king of all times.

The Queen of Sheba came to test him with difficult questions. The Bible does not give:



Yahweh's House, she was left breathless.

⁶ Then she said to the king, "All that I heard in my own land concerning you and your wisdom was true. ⁷ But I did not believe the reports until I came and had seen with my own eyes. And what did I see! I was told only half the story; for your wisdom and wealth surpass the report I had heard.

⁸ Fortunate are your wives! Fortunate are your servants who are ever in your presence and hear your wisdom! ⁹ Blessed be Yahweh your God who has looked kindly on you and has put you on the throne of Israel! Because of Yahweh's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king so that you may dispense justice and righteousness."

¹⁰ Then she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in abundance, and precious stones. Such an abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon was never again seen.

¹¹ Moreover, the fleet of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, also brought from Ophir a huge amount of almug wood and precious stones.

¹² The king used the almug wood to make supports for Yahweh's House and the royal palace, and also to make lyres and harps for the singers. Such

almug wood has never again been brought or seen to the present day.

¹³ King Solomon, in turn, gave the queen of Sheba all that she desired and all that he in his generosity wanted to give her. Then she went back to her own land together with her servants.

¹⁴ Now the weight of gold that Solomon received in one year was six hundred and sixty-six gold talents, ¹⁵ not counting those brought by traders, merchants, the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land. ¹⁶ King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold, six hundred shekels of gold going into each shield. ¹⁷ And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold with three minas of gold in each shield. And the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. ¹⁸ The king also made a huge ivory throne and overlaid it with the finest gold. ¹⁹ The throne had six steps, a rounded back, and on each side of the seat were arm rests with two lions standing beside the arm rests. ²⁰ The six steps had twelve lions, one on each end of a step. Nothing like this was ever made in any kingdom. ²¹ All of King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold and none of silver, for silver was not considered of much value in the days of Solomon.

²² The king had a fleet of Tarshish ships at sea with Hiram's fleet, and once every three years the fleet of Tarshish ships would bring gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.

²³ King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in wealth and wisdom. ²⁴ And the whole world sought

22, 22, 49; Eek 27, 12

much importance to the commercial aspect of this visit which will only appear toward the end in the barter mentioned in verses 10 and 13.

Solomon's meeting with the Queen of Sheba becomes an historical scene:

- The wise Solomon and his people discover the wealth and products of other countries. "So the world is bigger than we thought!" These contacts help the Israelites gain a broader religious vision. Yahweh is not only the God of a small nation but is sovereign over the wide universe.
- The Queen of Sheba is a wealthy woman, but she is not satisfied. There is no mention of her husband. She is attracted by the divine wisdom manifested in the king. "The Beloved of Yahweh" (2 Sam 12:29). Jesus will recall this visit in Mt. 12:42.

o For a while, the Israelites marvelled at Solomon's wealth and the numerous chariots and horses that made up his army. Some centuries later, they saw how little this power had benefited them and how much it had cost the country: the politics of fame and of grandiose works demanded the imposition of forced labor on the people. This was one of the causes of the kingdom's split at the death of Solomon. This is why, afterwards, they ceased to recall with pride the splendour of his kingdom and showed greater appreciation for justice.

The believer who truly desires the prosperity of his nation, cannot be dazzled by illusions of grandeur. The Church will always denounce the sin involved in military expenses or in expenses meant solely to acquire fame. Everyone knows the world's military budget far exceeds that



audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom which God had put into his mind. ²⁵Everyone who came brought a present of articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses and mules, so much every year.

²⁶Solomon gathered together chariots and horses — fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses which he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. ²⁷The king made silver as common as stone in Jerusalem, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore in the lowland. ²⁸Solomon imported his horses from Musri and Kue and the king's traders got them from Kue for a fixed price. ²⁹A chariot could be imported from Musri for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They were exported in the same way to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria.

Solomon's wives

+ 11 ¹King Solomon loved many foreign women besides the daughter of Pharaoh. There were Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite women ²from nations about which Yahweh had commanded the Israelites, "You shall not marry them; nor shall they marry you, lest

they win over your heart to their gods." Solomon, however, was deeply attached to them and loved them. ³He had seven hundred wives of royal birth, and three hundred concubines, and they won his heart.

⁴In Solomon's old age, his wives led him astray to serve other gods and, unlike his father David, his heart was no longer wholly given to Yahweh his God. ⁵For he served Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the idol of the Ammonites. ⁶He did what displeased Yahweh and, unlike his father David, was unfaithful to him. ⁷Solomon even built a high place for Chemosh, the idol of Moab, on the mountain east of Jerusalem and also for Molech, the idol of the Ammonites. ⁸He did the same for all his foreign wives who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

⁹Yahweh became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from Yahweh, the God of Israel. ¹⁰Yahweh appeared twice to him and commanded him not to follow other gods. But he did not obey Yahweh's command. ¹¹Therefore, Yahweh said to Solomon, "Since this has been your choice and you have kept neither my Covenant nor the statutes I commanded you, I will take the

26. Dt 17, 16

1. Dt 17, 17; Sir 47, 19

5. Jdg 2, 13

9. 3, 5; 9, 2

which would suffice to industrialize all countries.

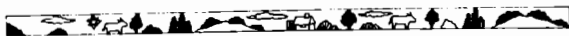
+ The Bible is not scandalized at Solomon's having several wives. At that time, to have many wives was an indication of a man's wealth. The Bible rebukes him for taking pagan wives. He increased the number of his foreign wives and at the same time entered into an alliance with these people who did not know God, imitating them in their materialism.

Luxury corrupts wisdom. Solomon makes a show of his manliness, unaware of the fact that his wives are ordering him around. They demand and obtain temples for their gods. While Solomon maintains the magnificent cult of the Temple, the altars he built for the gods of his wives show that, in his heart, he too entertains false gods, i.e., he values and desires things

which are not among the most important in God's eyes.

The people thought that the king blessed by Yahweh had to be surrounded with luxury and honours. Yet later the prophets would recall that power, wealth and luxury mute the heart of a ruler (Dt 17: 14). All peoples in the course of history have had the same experience. Even in the Church, for centuries the faithful thought it fitting that their bishops and popes assume the appearance of nobles, and we are still paying the consequences of that error.

You have not kept my covenant. (v. 11) Solomon's real sin consists in directing his life and his nation without seeking God's will. He lives like any other king and works out his own ambitions, thinking it is enough to ask Yahweh's blessings.



kingdom from you and give it to your servant. ¹²Nevertheless, I will not do this during your lifetime for the sake of your father David; I will take it from your son ¹³and even so I will not take it all, but I will reserve one tribe for your son for the sake of David my servant, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen."

Solomon's enemies

¹⁴And Yahweh raised up an adversary against Solomon. This was Hadad, the Edomite of the royal house in Edom. ¹⁵Indeed, when David defeated Edom, and Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the slain, he slew every male in Edom. ¹⁶Joab and the scoundrels remained in the place for six months until he had destroyed every male in Edom. However Hadad, then still only a boy, fled to Egypt together with some Edomites, his father's servants. ¹⁷They left Midian for Paran, then taking along with them some of the men from Paran, they went on to Egypt to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who gave Hadad a house, promised him food and gave him land. ¹⁸Hadad pleased Pharaoh, who gave him as wife the sister of Queen Tahpenes, his own wife. ¹⁹The sister of Tahpenes bore him a son, Genubath whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house, and who lived there together with Pharaoh's sons.

²⁰And so when Hadad heard in Egypt that David had slept with his fathers, and that Joab the commander of the army was also dead, he fled to Pharaoh. "Let me go back to my own country." ²¹Pharaoh asked him, "What have I not done that you want to leave for your own country?" But he answered him, "Please, let me go." And he came back to his land. He ruled over Edom and hated Israel.

²²God raised up another adversary in the person of Rezon son of Eliada, who had fled

from his master Hadadezer king of Zobah. ²³Rezon gathered men around him and became the leader of a marauding band. After David fought them and killed some of them, they went to live in Damascus where they made him king. ²⁴He was an adversary of Israel during Solomon's lifetime.

Ahijah foretells the division of the kingdom

■ ²⁵Jeroboam also rebelled against the king. He was the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah; his mother Zeruiah had been left a widow and he was one of Solomon's officials. ²⁶This was the reason for his rebellion. Solomon was building the Millo and closing up the breach of the City of David his father, ²⁷when he noticed that Jeroboam was a man of great personal worth and an able worker, so he put him in charge of all the forced labour of the tribes of Joseph.

²⁸Once, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh found him on the road. The two of them were alone in the open country ²⁹when Ahijah, who had a new garment on, clutched and tore it into twelve pieces. ³⁰He then said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself for this is the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel:

"I am about to tear the kingdom from Solomon's hands ³¹to give you ten tribes. Only one tribe shall be left to him for the sake of my servant David and Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of

■ *Jeroboam also rebelled against the king.* In the last years of Solomon, several of his opponents stir up rebellions. Now appears the man who will take the greater part of the country from Solomon's son and definitely divide the people.

In the poem of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), the division of the peoples was presented as the consequence of and punishment for arrogant ambitions. It will be the same for the Kingdom of Israel.

I will give you ten tribes. Israel counts twelve tribes. In reality, one could speak of two. In the

south, there is Judah with its neighbour, Simeon, a very small group. In the north, there is Israel, heading the other tribes of lesser importance. After David united them, Absalom, and others after him, stimulated the desire for autonomy in the north. Solomon's dictatorship, which weighed more heavily on the northern tribes, prepared for the separation.

The prophet Ahijah says that Yahweh will divide the kingdom to punish Solomon. This is a way of speaking. Everyone prepares his own punishment and the division comes directly from the errors and sins of the king.



Israel. ³³For Solomon has forsaken me and worshipped Ashtarte, the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites. Unlike his father David, he has not walked in my ways to do what is right before me and to keep my commandments and decisions.

³⁴Nevertheless, it is not from him, that I will take the kingdom. I will let him reign during his lifetime for the sake of David my servant whom I chose and who kept my commandments and statutes. ³⁵But I will take the kingship from his son's hand and make you king over ten tribes. ³⁶One tribe will be left for his son so that my servant David may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my Name. ³⁷I will let you reign, over all you wish; you shall be king of Israel. ³⁸Now, if you obey all that I command you, follow me and do what is right in my eyes; if you keep my commandments and my statutes, as my servant David did, I will be with you and establish your family for a long time, as I did for David. I will entrust Israel to you ³⁹whereas the family of David will be humbled for a time."

⁴⁰Solomon wanted to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam took refuge in Egypt, with Shish-ak king of Egypt, where he remained until the death of Solomon.

⁴¹Now the rest of the events of Solomon's reign, his deeds and his wisdom, are written in the book of the acts of Solomon. ⁴²Solomon reigned over all Israel in Jerusalem for forty years. ⁴³Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David; Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.

The political schism, or division

◆ **12** ¹Rehoboam went to Shechem because all Israel had gathered there to make him king. ²When Jeroboam, son of Nebat, heard of this in Egypt where he had fled from King Solomon and where he still remained, he returned from Egypt. They called for him, and he

came with all the assembly of Israel.

³The people of Israel went to Rehoboam with this demand, ⁴"Your father made our yoke heavy. So now lighten the heavy yoke and the hard labour your father imposed on us and we will serve you." ⁵Rehoboam, answered them, "Leave now but come back on the third day." And so the people went their way.

⁶King Rehoboam sought advice from the elderly counsellors who served his father Solomon while he was still alive, and he asked them, "How would you advise me to answer this people?" ⁷To this they replied, "If you attend to this people today making yourself their servant and speak to them with good words, they will serve you forever." ⁸But Rehoboam disregarded the advice of the old counsellors and asked the opinion of the greenhorns who had grown up with him and were in his service. ⁹He asked them, "What do you say we should answer this people who tell me 'Lighten the yoke which your father imposed on us'?" ¹⁰The greenhorns who had grown up with him answered, "Since these people said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you should now lighten it for us', tell them this: 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist.' ¹¹My father laid a heavy yoke on you, but I will make it heavier yet. My father chastised you with whips, but I will fix iron points to the lashes."

¹²On the third day, Jeroboam together with the people went back to Rehoboam just as the king said, for he had said to them, "Come back on the third day." ¹³Ignoring the advice

36. 2 S 8, 19

39. Ezk 37, 22

4. 5, 27

◆ Soon after Solomon's death, what the prophet Ahijah announced comes true: the kingdom is divided. The author singles out the culpability and folly of Rehoboam. *The king did*

not listen to the people. Neither had Solomon listened to them, while he lived isolated in his splendour.



given him by the elderly counsellors, the king answered the people harshly in the way the greenhorns had advised him. He said, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will make it even heavier. My father chastised you with whips, but I will fix iron points to the lashes." ¹⁵The king did not listen to the people. It was, indeed, Yahweh who brought about this fateful event, fulfilling the word he had spoken to Jeroboam, son of Nebat, through Ahijah the Shilonite.

¹⁶All Israel realized that the king refused to listen to them, and they answered the same way, "What have we to do with David? Is the son of Jesse from our tribes? Let the son of David deal with his own and you, people of Israel, go back to your homes!" And so the Israelites left for their homes. Only the Israelites who dwelt in the cities of Judah let Rehoboam reign over them.

¹⁸Rehoboam sent Adoram, taskmaster of the forced labour, but the Israelites stoned him to death and King Rehoboam had to mount his chariot and flee to Jerusalem. ¹⁹So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to the present time.

²⁰As Jeroboam had returned and was with them at the assembly, having been called by them, they made him king of Israel. And so, with the exception of the tribe of Judah, no one followed the house of David.

²¹When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he called together all the people of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, numbering a hundred and

eighty thousand select warriors, to fight against the people of Israel in a bid to restore the kingship of Rehoboam, son of Solomon. ²²But the word of God was directed to Shemaiah, the man of God, ²³"Give Rehoboam, son of Solomon, king of Judah, and all the people of Judah and Benjamin, and the rest of the people, this message from Yahweh: ²⁴You shall not go up to fight against your kinsmen, the Israelites. Let every man return to his home for I am the author of this." When they heard this word they went back home according to what Yahweh had ordered.

²⁵Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. Then, he set out to fortify Penuel.

The religious division

²⁶Jeroboam thought, "The kingdom could return to the house of David. ²⁷Should this people go up to offer sacrifices in Yahweh's House at Jerusalem, their heart would turn again to their master, Rehoboam king of Judah. They would kill me and go back to him."

²⁸And so the king sought advice and made two golden calves. Then he said to the people, "You have been going up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." ²⁹He put one of these in Bethel, the other in Dan. ³⁰And so Jeroboam made the people sin; the people went as far as Dan to accompany one of them.

³¹Jeroboam also built temples on high places, appointing priests who were not from the Levites. ³²Jer-

15. 11, 29

24. 14, 30

o The twelve tribes are united by the same religion, but Jeroboam realizes that his authority will be weak as long as the Israelites go up to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices there. He ensures political separation through a schism, that is, a religious separation. He has a calf made to represent Yahweh in spite of the prohibition against making a representation of the invisible God and reducing him to the level of an animal.

In narrating the deeds of the kings of Israel in the north, the Bible constantly repeats: "They followed and committed the sin of Jeroboam."

Thus Scriptures emphasized the need to remain united to the centre which God established in Jerusalem. It is not enough to think: "We serve the same God," "We serve in our own way."

Jeroboam is the model of other rulers who, much later, tried to establish national churches: in England, at the time of the Reformation; in France, after the Revolution; in China and socialist countries, after a communist revolution. Many Catholics were persecuted and died for remaining faithful to the only Church which ought to be Catholic, or universal.

oboam also appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in imitation of the feast in Judah, and he himself offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel and sacrificed to the calves that he had made; there he placed priests for the high places he had made. ³³On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, the month which he had arbitrarily chosen, he ordained a feast for the Israelites and went up to the altar to burn incense.

Story of Judah's man of God

+13 ¹A man of God, came out of Judah following a command of Yahweh, and he arrived at Bethel while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. ²The man shouted, cursing the altar, "O altar, altar, thus says Yahweh: There shall be born to the family of David a son by the name of Josiah. He shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who burn incense on you; and human bones shall be burned on you."

³And at once the man gave a sign. He said, "This is the proof that Yahweh has spoken. The altar shall be torn down and the ashes on it shall be poured out."

⁴When the king heard the man of God shouting and cursing the altar of Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, "Arrest him!" ⁵Immediately the hand which he pointed out against the man dried up and he could not draw it back. The altar itself crumbled and the ashes poured out from it according to the sign that had been given.

⁶ And so the king said to the man of

God, "Entreat now the favor of Yahweh your God and pray for me so that my hand may be restored." The man of God entreated Yahweh and the king's hand was restored as it was before.

⁷The king then said to the man of God, "Come home with me and refresh yourself. I will give you a reward." ⁸But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you give me half your house, I will not go in with you; nor will I eat or drink in this place, for this was commanded me by Yahweh. ⁹He precisely said to me: You shall neither eat bread nor drink water, nor return by the way you came." ¹⁰And the man did not return by the way he had come to Bethel, but he went another way.

¹¹Now there was an old prophet, living in Bethel, and his sons came to tell him what the man of God had done on that day in Bethel, and everything he had said to the king. ¹²Their father then asked them, "Which way did he go?", and they told him which way the man of God from Judah had taken. ¹³He then said to his sons, "Saddle the ass for me"; and they did so. ¹⁴He mounted the ass and went after the man of God whom he found sitting under the Oak.

He asked him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" ¹⁵Come home with me and eat bread." ¹⁶The prophet from Judah answered, "I may neither return nor go in with you; nor will I eat or drink with you, ¹⁷for this was the command of Yahweh: You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor shall you return by the way

2. 2 K 23, 15

6. 1 S 7, 5; Jer 37, 3

+ *Obedience is worth more than sacrifice.* (1 Sam 15:22) Such was Yahweh's word when he renounced Saul in some similar circumstances.

The present text highlights various aspects of true obedience which pleases God very much:

- *In the name of Yahweh.* The prophet comes from Judah, in the name of religious unity, and condemns Jeroboam in Bethel where he has built an illicit sanctuary.
- *His hand dried up.* Jeroboam's authority is no match for him who carries out Yah-

you come." ¹⁸ But the old prophet from Bethel said to him: "I am also a prophet as you are; and an angel told me on behalf of Yahweh: Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water." ¹⁹ The old prophet in fact, was lying. And so the man of God went back with him and ate and drank in his house.

²⁰ As they sat at table, the word of Yahweh came to the prophet who had brought him back. ²¹ And he said in a loud voice to the man of God who came from Judah, "Thus says Yahweh: You have disobeyed me and have not observed the command I gave you. ²² Instead, you have come back and eaten and drunk although I told you not to eat bread or drink water. Because of this, your body shall not be laid in the tomb of your fathers."

²³ After he had eaten and drunk, the old prophet who had brought him back saddled the ass for him and the prophet from Judah went away. ²⁴ But a lion met him on the road and killed him. His body was thrown on the road with the lion beside it. ²⁵ People who passed by saw the body thrown on the road with the lion standing by; and they reported this in the city where the old prophet lived.

²⁶ When the prophet heard of this, he said, "It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of Yahweh. Yahweh has delivered him to the lion which has torn and slain him just as Yahweh had told him." ²⁷ Then he said to his sons, "Saddle the ass for me." ²⁸ They saddled it and he went and found the body thrown on the road with the ass

and the lion standing beside it. ²⁹ The lion had neither eaten the body nor torn the ass. And so the prophet took up the body of the man of God, laid it on the ass and brought it back to the city to mourn and to bury him. ³⁰ He laid the body in his own grave and they mourned over him with the lament, "Alas, my brother!"

³¹ After that the old prophet said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried and lay my bones beside his bones."

³² For everything he said, at Yahweh's command, cursing the altar in Bethel and all the sanctuaries of the high places in the cities of Samaria will be fulfilled."

³³ After this, however, Jeroboam did not abstain from doing evil. Instead he made priests for the high places from among the people; he consecrated anyone who wanted to be a priest for the high places. ³⁴ And this became the sin of the family of Jeroboam for which it was to be cut off and destroyed from the face of the earth.

Ahijah's prophecy against Jeroboam

■ 14 ¹ At that time, Abijah, son of Jeroboam, fell ill. ² So the king told his wife. "Go, disguise yourself so that no one may recognize you as Jeroboam's wife. Go to Shiloh where you will find Ahijah the prophet who foretold that I would be king over this people. ³ Take with you ten loaves, a few cakes, and a jar of honey. Enter his house and he will tell you what shall happen to the child."

21. Gal 1, 8

24. 20, 36

33. 12, 31

2. 1 S 28, 8; 11, 29

3. 1 S 9, 7

weh's order.

- You have disobeyed me. The prophet himself dies for having disobeyed Yahweh's first order: when his colleague tried to deceive him, he should have remained firm, knowing that God does not change his orders.

■ Ahijah's words announce the first coup d'état in the history of Israel. There will be many others and, each time, the relatives and sons of the one overthrown will be killed. Following this episode is the history of the two kingdoms during their first fifty years.

⁴Jeroboam's wife did as she was told and left for Shiloh. She entered the house of Ahijah who was now so old that he could not see.

⁵But Yahweh had told Ahijah, "Jeroboam's wife is coming to consult you about her sick son, and this is what you must tell her. Besides, she will be coming in disguise." ⁶And so when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps, as she entered the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why have you disguised yourself? I have been told to give you unpleasant news." ⁷Go, therefore, bring Jeroboam this message of Yahweh, the God of Israel: "I took the kingdom from David's family to give it to you. Yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with his whole heart, only doing what was pleasing to me. ⁸You have done worse than anyone before you. You made me angry with your strange gods and the images you have made; and you have forsaken me.

⁹Now, I shall bring disaster on the family of Jeroboam. I will cut off every male in Jeroboam's line, whether slave or freeman in Israel, and I will wipe out the descendants of Jeroboam just as they wipe out the dung till all is gone. ¹⁰He who dies in the city will be devoured by dogs; he who dies in the field, by the birds of the sky. So Yahweh has spoken!

¹¹Leave now, and go back home! As soon as you enter the city, the child will die. ¹²All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He alone of Jeroboam's line will be buried, for in him alone has Yahweh, the God of Israel, found something good. ¹³Yahweh himself will raise up for himself a king of Israel; it is he who will destroy Jeroboam's family.

¹⁴Yahweh will strike Israel like a reed tossed about in the water and root them out from this good land which he gave to their ancestors. He will scatter them beyond the river Euphrates because they made him angry with the sacred poles they set up. ¹⁵Yahweh will scatter Israel because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and by which he dragged Israel into sin."

¹⁶So Jeroboam's wife went home. On her arrival at Tirzah and as soon as she crossed the threshold of her house, the child died. ¹⁷The child was buried and all Israel mourned over him just as Yahweh had prophesied through his servant the prophet Ahijah.

Rehoboam, king of Judah

¹⁸The rest of the acts of Jeroboam, his achievements in war and his reign, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the kings of Israel. ¹⁹Jeroboam reigned for twenty years. When he rested with his fathers, his son Nadab succeeded him as king.

²⁰As for Rehoboam, son of Solomon, he was forty-one when he began to reign over Judah. He reigned for seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which Yahweh chose, out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his Name there. His mother Naamah was an Ammonite.

²¹The people of Judah did what displeased Yahweh and, by their sins, angered him even more than their ancestors had done. ²²They also built for themselves high places, pillars and sacred poles on every high hill and under every green tree. ²³They even had male cult prostitutes in their land. Judah followed all the abominable practices of the nations whom Yahweh has driven out before the Israelites.

²⁴In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Jerusalem and looted everything including the treasures of Yahweh's house and of the royal palace. As he had taken the golden shields made under Solomon, ²⁵Rehoboam replaced them with brazen shields and entrusted them to the officers of the guard who watched at the door of the king's palace. ²⁶Every time the king went into Yahweh's House, the guards took them out and then brought them back to the guard room.

²⁷The rest of the events of Rehoboam's reign including his deeds, are all written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah.

¹¹ There was incessant war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. ¹² Then Rehoboam rested with his fathers and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. His mother Naamah was an Ammonite. His son Abijam succeeded him as king.

Abijam, king of Judah

[15] ¹ In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, son of Nebat, Abijam became king of Judah ² and reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah, daughter of Abishalom. ³ He imitated all the sins his father had committed before him and, unlike his ancestor David, was not wholly faithful to Yahweh, his God. ⁴ Yet Yahweh had promised David that he would keep his camp burning in Jerusalem; he would raise his descendants after him and establish Jerusalem. ⁵ This was because David had pleased Yahweh and did not disobey any of his commands as long as he lived except in the case of Uriah the Hittite. ⁶⁻⁷ The rest of the events of Abijam's reign and everything he did are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah. ⁸ When Abijam rested with his fathers, he was buried in the city of David, and his son Asa reigned in his place.

Asa, king of Judah

⁹ In the twentieth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa, king of Judah, began to reign and ¹⁰ was king for forty-one years, ruling in Jerusalem. His grandmother was Maacah, daughter of Abishalom. ¹¹ Asa did what was right before Yahweh, just as his ancestor David had done. ¹² He rid the land of male cult prostitutes and removed all the idols his ancestors had made. ¹³ He also deposed his grandmother Maacah as queen mother, for having made an abominable image for Asherah. Asa destroyed Asherah's image and burned it at the brook Kidron; ¹⁴ he did not, however, close down the high places. Nevertheless, Asa remained faithful to Yahweh for the rest of his life. ¹⁵ He brought into Yahweh's house both the votive gifts of his father and his own, silver, gold and vessels.

¹⁶ Asa and Baasha, king of Israel, were at war during their reigns. ¹⁷ Baasha, king of Israel, attacked Judah and fortified Ramah to cut off all communications with Asa, king of Judah. ¹⁸ Asa, in the meantime, collecting all the silver and gold remaining in the treasuries of the temple of Yahweh and the royal palace, entrusted them to his servants whom he sent to

Ben-hadad, son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion, king of Syria who reigned in Damascus. ¹⁹ He sent him this message, "Let us together make a treaty just as my father and yours did. I am sending you silver and gold, so please break your treaty with Baasha, king of Israel that he may withdraw from my territory."

²⁰ Ben-hadad acceded to king Asa's request and sent his officers to harass the cities of Israel, capturing Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, all the land of Chinneroth and the region of Naphtali. ²¹ On hearing this, Baasha stopped the fortification of Ramah and moved to Tirzah where he lived. ²² Then king Asa issued an order to all of Judah, excluding no one, to take away the stones and timber which Baasha had been using to fortify Ramah. With these materials, king Asa built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. ²³ The rest of Asa's reign, his bravery, his deeds and the cities which he built are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah. In his old age, Asa suffered from a foot disease. ²⁴ Asa then rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David his ancestor. His son Jehoshaphat reigned in his place.

Nadab and Baasha, kings of Israel

²⁵ Nadab, son of Jeroboam, began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa, king of Judah. ²⁶ He reigned over Israel for two years, doing what displeased Yahweh and dragging Israel into sin as his father had done.

²⁷ Baasha, son of Ahijah of the family of Issachar, plotted against him and struck him down at Gibbethon of the Philistines when Nadab and the Israelites were laying siege to this city. ²⁸ Baasha killed Nadab in the third year of Asa king of Judah and reigned in his place. ²⁹ As soon as he was king, he killed off the entire family of Jeroboam, leaving him no one alive but wiping them out according to the word which Yahweh had spoken through his servant Ahijah, the Shilonite. ³⁰ This happened because of Jeroboam who aroused the anger of Yahweh, the God of Israel by sinning and dragging Israel into sin.

³¹ The rest of the events of Nadab's reign and his achievements are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel. ³² Asa and Baasha were at war during their reigns.

³³ In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baashah, son of Ahijah, began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah where he reigned for twenty-four years. ³⁴ He did what displeased Yahweh and sinned just as Jeroboam who dragged Israel into sin had done.

16 ¹Yahweh spoke to Jehu, son of Hanani, to condemn Baasha; he said, ²"I have raised you from the dust to make you rule over my people Israel, but you made me angry by going the way of Jeroboam and dragging my people Israel into sin. ³I will therefore sweep away Baasha and his family and deal with them as I did with Jeroboam, son of Nebat. ⁴Dogs will devour those of Baasha's line who die in the City, the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country."

⁵The rest of the events of Baasha's reign, his deeds and achievements are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel.

⁶Baasha rested with his fathers and was buried at Tirzah while Elah, his son reigned in his place. ⁷Yahweh indeed spoke through the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, to condemn Baasha and his family, not only for doing what displeased Yahweh, making him angry as Jeroboam had done, but also because he murdered the family of Jeroboam.

Elah, king of Israel

⁸In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah, son of Baasha, began to reign over Israel in Tirzah and was king for two years. ⁹But his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, plotted against him. While Elah was getting himself drunk in the house of Arza, governor of Tirzah, ¹⁰Zimri came in, struck him down and killed him. This happened in the twenty-seventh year of Asa, king of Judah. Then Zimri reigned in his place.

¹¹As soon as Zimri began to reign, he had the entire family of Baasha killed, leaving him not a single male relative or friend. ¹²Zimri wiped out the entire house of Baasha according to Yahweh's pronouncement against him as spoken by Jehu, the prophet. ¹³And this happened because of the sins which Baasha and his son had committed, dragging Israel into sin and making Yahweh angry with their idols. ¹⁴Now the rest of the events of Elah's reign and all his deeds are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Omri, king of Israel

¹⁵It happened in the twenty-seventh year of Asa, king of Judah, that Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah. ¹⁶For the army was besieging Gibbethon of the Philistines when Zimri plotted against Elah, and, on hearing

that he killed the king, they proclaimed Omri, commander of the army, king of Israel. ¹⁷Omri went up with the Israelites from Gibbethon and attacked Tirzah. ¹⁸When Zimri saw that the city was to be captured, he went into the citadel of the royal palace where he was to die; he set the royal palace on fire, and he himself was burned. ¹⁹So he died because of the sins which he committed, doing what displeased Yahweh and going the way of Jeroboam and dragging Israel into sin. ²⁰The rest of the acts of Zimri and his plot are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel.

²¹The Israelites were then divided; half of them followed Tibni, son of Ginath to make him king; the other half followed Omri. ²²Those who followed Omri overcame those who followed Tibni, son of Ginath. And so, Tibni died and Omri became king. ²³In the thirty-first year of Asa, king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel. He reigned for twelve years, six years of which he reigned in Tirzah. ²⁴Then he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver. He built a city on the hill and called it Samaria, after Shemer, the owner of the hill.

²⁵Omri did what displeases Yahweh, even more than all those who preceded him. ²⁶He went the way off Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and dragged Israel into sin, thereby provoking the anger of Yahweh, the God of Israel, by their idols. ²⁷The rest of the acts of Omri and his bravery are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel. ²⁸Then Omri rested with his fathers and was buried in Samaria while Ahab, his son, reigned in his place.

to live by the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan. ⁶ There the ravens brought him bread in the morning and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.

The widow of Zarephath

+ ⁷ After a while, the brook dried up because no rain had fallen in the land. ⁸ Then Yahweh spoke to Elijah, ⁹ "Go to Zarephath of the Sidonites and stay there. I have given word to a widow there to give you food." ¹⁰ So Elijah went to Zarephath. On reaching the gate of the town, he saw a widow gathering sticks. He called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel that I may drink."

¹¹ As she was going to bring it, he called after her and said, "Bring me also a piece of bread." ¹² But she answered, "As Yahweh your God lives, I have no bread left but only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am just now gathering some sticks so that I may go in and prepare something for myself and my son to eat – and die."

¹³ Elijah then said to her, "Do not be afraid. Go and do as you have said, but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me; then make some for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For this is the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel. 'The jar of meal shall not be emptied nor shall the jug of oil fail until the day when Yahweh sends rain to the earth.'"

¹⁵ So she went and did as Elijah told her; and she had food for herself, Elijah and her son from that day on. ¹⁶ The jar of flour was not emptied nor did the jug of oil fail in accordance with what Yahweh said through Elijah.

The widow's son raised to life

■ ¹⁷ After this, the son of this housewife became ill. And such was his illness that he stopped breathing. ¹⁸ She then said to Elijah, "What did you do, O man of God? Have you come to uncover past sins and cause my son's death?" ¹⁹ He answered, "Give me your son."

²⁰ Taking him from her lap, he car-

9. 2 K 4, 1; Lk 4, 25

17. 2 K 4, 32; Lk 8, 55

see James 5:17 where Elijah is presented as a model of faith.

There will be neither dew nor rain. Of course, drought is a natural event. But God, without directly intervening at every moment, arranges events. The faith of the believer is a force, like the physical laws of the universe, and when we ask of God the impossible, confident that he himself wants to give it, he is not without the means to make this happen.

The people consider the Baals as gods of rain and nature. The drought that comes will show them that Yahweh, God of hosts, is also God of creation.

Elijah begins his mission as a prophet by attacking the greatest disorder: failing to place God above all.

+ *Go to Zarephath.* The drought harms everybody, including Elijah who had asked God for this sign. But for the believer, the very plague is an opportunity to experience that the heavenly Father does not abandon him.

I have given word to a widow to give you food. The prophet will receive his food, and he will also get comfort from God through discov-

ering this believing woman. the poor widow has something to give the great prophet, and this is a grace for both of them.

Bring me a little water is a first step. *Bring me a piece of bread.* Elijah tests her faith: "First you shall make me a little bread," and the widow gives him this. This widow is similar to the one whom Jesus praises in Mk 12:41.

The jar of meal will not be emptied. God rewards this kind of faith which goes to the extent of risking everything one possesses.

■ This is the first resurrection we encounter in the Bible.

God usually directs the world and his Church through the natural process of things, by the effect of the laws of nature which he himself established. But he also reserves to himself the right to make exceptions to these laws sometimes: the water changes into wine, the bread is multiplied.

Have you come to uncover past sins, man of God? The death of her only son is enough to arouse in the poor woman the unfounded fear of those who see God as an accuser who spies on people to punish them. She thinks that the



ried him up to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his own bed. ²¹Then he called on Yahweh, "O Yahweh, my God, are you afflicting even the widow with whom I am residing and letting her son die?" Then he stretched himself on the child three times and called on Yahweh, "O Yahweh, my God, let this child's breath return to him." ²²Yahweh listened to the pleading of Elijah and the child's breath returned to him, and he lived. ²³Elijah then took the child and brought him down from the upper room. He gave him to his mother and said, "See, your son is alive."

²⁴Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I am certain that you are a man of God, and that your words really came from Yahweh."

18 ¹After several days (in the third year) Yahweh spoke to Elijah and said, "Go, show yourself to Ahab that I may let it rain on the earth." ²So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab.

³Now the famine in Samaria was severe. Ahab therefore called Obadiah who was in charge of the household. ⁴(Obadiah was a faithful servant of Yahweh and when Jezebel slew the prophets of Yahweh he himself took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in caves, feeding them with bread and water.) ⁵Then Ahab told Obadiah, "Go and check all the watersprings and the valleys through the land; look for grass so that the horses and

mules may be kept alive and not perish." ⁶So Ahab and Obadiah divided the land between them and each of them went his own way.

⁷As Obadiah was going his way, Elijah met him. Recognizing Elijah, Obadiah fell on his face and said, "Is that you, my master Elijah?" "He answered him, "It is I. Go tell your master that I am here." ⁹But Obadiah replied, "What evil have I done that you expose me to Ahab's anger? Surely you want me to die." ¹⁰By Yahweh, your God, there is no people or nation where my master has not searched for you and if they said, 'Elijah is not here', he would make them take an oath that they had not found you. ¹¹Yet now as soon as I leave to inform Ahab of your presence, ¹²the Spirit of Yahweh will transport your goodness elsewhere, and when Ahab fails to find you, he will kill me. But I have served Yahweh from my youth. ¹³Do you not know that when Jezebel had the prophets of Yahweh killed, I hid a hundred of them in two caves and fed them with bread and water? ¹⁴Now if I notify Ahab of your presence, as you want me to do, he will surely kill me!"

¹⁵But Elijah said to him, "By Yahweh of hosts whom I serve, I will show myself to him today." ¹⁶So Obadiah went to give Ahab this message and Ahab came to meet Elijah.

The sacrifice at Carmel

◆ ¹⁷On seeing Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, the plague of Israel?" ¹⁸Elijah replied, "Who is troubling Israel? Isn't it you and your family who have disobeyed the commands of Yahweh and followed instead the

prophet's presence has attracted Yahweh's attention to her house and that he is punishing her with this grief.

He stretched himself three times on the child. In this gesture of the prophet, who communicates life with his own breath, who would fail to recognize Christ who comes to unite himself closely with humanity to communicate to it the power of resurrection?

Yahweh heard Elijah's voice. Elijah is the man chosen to reverse a desperate situation and to upset all human foresight. Yahweh allows him to resuscitate the widow's son and, a little later on Mt. Carmel, he will let him resuscitate the faith of his people.

◆ The sacrifice on Mt. Carmel is one of God's great manifestations in the Old Testament. Yahweh takes the initiative to stir up an indifferent people.

Baal or Yahweh. The people do not see clearly the difference between the two. They consider them as two powers or persons endowed with different capabilities but equally useful. Yahweh is God of the race, a sure help in combat. While Baal is at the service of the peasant: through offerings and feasts, they ask him for rain.

For how long will you follow two ways at the same time? Elijah obliges the Israelites to make a decision. The believer should not have two masters:

- God or money (Mt 6:24)
- For Christ or against him (Mt 12:30).
- Cooperating member of the Church or part of a lukewarm audience whom God will one day vomit out of his mouth (Rv. 3:6).

The true God is the one who answers with

Baals? ¹⁹ Now, therefore, give an order for the Israelites to gather before me at Mount Carmel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Asherah who are sustained by Jezebel."

²⁰ So Ahab sent for all the people of Israel and gathered them together at Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah addressed the people and asked, "How long will you follow two ways at the same time? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal is God then follow him." The people remained silent.

²² So Elijah continued, "I am the only prophet of Yahweh left here to face Baal's four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³ Get us two bulls. Let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood and I will do the same with the other bull. But we will not set it on fire. ²⁴ Then you shall call on the name of your god while I shall call on the name of Yahweh. The God who answers with fire is the true one." Then the people answered, "That is right."

²⁵ Then Elijah told the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many. Then call on the name of your god lest you are left without fire!" ²⁶ So they took the bull and prepared it, and they called on the name of Baal, "Baal,

answer us!" But there was no voice and no one answered them while they went on dancing on one foot around the altar they had built.

²⁷ By noontime, Elijah began to mock them, "Shout out louder. Baal is a busy god; or he may have gone out or perhaps he has gone on a trip, or he is sleeping and must be awakened."

²⁸ So they shouted louder gashing their skin with knives, as they are used to doing, until they bled. ²⁹ It was already past noon and they were still raving on until the time of the evening offering. But still there was no voice; no one answered or gave a sign of life.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to the people, "Draw closer to me", and the people drew closer to him. He then repaired the altar of Yahweh which had been thrown down. ³¹ He took twelve stones corresponding to the number of tribes of the sons of Jacob whom Yahweh had addressed saying, "Israel shall be your name." ³² With these stones, he built an altar to the Name of Yahweh and dug a trench around it that would contain about thirty liters. ³³ He then arranged the firewood, cut the bull in pieces and laid them on the wood. Then, he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the firewood." ³⁴ He said, "Do it again"; and they did it

29. 2 K 3, 20; Dn 9, 21

31. Ex 24, 4; Jos 4, 3; Gen 32, 29

fire. This will be the sign: the fire that destroys, purifies, transforms; the fire that effects the consecration of the sacrificial victims to God. Israel also needs to be transformed "by fire," and later with Jesus, we shall be baptized, or rather purified and renewed "through fire and the Holy Spirit." (See Lk 3:16).

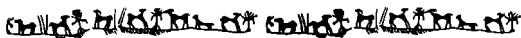
They called on Baal but there was no response. We who read about Elijah's mockery of Baal, are we convinced that God answers and hears our prayer? God is not obliged to satisfy all our desires, but we have the obligation to ask him in such a way and with such perseverance that he will manifest proofs of his presence among us.

You are the one who brings them back to you. The fire, the miracle, the rain has no other

purpose: Yahweh loves Israel and wants to awaken their love once more. He does not want to frighten them or make them marvel, but rather to make this people discover that God lives and is concerned about searching them out.

The victory of Carmel is Yahweh's victory. It is also Elijah's victory. God needs man and saves by means of man. We are shocked at the massacre that follows; but Elijah lived in a violent world where death was the normal lot of those conquered, and his thinking was in accordance with those times.

Besides, this brutal punishment teaches us: that to lose one's life is not as serious as to lose oneself serving false values, deceiving oneself and deceiving everyone.



again: "one more time," and they did it a third time. ³⁵ The water ran around the altar and filled the trench.

³⁶ When the time of the evening offering came, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant, doing all these things at your command." ³⁷ Answer me, O Yahweh, answer me so that this people may know that you, O Yahweh, are God and that you have brought them back to you."

³⁸ Then the fire of Yahweh fell and consumed the burnt offering, together with the wood, the stones also, and the dust, the water also dried up in the trench.

³⁹ The people then fell on their faces and said, "Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!" ⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal and let none of them escape." And so they seized them. Then Elijah brought them down to the book Kidron and had them slaughtered there.

⁴¹ Elijah then said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for the sound of rain is rushing in." ⁴² So Ahab went up to eat and drink. Elijah, in the meantime, went to the top of Carmel, bowed to the ground and put his face between his knees. ⁴³ Then he said to his servant, "Go up and look in the direction of the sea." The man went up, looked,

and said, "There is nothing." Then Elijah said, "Go again and do it seven times." ⁴⁴ At the seventh time, he perceived a little cloud, the size of a man's hand, rising out of the sea. Elijah told him, "Go, tell Ahab: Prepare your chariot and go down before the rain stops you." ⁴⁵ A little later the sky grew dark with clouds and wind and a strong rain fell. Ahab was weeping and riding on his way to Jezreel; ⁴⁶ as for Elijah, the hand of Yahweh was on him, and tucking his cloak in his belt, he ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Elijah flees to Horeb

19 ¹ Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. ² Jezebel then sent word to Elijah, "May I be cursed if by this time tomorrow I have not dealt with you as you dealt with them."

³ Elijah was scared and fled for his life. He reached Beer-sheba of Judah and left his servant there. ⁴ He himself disappeared into the desert going on a day's journey. Then he sat down under a broom tree and prayed to die, "That is enough, Yahweh, take away my life for I am worn out."

⁵ He lay down and went to sleep under the broom tree. Then an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ Elijah looked and saw, at his

36. Ex 3, 6; Mt 22, 32; Num 16, 28; Jn 12, 28

46. 2 K 3, 15

1. 18, 40

o *Elijah was scared and fled for his life.* Thus, the miracle does not miraculously solve the problems of faith. The conversion of the people will be a long and painful work.

We can see on the map how Elijah crossed the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah from north to south. Carmel is 250 kilometers from Beer-sheba, the last town before the desert, south of Judah.

The journey is too long for you. Elijah only looks for the entrance to the desert to save himself, but God brings him much farther. He is given a mysterious bread which recalls the manna of the Hebrews in the desert and fore-

tells the eucharistic bread which Jesus will give for our spiritual journey (Jn 6:8).

He walked forty days and forty nights (See Ex 24:18). Elijah goes to encounter Yahweh. Jesus himself will go to the desert as a necessary proof and we, too, at certain moments need "to go to the desert" (sometimes God himself puts us in the desert: Hos 2:16). Elijah's lone journey announces the itinerary which those who seek God have to undertake. Howmuchsoever we need the support of our spouse, of our companions, of the Church, each one makes his own journey, and God calls him personally to seek this encounter with him.



head, a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and went back to sleep. ⁷The angel of Yahweh came a second time to him, saying, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too long for you." ⁸He got up, ate and drank, and on the strength of that food, he travelled for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

The encounter with God

■ ⁹On reaching the place, he came to the cave and stayed in it. Then the word of Yahweh came to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰He answered, "I am burning with jealous love for Yahweh, the God of Hosts, because the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword. No one is left but myself and they are still trying to kill me as well." ¹¹Then Yahweh said, "Go up and stand on the mount, waiting for Yahweh." And Yahweh passed.

There was first a storm of wind, wild wind which rent the mountains and broke the rocks into pieces before Yahweh, but Yahweh was not in the

wind. ¹²After the storm, an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, a fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire. After the fire, the murmur of a gentle breeze. ¹³When Elijah perceived it, he covered his face with his cloak, went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then he heard a voice addressing him again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He answered, "I am burning with jealous love for Yahweh, the God of hosts, because the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars and slain your prophets with the sword. No one is left but myself, yet they still seek my life to take it away."

¹⁵Yahweh said to him, "Take the road back through the desert and go to Damascus for you must anoint Hazael as king of Syria; ¹⁶you shall also anoint Jehu, son of Minshi, as king over Israel; and Elisha, son of Shaphat, from Abelmehrah, you shall anoint a prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael will be slain by Jehu and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu,

8. Num 14, 33; Ex 24, 18
15. 2 K 8, 7

9. Ex 33, 21
16. 2 K 9

12. Gen 3, 8

13. Ex 33, 20; Is 6, 2

14. Rom 11, 3

■ Thus Elijah arrives at Horeb: it is the other name of Sinai, where Yahweh revealed himself to Moses four centuries earlier.

Go up waiting for Yahweh. To him who is afire with a jealous love for God. God manifests his tenderness beyond all that man can imagine. Thus, Yahweh reveals himself in the gentle breeze more than in the hurricane or the earthquake.

What are you doing here, Elijah? First, God asks a question and obliges the prophet to discover the depth of his heart. But there is nothing in Elijah but his jealous love for Yahweh. Yahweh, in turn, reveals his infallible plans.

Hazael, Jehu, Elisha. Yahweh tells Elijah about the future of Israel with all its tragic truth: the Kingdom, gloriously begun with David and Solomon, is destined to disappear. This will be the result of the people's disobedience.

- Jezebel, king of Syria, is the enemy king who will conquer and humiliate Israel.
- Jehu will destroy Ahab's family and anni-

hilate the worshippers of Baal.

- Elisha will transmit the menacing words of Yahweh.

Nevertheless, Israel will not totally disappear, for God reserves a Remnant, expressed in symbolic form by 7,000 men who have not knelt before Baal.

This revelation clarifies the mission of the prophets of the Bible. The majority of them, and the greatest among them, lived during the three centuries in which Israel passed from the glory of Solomon to the Exile. So the prophets:

- tried to hold back the infidelity of the chosen people who were heading to their ruin.
- called for inner conversion, that of the heart.
- taught the marvelous future which God had reserved for the "Remnant" of Israel after the destruction of their material kingdom in the land of Palestine.



Elisha will let him die. ¹⁸ Yet I will spare seven thousand in Israel who have not knelt before Baal and whose lips have not kissed him."

+ ¹⁹ So Elijah left. He found Elisha, son of Shaphat, who was ploughing a field of twelve acres and was at the end of the twelfth acre. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak over him. ²⁰ Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah and said, "Let me say goodbye to my father and mother; then I will follow you." Elijah said to him, "Return if you want, don't worry about what I did." ²¹ However, Elisha took the yoke of oxen and slew them. He roasted their meat on the pieces of the yoke and gave it to his people who ate of it. After this, he followed Elijah and began ministering to him.

The siege of Samaria

20 ¹ Ben-hadad, king of Aram, gathered together his entire army. With him were thirty-two kings. With horses and chariots, he went to Samaria and besieged it. ² He then sent messengers into the city to Ahab, king of Israel, and said to him, "Thus says Ben-hadad: ³ Your silver and gold are mine and so are your fairest wives and children." ⁴ The king of Israel answered, "As you say, my master, O king, I am yours with all that I possess." ⁵ Again Benhadad sent messengers to say, "I sent this message to you: 'Hand over to me your silver and gold, along with your wives and children,' but now I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time. They shall search your house and those of your officials and take with them whatever they want to take."

⁷ Then the king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said, "Look now and see how this man acts with evil intentions. He will send his officers to take my wives and children, and my silver and gold, although I agreed to deliver all to him." ⁸ The elders and the

people said to him, "Pay no attention to him and do not agree to what he asks." ⁹ So the king of Israel told Ben-hadad's messengers, "Tell my master, the king, I will do everything you first demanded of me, but now it is too much." The messengers left and reported this to ¹⁰ Ben-hadad who then answered, "May I be cursed if enough dust remains of Samaria to give a handful to all the people who follow me." ¹¹ But the king of Israel answered, "Let not he who puts on his armour boast like one who takes it off." ¹² Ben-hadad was drinking with the kings in the booths when he heard this message. So he said to his officers, "Take your positions." And they took their positions against the city.

¹³ Then a prophet approached Ahab, king of Israel and said, "Have you seen this immense crowd? This is the word of Yahweh: I will deliver it into your hands today and you shall know that I am Yahweh." ¹⁴ Ahab asked, "Who is to win over him?" The prophet replied, "The guards of the governors of the districts, for this is Yahweh's order." Again the king asked, "Who shall begin the battle?" He replied, "You!"

¹⁵ And so the king of Israel mustered the guards of the governors of the districts, numbering two hundred and thirty-two. After that, he mustered all the Israelites, numbering seven thousand.

¹⁶ They set out at noon while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths together with the thirty-two kings who helped him. ¹⁷ The guards of the governors of the districts went out first. Someone reported to Ben-hadad, "People are crying out from Samaria." ¹⁸ He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if for war, take them alive as well."

¹⁹ So the guards of the governors of the city went out, and the army followed them, ²⁰ and each one began to kill his man. The Arameans fled, with the Israelites pursuing them. Ben-hadad, king of Aram was able to escape on a horse with horsemen, ²¹ but the king of Israel captured horses and chariots and killed the Arameans in a great slaughter.

²² Then the prophet came again to the king of Israel and said to him, "Courage, be on your guard and ponder well your next action, for

+ *Elijah passed by Elisha and cast his cloak over him. He calls him in the same way as Jesus will call his apostles: "Follow me."* Perhaps Elijah interprets the answer, "Let me embrace my parents," as a hesitation on Elisha's part to leave everything and, for this reason, he answers him:

"Go back if you want, it was nothing of importance." But Elisha merely wanted to say goodbye to his relatives in a decent manner (See Lk 9:61). From now on, Elisha will be Elijah's disciple and his successor in Israel.



next year the king of Aram will come up against you."

²³ The officers of the king of Aram said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills; that is why they were stronger than us." ²⁴ Let us fight against them on the plain and we shall overcome them. But you have also to replace the princes by officers appointed by you. ²⁵ When you have gathered an army like the one you have lost, with the same amount of horses and chariots, we will fight on the plain, then we shall see who is stronger." Ben-hadad listened to their advice and did just that.

Victory over the Arameans

²⁶ In the spring, Benhadad mustered the Arameans and set out for Aphek to fight against Israel. ²⁷ The Israelites were also mustered and they set out against the Arameans. As they encamped, the Israelites looked like two little herds of goats, whereas the Arameans filled the countryside. ²⁸ A man of God approached the king of Israel and said to him, "Thus says Yahweh: Because the Arameans have said: 'Yahweh is a god of the hills but not of the valleys,' therefore I will deliver this immense crowd into your hands and you shall know that I am Yahweh." ²⁹ And they encamped facing each other for seven days.

On the seventh day, the battle was engaged and that day the Israelites killed a hundred thousand Aramean foot soldiers. ³⁰ As the rest fled into the city of Aphek, the wall fell on the twenty-seven thousand men that were left. Ben-hadad himself fled and entered an inner room in the city. ³¹ His officers said to him, "People say that the kings of Israel are merciful kings. Let us put sackcloth around our necks, perhaps he will spare your life."

³² So, putting sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their necks, they went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant, Ben-hadad, pleads. Please, let me live." He then asked, "Is he still alive? He is my brother." ³³ They quickly took up his word and said, "Yes, Benhadad is your brother." The king of Israel then said, "Go, bring him here."

Ben-hadad came to him and he let Ben-hadad get into his chariot. ³⁴ Ben-hadad then said to him, "I will give back the cities which

my father took from your father, and you may put up business establishments for yourself in Damascus just as my father did in Samaria." He then made an agreement with Ben-nadad and let him go.

³⁵ Now the word of Yahweh was directed to one of the fellow prophets, so he said to his companion, "Strike me, please." But his companion refused to strike him. ³⁶ So he said to him, "Since you have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, once you leave me, a lion shall kill you." And, indeed, as soon as he had left, a lion found him and killed him.

³⁷ Then the fellow prophet found another man to whom he said, "Please, strike me." This man struck him, wounding him. ³⁸ Then this prophet left, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes, and waited for the king along the road. ³⁹ When the king passed, he called to him and said, "O King! I, your servant, went into the thick of the battle when a soldier left the line and brought me a man, saying: 'Guard this man. Should he escape, your life shall be in exchange for his, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.'" ⁴⁰ While I was busy running around, my prisoner disappeared." The king of Israel said to him, "You yourself have said what your sentence shall be."

⁴¹ At once the man removed the bandage from his eyes and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. ⁴² Then the prophet told him, "Because you have released the man whom I have decreed to die, your life shall be in exchange for his and your people for his people." ⁴³ And the king of Israel went back home to Samaria, resentful and sad.

Naboth's vineyard

21 ¹ Now Naboth, a man from Jezreel, owned a vineyard just beside the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. ² Ahab asked Naboth, "Give me your vineyard which is near my house that I may use it for a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard in exchange. Or, if you prefer, I will pay you its price."

■ Naboth keeps his vineyard, more out of respect for the inheritance received from his fathers than for his personal convenience.

Declare a fast (v. 9). Surely Jezebel takes advantage of a calamity of that time, a drought or a pestilence. The elders of the city must assemble all the people for a solemn fast and an assembly, where they will find out "who attract-

ed this punishment of God." The guilty one will have to be Naboth and, in this way, Jezebel will have him killed legally.

You kill and take possession at the same time. Ahab's crime is no worse than David's who had Uriah killed so that he could take his wife (2 Sam 12). Elijah goes to Ahab in the manner that Nathan had gone to rebuke David.



³ But Naboth said to Ahab, "Yah-zeh forbid that I give you the inheritance of my fathers."

⁴ So Ahab went home angry and sad because of what Naboth had told him, that he would not give him the inheritance of his fathers. So he lay down on his bed with his face turned toward the wall and refused to eat.

⁵ His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so angry that you refuse to eat?" ⁶ He answered, "I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and asked him to sell me his vineyard or to exchange it for another better one but he answered: I will not give you my vineyard."

⁷ His wife Jezebel said to him, "Are you not king of Israel? Get up and eat and be joyful, for I will give you the vineyard of Naboth of Jezreel."

⁸ So Jezebel wrote letters using Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal; and sent the letters to the elders and important persons living near Naboth. ⁹ This is what she wrote in the letters, "Declare a fast and put Naboth on trial. ¹⁰ Get two worthless fellows to accuse him in this way: 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death."

¹¹ The people, the elders and the important persons who lived in his city did as Jezebel had instructed him in the letters which she had sent to them. ¹² They declared a fast and put Naboth on trial. ¹³ The two worthless fellows came in and sat facing him, accusing Naboth before the people, 'Naboth cursed God and the king!' ¹⁴ So the people took him outside the city and stoned him to death. ¹⁵ They then sent word to Jezebel that Naboth had been stoned and was dead.

¹⁶ As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was

dead, she told Ahab, "Now take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the man of Jezreel who refused to sell it to you, for Naboth is now dead." ¹⁷ As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he went down to the vineyard of Naboth and took possession of it.

¹⁸ Then Yahweh spoke to Elijah of Tishbe, ¹⁹ "Go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, in Samaria. He is taking possession of the vineyard of Naboth. ²⁰ Say to him: 'Have you killed and taken possession at the same time?' Then give him this word of mine: 'Dogs shall lick your own blood. In the very place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, they will lick yours.'"

²¹ Ahab then said to Elijah, "Who better than my enemy could find me here and now!" Elijah answered, "I have come to you because you have done what Yahweh abhors. This is Yahweh's word: I will bring disgrace on you. ²² I will sweep you away and cut off every male of your family, from the smallest to the greatest. ²³ Your family will disappear like the families of Jeroboam and Baasa, because you offended me and dragged Israel into sin. ²⁴ There is another word of Yahweh to Jezebel: 'The dogs shall devour Jezebel within the territory of Jezreel.' ²⁵ If anyone of Ahab's line dies in the city, he shall be devoured by dogs; if in the green country, the birds of the air shall feed on him."

²⁶ No one dared to do what Yahweh abhorred like Ahab urged on by Jezebel, his wife, had done. ²⁷ He did horrible things and ran after unclean idols just as the Amorites had done, from whom Yahweh had taken the land to give it to Israel.

²⁸ On hearing these words, Ahab tore his clothes and put on sackcloth. He fasted as he lay in sackcloth and moved around



despondently. ²⁸ Then Yahweh said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself?" ²⁹ Because of this I will not bring about the disaster during his reign; during his son's reign disgrace will fall on his family."

◆ **22** ¹ There was no war between Aram and Israel for three years. ² But the third year, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, came down to the king of Israel. ³ The king of Israel then talked to his officers, "Have you forgotten that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us? Yet we do nothing to take it back from the Arameans." ⁴ So he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you come with me to conquer Ramoth-gilead?" Jehoshaphat answered the king of Israel, "I am with you, my people are with your people, and my horses with yours."

Micaiah and the false prophets

■ ⁵ Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, said to the king of Israel, "Let us consult Yahweh before setting out for war." ⁶ So the king of Israel gathered all the prophets, numbering about four hundred men, and asked them, "Shall I go to conquer Ramoth-gilead, or shall I hold back?" They replied, "Go, for Yahweh will deliver the city into your hands."

⁷ Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there no other prophet of Yahweh around here whom we might ask?" ⁸ The king of Israel answered, "There is still one whom we may ask for Yahweh's counsel; but I hate him, for he never prophesies good about me but only evil." Then Jehoshaphat said, "Don't speak in this manner." ⁹ So the king of Israel called an official and told him,

"Bring quickly Micaiah, son of Imlah."

¹⁰ Meantime, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, were seated on their thrones, fully robed. They were both at the threshing floor by the entrance gate of Samaria where the prophets continued to prophesy before them. ¹¹ There was Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah who made for himself horns from iron and said, "Thus says Yahweh: 'With these horns you shall strike the Arameans until they are destroyed.'"

¹² All the prophets said the same, "Go to Ramoth-gilead and triumph. Yahweh will deliver it into the hands of the king."

¹³ The official who went to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look here, all the prophets agree to foretell a happy end to the king. You too agree to speak favourably." ¹⁴ But Micaiah replied, "As Yahweh lives, I will speak what Yahweh tells me to."

¹⁵ When he had come, the king asked him this, "Micaiah, shall we go to conquer Ramoth-gilead or shall we hold back?" Then Micaiah answered, "Go and triumph! Yahweh will give the city into the hands of the king!"

¹⁶ But the king said to him, "How many times shall I ask you to speak seriously to me and tell me the truth in the name of Yahweh?" ¹⁷ Then Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep without a

6. 2 K 3, 11

13. Is 30, 10

14. Num 22, 18

17. Ezk 34, 5; Mt 9, 36

◆ In those times, war was something of a routine. A people could not exist without continually fighting with others. To fight, to kill and to die were but signs of life. (See 2 Sam 11:1).

For once, the kings of Israel and Judah are united, but the writer speaks very differently about the two.

■ This Micaiah is not to be confused with the other prophet Micaiah of Morasti (see Micah 1:1). The kings were sitting at the city gate. In those centuries, the entrance to the city was very often the gate of the wall surrounding the town. It was the place where the people gathered, as today in the plaza. There, the tribunal executed

judgement and cases were heard; there, the elders spent hours conversing in their seats.

The present text wants to teach two things:

- God's word condemning Ahab's family is realized infallibly: the lies of the prophets, the strategy of the king and unforeseen events come together to accomplish what had been announced: the king will die and the dogs lick up his blood.
- The contradiction between true and false prophets.

The fellow prophets are consulted by the people about their future, and they support the



shepherd. Then Yahweh said: These have no master, so let each return to his home in peace."

¹⁸ So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good about me, but only evil?"

¹⁹ Micaiah replied, "Listen again to his word of Yahweh. I saw Yahweh sitting on his throne with the entire host of Heaven standing beside him on his right and on his left. ²⁰ Then Yahweh asked: Who will deceive the king of Israel that he may go and fall at Ramoth-gilead? One said one thing, and another, another thing. ²¹ Then a spirit came forward and stood before Yahweh, saying: I will deceive him. ²² Yahweh then asked him: What will you do? To this he replied: I will go and make myself a lying spirit on the lips of all his prophets. Then Yahweh said: You shall succeed. Go and do just that.

²³ You must know that Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours because he wished to bring evil on you."

²⁴ Then Zedekiah, son of Chanaanah, approached Micaiah, struck him, and said, "How did the Spirit of Yahweh leave me to speak to you?" Micaiah replied, "You shall discover for yourself on the day you flee from house to house to hide."

²⁶ Then the king of Israel ordered, Seize Micaiah and take him back to

Amon, governor of the city and to Joash, the king's son. ²⁷ Give them this order: 'Throw this man in prison and feed him with scant fare of bread and water until I come in peace.'

²⁸ Then Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, then Yahweh has not spoken through me."

Death of the king of Israel

²⁹ So the king of Israel went up to Ramoth-gilead together with the king of Judah. ³⁰ The king of Israel told Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself before the battle, but you wear your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself before the battle.

³¹ Now the king of Aram had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Attack no one, big or small, but only the king of Israel." ³² When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, "That surely is the king of Israel." So they turned to attack him. But when Jehoshaphat shouted his cry of war, ³³ the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel and they no longer pursued him.

³⁴ In the meantime one of the Arameans drew his bow without knowing at whom he aimed and hit the king between the scale armour and the breastplate. The king then ordered the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle for I am

19. Is 6, 1; Job 1, 6; Ps 93, 2	22. Esk 14, 19	27. Jer 20, 1	28. Jer 28, 9
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in danger of the people. Their profession is difficult, for the prophet has to give an answer that pleases his client. Meantime, the Spirit of Yahweh, the only one who can with certainty disclose the future, speaks when he wants to and very often says what we do not wish to hear. That is why many prophets do not give God's answers.

I will speak what Yahweh tells me to. It is typical of the true prophet to face opposition.

I have seen Yahweh (v. 19). The vision of Micaiah tells us clearly that one should not trust in dreams and imaginings that come from his

own spirit.

Neither ought one believe blindly those who pretend to be inspired, such as politicians, theorists, businessmen and all who promise to make us happy.

o This remark referring to Ahab makes one think that he died a natural death. One notes that all previous passages spoke only about the king of Israel, and mentioned Ahab only once in 22:20. Surely, this account referred in the beginning to Joram, son of Ahab (2 Kgs 9:14-16) and in him, Elijah's prophecy in 1 Kgs 21:21 was fulfilled.



wounded." ³⁵ The battle raged heavily on that day. Meanwhile, the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans until the evening when he died. The blood from his wound flowed down the bottom of the chariot. ³⁶ At about sunset, a cry went through the army, "Everyone to his city, and everyone to his country! The king has died!"

³⁷ As he had died, the king was brought to Samaria and buried there. ³⁸ But they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria. So the dogs licked up his blood, while the harlots bathed in it in accordance with the word spoken by Yahweh.

o ³⁹ The rest of the acts of Ahab, his deeds, the ivory house he built and the cities he restored are all written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel. ⁴⁰ So Ahab rested with his fathers and his son Ahaziah reigned in his place.

⁴¹ Jehoshaphat, son of Asa, began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab, king of Israel. ⁴² He was thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother was Azubah, daughter of Shilhi. ⁴³ He conducted himself

like his father Asa, and did what pleased Yahweh without hesitation. Yet, he did not remove the high places where the people continued to sacrifice and burn incense. ⁴⁴ Jehoshaphat had peace with the king of Israel.

⁴⁵ The rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, his bravery and his war exploits are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah. ⁴⁶ He also removed from the land the remaining male cult prostitutes, completing the work of his father Asa.

⁴⁷ There was no king in Edom but a governor ruled over it. ⁴⁸ Jehoshaphat had Tarshish ships go to Ophir for gold, but the venture failed when the ships were wrecked at Eziongeber. ⁴⁹ Then Ahaziah, son of Ahab, said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my servants go in the ships with your servants." Jehoshaphat, however, refused. ⁵⁰ When Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers; he was buried with them in the city of his ancestor, David, and his son Jehoram, reigned in his place.

⁵¹ Ahaziah, son of Ahab, began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. He reigned over Israel for two years. ⁵² He did what displeased Yahweh, imitating the conduct of both his father and mother, as well as of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who dragged Israel into sin. ⁵³ He served Baal and worshipped him, offending Yahweh, the God of Israel, in the same way his father had done.

39. Am 3, 15; 6, 14

45. 2K 3, 7

INTRODUCTION TO 2ND KINGS

The second book of Kings continues to look at the progressive decay of the two kingdoms to the North and the South, Israel and Judah.

It would, however, be a mistake to believe that at first the nation prospered because it had good and just kings, David and Solomon, and that after them, the bad kings ruined everything, or that the Jewish people who were destroyed by the Chaldeans were more sinful than David's contemporaries.

When we read attentively, we realize that the author of the book does not judge the founders of the kingdom and their successors with the same severity. Was Jeroboam II, who restored prosperity and independence to Israel and brought peace for forty years, inferior to Solomon? Was he, perhaps, less of a believer? And yet, the first book of Kings delights in describing Solomon's luxury and greatness, rather material things, whereas the second book of Kings gives Jeroboam II only one paragraph, as if the fact of having a temple other than the one in Jerusalem was *a priori* a condemnation of all his achievements.

Kings

In this we must see God's way of teaching; at first he encourages his people with the possibility of achieving independence and prosperity, because these men live in the historical moment when this conquest must be accomplished. God does not show them all the negative aspects of what they are doing; he does not insist on Solomon's faults or the vanity of his luxury. But, later, God invites his people to observe with a critical eye, and while the great dream of Solomon's kingdom is vanishing, God teaches them to seek another more lasting and important conquest, that of the Reign of Justice.

1 After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel. ² In Samaria, king Ahaziah fell through the window from the second floor of his house and was badly injured. So he sent messengers to consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, "Ask him whether I shall survive this accident." ³ Then an angel of Yahweh said to Elijah of the town of Tishbe, "Arise, and go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria. You will say to them: Why have you come to consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Is it because there is no God in Israel?" ⁴ Now Yahweh himself gives you this answer: You shall not rise again from the bed where you lay down, but shall die there." So Elijah went.

⁵ Then the messengers returned to Ahaziah who wondered and asked, "How is it that you have returned so fast?" ⁶ They answered, "A man met us on the way, and he said to us: 'Return to the king who sent you and say to him in the name of Yahweh: Why do you send men to consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Is there no God in Israel? Because of this, you shall not rise again from the bed where you lay down, but shall die there.'"

⁷ The king asked them, "What was the appearance of the man who met you on the way and told you this?" ⁸ They answered him, "The man wore a mantle of fur with a leather belt around his waist." The king then said, "He is Elijah from the town of Tishbe."

⁹ Ahaziah sent a captain of fifty men who went up with his fifty men to get him. Elijah was seated at the top of the mountain. The captain said to him, "Man of God, the king

commands you to come down." ¹⁰ Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, then may fire come down from heaven and devour you and your men." Fire came down from heaven and devoured them all. ¹¹ The king again sent to him another captain of fifty who went up and said to him, "Man of God, the king says that you are to come down at once." ¹² Elijah answered, "If I am a man of God, then may fire come down from heaven and devour you and your men." Fire came down from heaven and devoured them all.

¹³ The king sent a third captain with his fifty men. When his men came, he fell on his knees before Elijah and said to him, "Man of God, I beg you to pardon me as well as my fifty men; we are all your servants." ¹⁴ I have heard that fire came down from heaven twice and devoured the two captains with their fifty men. So now, do spare my life."

¹⁵ Then the angel of Yahweh said to Elijah, "Go down with him and do not be afraid." ¹⁶ So he stood up and went down with them to the king. And Elijah said to the king, "Listen to this word of Yahweh: Because you sent your messengers to consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, you shall not rise again from the bed where you lay down but shall die there."

¹⁷ Ahaziah died according to what Yahweh had said through the mouth of Elijah, and since he had no sons, his brother Jehoram, reigned in his place in the second year of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. ¹⁸ Everything referring to Ahaziah and his deeds is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.



Elijah is taken up to heaven

2 ¹Yahweh took Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind. It happened this way: Elijah and Elisha had left Gilgal, and Elijah said to Elisha, ²"I beg you to stay here, for Yahweh is sending me to Bethel." Elisha said, "I swear by Yahweh and by your life that I will never leave you." So they went down to Bethel together. ³The fellow prophets in Bethel went out to welcome Elisha and said to him, "Don't you know that today Yahweh will take your master away from you?" He answered them, "Yes, I also know it. So, be quiet."

⁴Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for Yahweh is only sending me to Jericho." Elisha answered, "I swear by Yahweh and by your life that I will never leave you." ⁵So they went on to Jericho.

The fellow prophets in Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you not know that Yahweh is to take your master away today?" Elisha answered, "Yes, I know it. Be quiet."

⁶Elijah said once more to Elisha, "Stay here, I beg you, for Yahweh is only sending me to the Jordan." But Elisha answered, "I swear by Yahweh

and by your life that I will never leave you." And as they went on their way, ⁷fifty fellow prophets of Jericho followed them at a certain distance.

When Elijah and Elisha stood by the Jordan ⁸Elijah took his mantle, rolled it, and struck the water with it. The water parted to both sides and they crossed on dry ground through the river.

⁹After they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "What shall I do for you before I am taken away from you? Ask me." Elisha said, "Grant that I may have the best of your spirit." ¹⁰Elijah answered, "Your request is most difficult. Yet if you see me while I am taken away from you, then you shall have it. But if not, you shall not have it."

¹¹As they were talking on the way, a chariot of fire with horses of fire stood between them, and Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹²Elisha saw him and cried out, "Father, my father, chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"

When Elisha lost sight of him, he took hold of his own clothes and tore them. ¹³He then picked up the mantle which had fallen from Elijah and re-

2. 1 S 19, 18 6. 1 K 19, 19 9. Is 61, 1 11. 1 Mac 2, 58; Sir 48, 9; Gen 5, 24; Lk 24, 51 12. 13, 14

o The end of Elijah is one final testimony to the living God who gives life to man.

Elijah, the solitary prophet, seems to live on high, far from human corruption. That is why God does not let him die like others do. This man of God will not be remembered as a dead man: nothing, not even death can overcome the one who *burned with jealous love for Yahweh, his God* and who fought for him alone.

Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. When Scripture says that Elijah was taken up to heaven, we must not insist on the image of "going up" (as in the Ascension of Jesus). In those days, people believed that God lived on high, and God, who speaks to people of every age according to their own concepts, wanted Elijah to disappear visibly, as if taken up to heaven.

My father, chariot of Israel and its horsemen! Elisha's exclamation is made clear by

Israel's past. Before their Canaanite enemies who had war chariots and horses, the Israelites poorly equipped, placed their trust in the Lord who was their only strength and who became for them the chariots and the horse at the same time. Elisha witnesses the disappearance of the man who was the living symbol of the presence and the power of God in the midst of Israel.

Elijah's strange disappearance will encourage the Jews who hope for the Lord's triumphant coming to begin the definitive kingdom. The conviction that Elijah will return at that time and prepare for the coming of the Lord arises among the Jews (see Sir 48:1 and Mal 3:32). See what Jesus says to that effect (Mk 9:12).

The Bible leaves us in the dark as to what happened to Elijah after his death. Thus, it prepares us for the announcement of Jesus' resurrection and the faith of the church in the assumption of Mary, his mother.



turned to the banks of the Jordan. ¹⁴ There he struck the water with the mantle, but it did not part. So he asked, "Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?" And as he struck the water again it parted. Elisha crossed over.

¹⁵ The fellow prophets of Jericho saw him from the other side, and said, "The spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha." And as they came to him, they bowed to the ground before him saying, ¹⁶ "There are fifty valiant men here with us. Let them go in search of Elijah, for it may be that the spirit of Yahweh has left him in some mountain or valley." Elisha replied, "Do not send anyone." ¹⁷ But they insisted so much that Elisha let them go, and they sent fifty men to search for Elijah. ¹⁸ After three days they had not found him and they returned to Elisha, who had stayed in Jericho. He commented, "Did I not tell you not to go?"

¹⁹ The men of the city said to Elisha, "The location of this city is good, as my lord can see, but the water is bad, and so the land is unproductive." ²⁰ He said to them, "Bring me a new pot with salt in it." When they brought it to him, ²¹ Elisha went to the fountain and threw salt in it saying, "This is what Yahweh says: I have healed this water, never more will it cause death or sickness." ²² And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to what Elisha said.

²³ From there, he went up to Bethel. He was on his way when some youths went out from the city and made fun of him saying, "Go up, baldhead! Go up, baldhead!" ²⁴ Elisha turned around, looked at them and cursed them in the name of Yahweh. At once, two she-bears came out of the forest and killed forty-two of them. ²⁵ From there Elisha set out for Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

3 ¹ Jehoram, son of Ahab, began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and he reigned for twelve years. ² He did what was displeasing to Yahweh, but not as his father or mother had done, for he removed the statue of Baal which his father had made. ³ Nonetheless he clung to the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which had become the sin of Israel, and did not depart from it.

Expedition of Israel and Judah against Moab

⁴ Mesha, the king of Moab, had flocks of sheep; he paid the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs and a hundred thousand rams with their wool annually. ⁵ But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

⁶ At that time, King Jehoram set out from Samaria, to mobilize the whole of Israel. ⁷ He also sent word to Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me; will you come with me to fight against Moab?" Jehoshaphat answered him, "I will go with you, for you and I are one; my men and my horses are at your disposal." ⁸ Jehoram asked, "By which way shall we go up?" And he answered, "By the way of the desert of Edom."

⁹ The kings of Israel, of Judah and of Edom had been going around for seven days, and there was no water for the soldiers and for the animals that followed them. ¹⁰ Then the king of Israel said, "Yahweh has called us, three kings, to give us into the hands of Moab." ¹¹ Then Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there no prophet of Yahweh here, through whom we may consult Yahweh?" One of the servants of the king of Israel said, "Elisha, son of Shaphat, is here. It was he who poured water on the hands of Elijah." ¹² And Jehoshaphat agreed, "Indeed, God's word comes to him." So the king of Israel, the king of Edom and Jehoshaphat went down to Elisha.

¹³ Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What have I to do with you? Go see the prophets of your father or those of your mother." But the king of Israel asked him, "Has Yahweh per-

¹⁵. Num 11, 25; Is 11, 2; 1 Pet 4, 14
³. 1 K 12, 29

⁷. 1 K 22

¹¹. 1 K 22, 7

¹⁶. 1 K 18, 12; Ezk 3, 14

¹³. 1 K 18, 19

¹⁷. Dt 34, 6

²⁵. 3, 11

+ Of all the people in the Bible, Elisha appears as the man most gifted with the working of miracles, but he is not considered greater than others because of that. He lives among the sons of prophets, meaning fellow prophets. They are poor men, with a touch of fanaticism in their faith; they live in religious communities with their wives and children. They will help Elisha in

his mission (see 1 Sam 19:18).

Elisha receives Elijah's spirit and continues his mission. Several of his miracles are related in the following chapters. Some may have been expanded or distorted by tradition for teaching purposes (as for example with the forty-two children).



haps called us three together to deliver us into the hands of Moab?" ¹⁴ Elisha replied, "Had not Jehoshaphat the king of Judah been before me, I swear by Yahweh God of Hosts whom I serve, that I would not attend to you nor look at you. ¹⁵ Now, bring me someone who plays the harp." As the musician played, the hand of Yahweh came upon Elisha ¹⁶ and he said, "This is the word of Yahweh: Dig trenches and more trenches in this valley, ¹⁷ for Yahweh says: You shall not see wind or rain, but the valley shall be filled with water, and you, your troops and your livestock will drink. ¹⁸ But this is an easy thing for Yahweh, for he shall give Moab into your hands. ¹⁹ You shall conquer all the fortified cities, cut down all fruit-bearing trees, close up all the springs of water, and scatter stones in all the plowed fields."

²⁰ In the morning, at the time of the offering, water came from the direction of Edom, and the whole country was flooded.

²¹ The Moabites had learned that the kings had come to attack them, so they gathered together all the men able to bear arms and positioned them at the border. ²² When they woke up in the morning, they saw the sun shining upon the water, and this appeared to them as if it was blood. ²³ So the Moabites said, "Look at the blood; the kings have surely turned against one another and killed each other. Let us now go and gather the booty!" ²⁴ But when they came to the camp the Israelites confronted, defeated and routed them. The Israelites pursued and entered Moab. ²⁵ They destroyed the cities of Moab, and each man threw stones on the fertile land, until it was covered. They closed up the springs of water and cut down fruit trees. Only Kir-hareseth was left with stones, but men armed with slings, surrounded the city and began harassing it.

²⁶ When the king of Moab saw that his enemies were winning, he gathered seven hundred warriors to break through the blockade, opposite the king of Edom. But they did not succeed. ²⁷ So he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him as king, and sacrificed him in the fire upon the wall. The fury that came

upon the Israelites was great, so they withdrew from there and returned to their own land.

The widow's oil

4 ¹ The widow of one of the fellow prophets called Elisha saying, "You know that my husband feared God. But now his creditor has come to collect the payment. And as we could not pay, he wanted to take my two sons as slaves." ² Elisha said, "What can I do for you? Tell me what you have in your house?" She answered, "I have but a little oil for cleaning." ³ Elisha said to her, "Go and ask your neighbours for empty jars. ⁴ Get as much as you can; then go into your house with your sons and close the door. Pour oil into the vessels. And as they are filled, set them aside."

⁵ The woman went and locked herself in her house with her sons. They handed her the vessels and she filled them all. ⁶ She said to one of her sons, "Bring me another vessel," and he answered, "There is no more." Then the oil stopped flowing.

⁷ As she went back to tell this to the man of God, he said to her, "Go and sell the oil to pay for your debts; You and your sons can live on the money that is left."

The resurrection of the Shunamite's son

◆ ⁸ One day Elisha went to Shunem, and a woman invited him to eat. Afterwards, whenever he went to

14. 1 K 17, 1 15. 1 S 10, 5; Is 8, 11; Ezk 1, 3
27. Jdg 11, 30; Mt 6, 7 1. Ex 1, 2; Ne 5, 1; Mt 18, 25

20. 1 K 18, 29; Lk 1, 10 25. Dt 20, 19

■ A series of Elisha's miracles begins here.

Miracles always teach us something about God. Elisha's miracles prove that Yahweh has entrusted him with power as a chief steward responsible for granting God's help to the weak. While the Gospel miracles invite us to see in Jesus, God himself made man who came to men, those who see in Jesus only someone with God's power to cure are mistaken: if this were so, Jesus would be no different from Elisha.

◆ All the elements of human tragedy are joined here: hope, happy life, death, the anguished heart of a mother who does not resign herself to the death of the son of her womb, her call of despair to the man of God.

We must meditate on the very moving resurrection at the hands of Elisha: mouth to mouth, eyes on eyes, hand in hand to communicate his warmth and restore life. It is an unusually concrete image of what Christ achieves in us when



that town, he would go to her house to eat.

⁹ The woman said to her husband, "See, this man who constantly passes by our house is a holy man of God." ¹⁰ If you want, we can make a small upper room for him, and place a bed, a chair and a lamp in it. So when he comes, he may stay and rest."

¹¹ One day when Elisha came, he went to the upper room and lay down.

¹² Then he said to Gehazi, his manservant, "Call the woman of the house." She came when called and stood before Elisha.

¹³ Elisha said to her, "You have taken all this trouble for us, what then can we do for you? Would you like me to say something to the king or the commander of the army for you?" But she answered, "I do not need anything in this land." ¹⁴ So Elisha said to Gehazi, "What can we do for her?" The young man answered, "She has no children and her husband is now old."

¹⁵ And so Elisha said to him, "Call her." The young man called her and as the woman stood by the door, ¹⁶ Elisha said, "By this time next year, you will hold a son in your arms." She answered, "No, my lord, O man of God, you are deceiving your maid-servant."

¹⁷ But the woman gave birth to a son precisely at the time Elisha had told her.

¹⁸ The boy grew. One day, when he had gone out to his father among the parvesters, he had a severe headache.

¹⁹ So the father ordered his servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰ The servant brought him to his mother, and the boy sat on her lap till noon, when he died.

²¹ Then the mother went up and laid him on Elisha's bed and she left, closing the door. ²² Then she called her husband, "Send me an ass and one of the servants. I am going to the man of God, and will come back." ²³ He asked, "Why are you going to him? It is not the new moon yet nor the sabbath." But she said, "Do not worry."

²⁴ She saddled the ass, and said to her servant, "Lead on, and don't stop until I tell you." ²⁵ So she set off and arrived at Mount Carmel where the man of God was.

Elisha saw her from afar, so he said to his servant, "Here comes our Shunamite. ²⁶ Run to meet her and ask: Are you well? How is your husband? And your son?" She answered, "Everything is all right." ²⁷ She went to the man of God, and embraced his feet. Then Gehazi came to draw her away, but the man of God said to him, "Leave her, for her soul is in bitter distress, and Yahweh has not made known to me nor has he revealed to me the cause of her suffering."

²⁸ She said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Why have you deceived me?"

²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, "Get ready, take my staff and go. If you meet anyone, do not stop to greet him; and if someone greets you, do not greet him in return. And as soon as you arrive, place my staff on the boy's face."

³⁰ But the boy's mother said, "I swear by Yahweh and by your life that I will not leave you." So Elisha arose and followed her.

³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but the boy did not move or give any sign of life, so Gehazi returned to meet them and said, "The boy has not revived."

[¹⁶ Gen 18, 10 ¹⁷ Gen 21, 1; Ps 113, 9 ²⁰ 1 K 17, 17 ²⁹ Lk 10, 4; Ex 4, 17; 1 K 19, 19]

te "resurrects" us and fills us with life by his intimate touch. As St. Patrick, filled with enthusiasm in his missionary journeys, used to say:

"Christ ahead of me, Christ behind me; Christ at my left; Christ at my right; Christ in me. Christ over me."



³² Elisha came into the house, and found the dead boy lying on his bed.

³³ He entered, closed the door behind him, and prayed to Yahweh. ³⁴ Then he lay upon the boy, put his mouth upon the boy's mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, his hands upon the boy's hands, and warmth returned to the boy's body. ³⁵ Elisha came down and began walking about from one side to the other. Then he returned upstairs to stretch himself upon the boy, and the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

³⁶ Elisha then called Gehazi and said, "Call the woman." And when she came, Elisha told her, "Take your son." ³⁷ She bowed at his feet, then she took her son and went out.

³⁸ Elisha returned to Gilgal. There was great scarcity of food in the region, and when the fellow prophets came to sit with Elisha, he said to his servant, "Take the big pot and prepare some broth for the fellow prophets."

³⁹ One of them went out into the field to gather herbs; he found a wild plant, from which he gathered poisonous fruits, enough to fill his cloak. When he came back, he cut them into pieces in the pot where the broth was being prepared, for he did not know what they were. ⁴⁰ Then the broth was served to the men to eat. But as soon as they tasted the soup, they cried out, "Man of God, this is pure poison!" So they did not eat any more. ⁴¹ Then Elisha said, "Bring me flour." And he put it into the pot. Then he said, "Serve these men and let them eat." And there was no longer anything bad in the pot.

The multiplication of loaves

o ⁴² A man came from Baal-shalishad bringing bread and wheat to the man of God. These were the first twenty loaves made from the barley of the last harvest. Elisha told him, "Give the loaves to these men that they may eat."

⁴³ His servant said to him, "How am I to divide these loaves among one hundred men?" Elisha insisted, "Give them to the men that they may eat, for Yahweh says: They shall eat and have some left over." ⁴⁴ So the man set it before them; and they ate and had some left, as Yahweh had said.

Naaman healed of leprosy

+ 5 ¹ Naaman was the army commander of the king of Aram. This man was highly regarded and enjoyed the king's favour, for Yahweh had helped him lead the army of the Arameans to victory. But this valiant man was sick with leprosy.

² One day some Aramean soldiers raided the land of Israel and took a young girl captive who became a servant to the wife of Naaman. She said to her mistress, ³ "If my master would only present himself to the prophet in Samaria, he would surely cure him of his leprosy."

⁴ Naaman went to tell the king what the young Israelite maidservant had said. ⁵ The king of Aram said to him, "Go to the prophet, and I shall also send a letter to the king of Israel."

So Naaman went and took with him ten gold bars, six thousand pieces of silver and ten festal garments. ⁶ On his arrival, he delivered the letter to

36. 1 K 17, 23; Lk 8, 55. 42. Lev 23, 17. 43. Mt 14, 16. 44. Mt 14, 20. 6. Gen 30, 2; Dt 32, 39; 1 S 2,

o We should compare this multiplication of loaves with the two multiplications at the hand of Jesus; they are related in very similar ways and, yet, each has a different meaning (see especially John 6).

+ Naaman's healing holds a special place among Elisha's miracles. Here, we can easily discover a prefigurement of Baptism which cleanses us from sin.

Even though Naaman is a famous general, it



the king of Israel. It said, "I present my servant Naaman to you that you may heal him of his leprosy."

⁷ When the king had read the letter, he tore his clothes to show his indignation, "I am not God to give life or death. And the king of Aram sends me this man to be healed! You see he is just looking for an excuse for war."

⁸ Elisha, the man of God, came to know that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, so he sent this message to him: "Why have you torn your clothes? Let the man come to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel."

⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and stopped before the house of Elisha. ¹⁰ Elisha then sent a messenger to tell him, "Go to the river Jordan and wash seven times, and your flesh shall be as it was before, and you shall be cleansed."

¹¹ Naaman was angry, so he went away. He thought: "On my arrival, he should have come out to meet me per-

sonally, and then paused and prayed to Yahweh. And he should have touched with his hand the infected part of my body, and I would have been healed." ¹² Are the rivers of Damascus, Abana and Pharpar not better than all the rivers of the land of Israel? Could I not wash in the rivers of Damascus to be healed of my leprosy?"

¹³ His servants approached him as he was going, and they said to him, "Father, if the prophet had ordered you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? But how easy it is to take a bath as the prophet has ordered you to do!"

¹⁴ So Naaman went down to the Jordan where he washed himself seven times as Elisha had ordered. His skin became soft like that of a child and he was cleansed.

¹⁵ Then Naaman returned to the man of God with all his men. He entered and said to him, "Now I know that there is no other God in all the

10. Jn 9, 7

11. Mt 8, 3

can do nothing about his leprosy. He wants to be renewed, to leave his contaminated skin behind and hope is offered to him: such miracles take place in Israel.

The girl told her mistress. It all begins with the word of a girl, Naaman's servant. Similarly, any believer today has many opportunities to say something or to do something which will bring about a lot of good and to direct those who seek to be cured to "Israel," to the church. The Good News is not only communicated and spread through the work of the great apostles. In the Gospel (Lk 4:27) Jesus points to the healing of this foreigner in preference to all the lepers in Israel, as a proof that God cares for everyone and not only for those who are officially the faithful.

Elisha sent a messenger. To the prophet, the great general is no more than any other man. He receives no privileges, nor special attention through a private consultation. Since he did not even get down from his chariot, Elisha does not go out to greet him.

Go and wash. Naaman expected something "magic," a gesture or words filled with divine power. Yet, his healing will come through simple contact with the waters flowing through the

land of God. Israel is a very small country, yet the riches of the Lord are hidden there.

If the prophet had ordered you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? People expect wonders: he only asks the simple following of a command. Jesus will proceed the same way (John 4:46). It is not important to achieve extraordinary things, but rather what God asks. We often miss his Kingdom because we want to make great efforts instead of doing the simple things that God asks.

Healing is a gift. The fabulous treasure Naaman brought with him is useless. The Lord is the one who gives, he does not charge nor does he want us to pay him. All he asks is that if we discover his merciful love, we love him in return for his love.

Only when I accompany my king to the temple of his god Rimmon. Now Naaman knows there is no other God than the God of Israel. But he cannot abandon the world in which he lives and where other gods are honoured. Elisha's answer shows that God understands the situation.

The same understanding toward men of good will who follow other religions is expressed in some texts of Genesis and Exodus which were



world but the God of Israel. I ask you to accept these gifts from your servant."

¹⁶ But Elisha answered, "I swear by Yahweh whom I serve, I will accept nothing." And however much Naaman insisted, Elisha would not accept his gifts.

¹⁷ So Naaman told him, "Since you refuse, let me get some sacks of soil from your land – the amount that two mules can carry. I shall use it to build an altar to Yahweh, for I shall not offer sacrifices to any other god but him.

¹⁸ Only when my king goes to the temple of his god Rimmon, he leans on my arm, and I bow down with him; may Yahweh pardon me for this."

¹⁹ Elisha answered, "Go in peace." And Naaman went.

Naaman was already at a certain distance, ²⁰ when Gehazi, Elisha's servant, thought: "Imagine that my lord refused to take the gifts that Aramean brought! As Yahweh lives, I will run after him and get some of them!"

²¹ Gehazi went after Naaman and Naaman saw Gehazi running after him, so he jumped out of his chariot to greet him. ²² Gehazi said to him, "Pardon me, lord, my master sent me to say to you: Two young men from the community of the prophets have just come to me from the mountain of Ephraim, kindly give me a talent of silver and two new garments for them." Naaman replied, ²³ Please accept two talents of silver."

He insisted that Gehazi accept them, so he put the two talents of silver with two new garments in two

sacks, and handed them over to two of his servants who carried them before Gehazi. ²⁴ When they reached Ophel, Gehazi took them from their hands and put them away in his house. Then he sent the two servants of Naaman away, and they left.

²⁵ When he appeared before his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" He answered, "Your servant has not been any place." ²⁶ Elisha replied, "Was not my spirit with you when a man jumped out of his chariot to meet you? Well, you have received silver and can now buy olive groves, vineyards, sheep, oxen and servants. ²⁷ But you and all your descendants shall be infected with the leprosy of Naaman forever." And Gehazi left his presence with leprosy, as white as snow.

6 ¹ Now the fellow prophets said to Elisha, "See, the place where we are gathered has become too small for us. ² Let us go to the Jordan, and let each of us get a log to build a shed where we can gather." Elisha answered, "Go." ³ Then one of them said to him, "Why do you not come along with us?" ⁴ So Elisha went with them. And when they arrived at the Jordan, they began to cut down the trees. ⁵ But as one of them was cutting a tree, his axehead fell into the river, and he exclaimed, "O my master, the iron piece that you have lent me!" The man of God asked him, ⁶ "Where did it fall?" And he showed Elisha the place. Elisha cut off a stick, threw it in there, and the iron piece floated! ⁷ Elisha said, "Get it." The man reached out his hand and took it.

26. 6, 12; 1 K 14, 5; Jn 1, 48

27. Num 12, 10

precisely written by prophets of the same groups around Elisha (see Genesis 20:1-7 and Exodus 18:1-20).

Naaman represents a man of good will afflicted with an incurable disease, which is sin, and who comes to the church to ask for health.

He comes to the church from far away because he discovers that there is a hidden source of life in it. The water of baptism does not work by itself; its effectiveness comes from the fact that it is through it that we join the people to Christ, the church.



Elisha captures an armed band of Arameans

■ At that time when the king of Aram was raiding Israel, he convened a council with his officials, and told them, "Let us attack that people." ⁹ But the man of God sent a message to the king of Israel, "Guard this place for the Arameans shall go there." ¹⁰ So the king of Israel sent men to the place indicated by the man of God, and they kept watch there. And this happened several times. ¹¹ The king of Aram was worried because of these things, so he called his officials and told them, "Go and find out who is revealing plans to the king of Israel." ¹² One of his officials said, "None of us has betrayed you, my king, but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, makes known to his king even the words you say in your bedroom."

¹³ The king answered them, "Go then and find out where he lives, that I may send people to arrest him." When they told him that Elisha was in Dothan, ¹⁴ he sent chariots, horses and strong troops who arrived there by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵ On the following day, when the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning, he went out and saw the Arameans surrounding the city with

their chariots and horses. He said to Elisha, "O my master, what shall we do?" ¹⁶ He answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ Elisha prayed and said, "Yahweh, open his eyes that he may see." Yahweh opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw the hill full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha.

¹⁸ As the Arameans came down to him, Elisha again prayed to Yahweh, "Blind them." So Yahweh made them unable to see as Elisha had asked. ¹⁹ Elisha told them, "This is not the way nor is this the city. Follow me and I shall bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria. ²⁰ When they had entered Samaria, Elisha said, "Yahweh open their eyes that they may see", and they saw they were in Samaria.

²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, should I kill them?" ²² He answered, "If you do not kill those whom you have captured with your sword and your bow, how can you kill these men? Give them bread and water so they may eat and drink, and let them return to their master."

²³ So the king served them a grand banquet, and they ate and drank. Then he sent them away to their master.

18. Gen 19, 1; Wis 19, 17; Acts 13, 11

■ We single out this narrative, somewhat adorned by legends, which shows Elisha's intervention in the life of the nation. Elisha received the mission to change the king of Israel responsible for the religious infidelity of his people, as well as the kings of Aram. Joram and Benhadad mentioned here: they will shortly be murdered.

The prophets of Israel are messengers and entrusted by God with the salvation of Israel, and this salvation does not mean only that our souls go to heaven as many people believe, but rather that the entire life of a people must bring them to greater awareness and responsibility. The people of Israel could not mature (and neither can people now) without a long experience of violence, injustice and lies as well as the remedies to overcome these things.

Give them bread and water (v. 22): a prophetic gesture: overcome evil through good.

Open their eyes... Make them blind (v. 16, 18, 20). These words show the contrast between those who see the situation as God does and those who get lost in their own wisdom. How much time we waste, how often we are paralyzed by our own fears, instead of deciding to take risks and go ahead, in the trust that God cannot fail!

May Yahweh punish me if Elisha's head stays on him (v. 31). The king's words tell us that Elisha had encouraged resistance to the Arameans while the leaders did not dare to do so. But, if prophets get involved in politics, why are Christians so afraid to do so?

From that day on, the troops of Aram did not return any more to invade the territories of Israel.

Famine and the liberation of Samaria

²⁴ Afterwards Ben-hadad, the king of Aram, gathered together his entire troops and went to lay siege on Samaria. ²⁵ There was great famine in Samaria: so great was the misery that the head of an ass was sold for eighty pieces of silver, and a half-litre of chickpeas for five pieces of silver.

²⁶ The king of Israel was walking by upon the wall when a woman cried out to him, "Save me, my lord King!"

²⁷ The king answered, "In what way can I help you? If Yahweh does not give you bread, where shall I get it?"

²⁸ "What is the matter?" She answered, "That woman told me: give up your son that we may eat him today, and then we will eat my son tomorrow."

²⁹ So we cooked my son and ate him. But on the next day, when I said to her: Take your son that we may eat him, she had hidden him."

³⁰ When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes. He was upon the wall, and the people saw that he was wearing sackcloth under his tunic. ³¹ The king swore: "May the Lord punish me, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, remains on his shoulders today." And the king sent a guard to Elisha's house.

³² Elisha was seated in his house and the elders were sitting with him. Before the messenger's arrival, Elisha said to them, "Do you not know that this murderer has ordered someone to cut my head off? Well then, when the messenger comes, shut the door and do not let him in. Behind him, I hear the sound of his master's footsteps."

³³ He was still talking to them, when

the king arrived. The king said, "If all this evil comes from Yahweh, why should I still trust him?"

7 ¹ But Elisha answered, "Listen to the word of Yahweh: Tomorrow at this same time, at the gate of Samaria, a measure of flour shall be sold for a piece of silver, and two measures of barley for a piece of silver, too." ² The shield bearer on whose arm the king leaned said to the man of God, "Even if Yahweh opens the windows of heaven for it to rain wheat, how could this thing be?" Elisha answered, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

³ Four men were at the city gates, outside, at the other side of the wall. They were lepers. And on that day, they said to one another, "Shall we sit here until we die? ⁴ If we decide to enter the city, there we shall die of hunger. But if we stay here, we die as well. So let us go over to the camp of the Arameans. If they spare our lives, then we live; and if they kill us, then let us die!"

⁵ They arose as it was getting dark to go to the camp of the Arameans. But when they reached the camp, they found no one there. ⁶ The Lord had let the Arameans hear the noise of chariots and horses, the sound of a great army. And they had thought: "The king of Israel has sent money to the kings of the Hittites and Moshrites to come and attack us."

⁷ So they fled away as it was getting dark to save themselves, abandoning their tents, their horses, and their asses, leaving the camp just as it was. ⁸ When these lepers reached the camp boundary, they went into a tent. They ate and drank; they took the silver, gold and clothes, and hid them there in the ground. They entered

another tent and took whatever they found, and hid them in the same way.

⁹ Then they thought: "What we are doing is not good. Today is a day of good tidings, and if we keep silent until tomorrow, we shall be guilty. So let us go and tell this to the king's men."

¹⁰ Returning to the city, they called out to the city guards, saying, "We went to the camp of the Arameans but no one was there, not even a trace of anyone, only horses and asses tied, and the tents just as they were left." ¹¹ The guards cried out the news and it was told within the king's household.

¹² The king arose in the night and said to his officials, "The Arameans know that we are hungry. They have left their camp and have hidden in the field, waiting for us to come out of the city that they may take us alive and then get into the city." ¹³ One of the officials answered, "Let some men take five of the remaining horses, for at any rate, these are also bound to die of hunger, as are all the people of this city. Dispatch them and see." ¹⁴ So they took two chariots and their horses, and the king sent the horsemen after the Arameans. ¹⁵ They went as far as the Jordan, and all the way was littered with clothes and equipment which the Arameans had thrown away in their flight.

The messengers returned and told him to the king. ¹⁶ Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. A measure of flour was sold for a piece of silver and a double measure of barley was also sold for a piece, as Elisha had said. ¹⁷ The king had appointed his shield bearer to keep watch at the city gates. But he was crushed right there by the crowd, so that he died, ¹⁸ just as Elisha had told him when the king had come down to see him.

For when Elisha had said to the king, "Tomorrow at this hour, at the gate of Samaria, two measures of barley as well as a measure of flour shall be sold for a shekel," ¹⁹ the shield bearer had said to the man of God, "Even if Yahweh opens the windows of heaven for it to rain down wheat, what you say will not happen." Then Elisha had told him, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it." ²⁰ So it happened. The people ran over him and crushed him at the city gates, and there he died.

8 ¹ Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had brought back to life, "Arise, and go with your family and go to live in another place, wherever it seems best for you, because Yahweh has called for a famine and it will come upon the land for seven years."

² The woman did what the man of God told her to do — she went with her family to the land of the Philistines and stayed there for seven years.

³ At the end of the seven years, the woman came back to her land and went to ask the king for her house and field. ⁴ The King was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, "Tell me all the marvelous things Elisha has done." ⁵ As Gehazi was narrating how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman showed up, she whose very son Elisha had raised from the dead. She was claiming back from the king her house and field. Gehazi said, "This, my lord, is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha raised from the dead."

⁶ The king asked her about what had happened, and she recounted it to him. Then the king immediately sent a palace official with her, and said to him, "See to it that all her properties are returned to her with all the produce of her field from the day she left her land until now."

Elisha and Hazael of Damascus

⁷ Elisha went to Damascus. Ben-hadad, the king of Aram, was sick. When he was told that the man of God had come, ⁸ he said to Hazael, "Go to the man of God and consult Yahweh through him, that I may know if I shall recover from this sickness. But take with you a good gift."

⁹ So Hazael went to see Elisha, taking with him all the best he could find in Damascus forty camel loads of gifts. When he came before Elisha, he said to him, "Your son, Ben-hadad, the king of Aram, has sent me to ask you: Shall I recover from this sickness?"



¹⁰ Elisha answered, "Go and tell him that he shall recover. But Yahweh has shown me that he shall certainly die."

¹¹ Then the facial features of the man of God became fixed and rigid, and he began to weep. ¹² Hazael asked him, "Why do you weep, my lord?" He answered, "Because I have just seen the evil you will do to the children of Israel: you shall set on fire their fortresses, kill their young men by the sword, crush their children, and rip up the womb of their pregnant women." ¹³ Hazael told him, "Who am I, your servant, that I should carry out such exploits?" Elisha answered, "I have just had a vision: Yahweh has made you king of Aram."

¹⁴ Hazael left Elisha and returned to his master who asked him, "What has Elisha said to you?" He answered, "He has told me that you shall surely live." ¹⁵ But on the following day, Hazael took a mantle, dipped it in water, and pressed it down on the king's face until he died. And so, Hazael succeeded him as king of Aram.

¹⁶ In the fifth year of Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah began to reign. ¹⁷ He was thirty-two years old when he began his reign, and he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem. ¹⁸ He followed the footsteps of the kings of Israel and acted in everything like the family of Ahab. Because he had married the daughter of Ahab, he acted very badly with Yahweh. ¹⁹ However, Yahweh would not destroy Judah for the sake of his servant David, according to the promise he had made to keep his lamp burning forever, which referred to David's descendants.

²⁰ In his days, the Edomites rebelled against the rule of Judah, and proclaimed a king of their own. ²¹ Then Joram went to attack the city of Zair with all his chariots of war. Rising by night he managed to escape from the Edomites who had surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but the troops had fled. ²² Thus Edom has rebelled against Judah to this day. At that time, the city of Libnah also rebelled.

²³ The rest of the deeds of Joram and his bravery are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁴ When Joram died, they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and his son Ahaziah succeeded him.

Ahaziah, king of Judah

²⁵ Ahaziah, son of Joram, king of Judah, began to reign in the twelfth year of Joram, son of Ahab, king of Israel. ²⁶ Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began his reign, and he reigned for a year in Jerusalem. His mother was Athaliah, daughter of Omri, king of Israel. ²⁷ He followed in the footsteps of Ahab and acted badly with Yahweh like those of the family of Ahab, since he was related to Ahab's family. ²⁸ He went with Joram, the son of Ahab, to make war against Hazael, the king of Aram, at Ramoth of Gilead. ²⁹ But the Arameans wounded Joram who returned from Ramoth to Jezreel to recover from his wounds. After a while, Ahaziah, the king of Judah, went to Jezreel to visit him as he was recuperating.

Jehu is anointed king of Israel

9 ¹ The prophet Elisha called one of the fellow prophets, and said to him, "Prepare to go to the city of Ramoth in Gilead taking this bottle of oil. ² Look there for Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. Make him leave his companions, and lead him to a place apart from them. ³ There you shall take the bottle and pour the oil on his head, saying: 'Yahweh has anointed you king of Israel. Then open the door and flee without delay.' ⁴ So this young man went to Ramoth.

⁵ When he came, the commanders of the army were seated together, and he said, "I have to talk with you, commander." Jehu asked, "To which of us?" He answered, "To you, commander." ⁶ So Jehu arose and went into the house.

Then the young man poured the oil on Jehu's head, and said to him: "Yahweh, the God of Israel, has consecrated you king of the people of Israel. Thus says Yahweh: ⁷ You shall overthrow the kings of the family of Ahab, that I may avenge the blood of

12. 10, 32; 12, 18; Am 1, 13

1. 1 K 19, 16

7. 1 K 18, 4

18. 1 K 16, 30

19. 2 S 7, 11; Ps 132, 10

28. 9, 14; 1 K 22, 11

◆ While the descendants of David continue to rule in Judah, in Israel there is one 'coup' after

another. Elisha is the one who had Jehu anointed, namely, consecrated with oil.



my servants, the prophets, whom Jezebel has murdered. ⁸ I shall destroy the family of Ahab and all their men shall perish. ⁹ The family of Ahab shall be like the family of Jeroboam and the family of Baasha. ¹⁰ And regarding Jezebel, no one shall bury her, for the dogs shall devour her in the field of Jezreel." Then the young man opened the door and fled.

¹¹ Jehu came out to join the officers of the king. They said to him, "What happened? Why did that fool call you?" Jehu answered, "You know that fellow and you also know why he came." ¹² They said, "We do not know anything. Tell us what he said to you." He answered, "I tell you exactly his words: Yahweh has consecrated you king of Israel."

¹³ Then all the commanders, the companions of Jehu, took their cloaks and put them on a wooden platform in the shape of a throne. And with blasts of trumpets, they proclaimed, "Jehu is king!"

¹⁴ Thus Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi, conspired against Joram. At that time, Joram was with the Israelites defending the city of Ramoth in Gilead against Hazael, king of Aram. ¹⁵ but Joram had retreated to Jezreel to recover from the wounds he had received in battle.

Jehu said, "If it seems good to you, let no one come out of the city, lest they go and tell the news to the king in Jezreel." ¹⁶ Jehu then mounted his chariot and went to Jezreel, where Joram lay sick, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, had gone to visit him.

¹⁷ The watchman at the tower in Jezreel saw the retinue of Jehu as he came, and said, "I see a company." Joram said, "Take your horse and run to meet them, and ask them if they have any news."

¹⁸ So the man went out to meet them and said, "The king sent me to ask if you have any news." Jehu answered him, "Do not worry about the news. Turn around and follow me." And the watchman immediately reported, "The messenger reached them, but he has not returned."

¹⁹ They sent another messenger who came to them and said, "The king wants to know if you bring any news." And Jehu again answered, "Do not worry about the news, turn around and ride behind me." ²⁰ Again the watchman reported, "He has reached them, but has not returned. But the way of driving of him who comes resembles that of Jehu, son of Nimshi, for he drives like a madman."

²¹ Joram then said, "Harness the horses of my chariot." And Joram, the king of Israel, went out with Ahaziah, the king of Judah, each in his chariot, to meet Jehu. They met him in the field of Naboth of Jezreel.

Jehu murders Joram

²² When Joram saw Jehu, he asked, "Do you bring peace, Jehu?" Jehu answered, "Why do you ask for peace when the prostitution of your mother, Jezebel, and her many sorceries still continue?" ²³ So Joram turned his chariot around and fled, saying to Ahaziah, "Treachery, Ahaziah!"

²⁴ Jehu then drew his bow with all his strength and shot Joram in the back, so that the arrow pierced his heart. And Joram fell dead in his chariot.

²⁵ Jehu said to his shield bearer Bidkar, "Take the body and throw it in the field of Naboth of Jezreel; for remember, when we served together in the cavalry of his father, Ahab, Yahweh pronounced this sentence against him: ²⁶ I swear that in this field, I shall take vengeance on you, for the blood of



Naboth and for the blood of his sons which I saw you shed yesterday. So take his body and throw it into the field according to the word of Yahweh."

²⁷ As for Ahaziah, the king of Judah, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. Jehu pursued him, crying out, "Kill him, too!" And they shot him in his chariot at the slope of Gur near Ibleam. He reached Megiddo, took refuge there and died. ²⁸ His servants carried his body in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him with his fathers in the city of David. ²⁹ Ahaziah had begun his reign in Judah in the eleventh year of Joram, son of Ahab.

Jezebel is killed

³⁰ Jehu entered the city of Jezreel. When Jezebel learned this, she painted her eyes, adorned her neck, and looked out of the window. ³¹ As Jehu entered the gates, she said to him, "Do you bring peace? Will you not have Zimri's luck after murdering your master?"

³² Jehu looked up to the window and cried out, "Who is on my side?" Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. ³³ He ordered them, "Throw her down." They threw her down through the window, and her blood splashed on the walls and on the horses, and Jehu in his chariot ran over her.

³⁴ Jehu entered Jezreel. After he had eaten and drunk, he gave these orders, "Take care of that cursed woman, and bury her for she was a king's daughter." ³⁵ They went to bury her, but they found no more than her hands and feet with the skull. ³⁶ When they told Jehu about it, he said, "This is what Elijah of Tishbe said in the name of Yahweh: In the field of Jezreel, the dogs shall eat Jezebel. ³⁷ Her body shall be as dung on the land, so

that no one can say: This was Jezebel."

Ahab's family is wiped out

10 ¹ The seventy sons of Ahab lived in Samaria. So Jehu wrote letters and sent them to Samaria, to the leaders of the city, to the judges and to those who took care of the sons of Ahab, saying, ² "As soon as this letter comes to you who have the king's sons, chariots of war and horses, fortified cities and weapons, ³ select the best and most fit of your master's sons and make him sit on his father's throne; then prepare to defend the family of your lord."

⁴ They were in great fear, and they said, "If the two kings were not able to stand up to him, how then can we resist him?" ⁵ The palace chamberlain, the military commissioner of the city, the judges and the tutors sent this response to Jehu: "We are your servants, and we will do whatever you say. We will not proclaim anyone king; do whatever seems best to you."

⁶ Then he sent them a second letter which said, "If you are on my side and among those who obey me, take the heads of the sons of the king, your lord, and come to talk to me tomorrow at this time in Jezreel."

The king's sons were seventy and they were growing up in the houses of prominent families of the city.

⁷ As soon as this letter reached them, they seized the sons of the king, beheaded seventy of them and placed their heads in large baskets which they sent to Jezreel. ⁸ The messenger came to where Jehu was and said to him, "Here they send you the heads of the king's sons." He answered, "Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate of Jezreel until tomorrow."

⁹ In the morning, Jehu went out and said to all the people, "Be fair, tell me: if I have conspired against my king and have killed him, -who then has beheaded all these?" ¹⁰ Know then that none of the words Yahweh has spoken against the family of Ahab shall be without effect. Everything he said through the mouth of his servant Elijah has been fulfilled."

¹¹ Jehu then killed all who remained loyal to Ahab in Jezreel - all his ministers, relatives,

31. 1 K 16, 9	36. 1 K 21, 23	1. Jdg 9, 5	6. 1 K 15, 29; Hos 1, 4
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• Jehu will be only a good soldier. It seems that he was not even successful in his wars and lost the province to the east of the Jordan, the land of Gilead.

However, he was dedicated to the faith (see 10:22) and to the service of Yahweh and it was

hoped that he would suppress all the influence of the foreign religions introduced by Jezebel, which he did do.

Jezebel dies: she is an example of a godless woman and a murderess of the servants of Yahweh (see Rv 2:20).



priests – without sparing anyone. ¹² Then he left for Samaria, and in Beth-eked of the Shepherds, ¹³ he met the brothers of Ahaziah, king of Judah. He asked them, "Who are you?" They answered, "We are the brothers of Ahaziah, and we go to greet the sons of the king and the sons of the queen." ¹⁴ Jehu said, "Take them alive." They took them alive and beheaded them all by the well of Beth-eked. They were forty-two men, and none was left alive.

¹⁵ Setting out from there, he met Jehonadab, son of Rechab, who came out to meet him. Jehu greeted him and said, "Would you be faithful to me as I am to you?" Jehonadab answered, "Yes." So Jehu said to him, "Give me your hand." He gave him his hand, and Jehu took him up with him into his chariot, and said, ¹⁶ "Come with me and see my zeal for Yahweh." And he had him ride in his chariot.

¹⁷ When Jehu came to Samaria, he killed all the survivors loyal to Ahab in that city, and he did not spare anyone. So the word Yahweh had said through the mouth of Elijah was fulfilled.

¹⁸ Jehu gathered together all the inhabitants and said, "Ahab served Baal, but I will serve him still better." ¹⁹ And he added, "Summon all the prophets of Baal, all his faithful followers and priests." ²⁰ Let no one be missing at the solemn sacrifice I will offer to Baal. Whoever is absent shall die." Jehu did this with cunning, for he was determined to kill all who were faithful to Baal. They themselves proclaimed the sacred solemnity that Jehu had commanded. And Jehu, for his part, ²¹ sent messengers throughout Israel for all the faithful of Baal to come without any exception.

When they entered the temple of Baal, they were so many that they hardly touched the ground. ²² Then Jehu ordered those in charge of the vestments to bring out the sacred vestments reserved for the faithful of Baal and to distribute these to them. ²³ Jehu who was accompanied by Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, said insistently to the faithful of Baal, "Make sure that none of the faithful of Yahweh has entered with you, that there is no one here except all the true servants of Baal."

²⁴ But while they were making preparations for offering the holocausts, Jehu sta-

tioned eighty men outside, and said to them, "Whoever of you lets anyone escape of those who must die shall pay with his own life." ²⁵ And when the sacrifice was finished, Jehu gave this order to the soldiers and officers, "Go in and kill all of them, let none of them escape." So, they went in and put everyone to the sword, going as far as the sanctuary of the House of Baal. ²⁶ They pulled out the sacred pillar of the House of Baal and burned it. ²⁷ They destroyed the altar and pulled down the temple, which remains a garbage dump to this very day.

²⁸ This was how Jehu wiped out the name of Baal from Israel. ²⁹ But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins which Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had caused Israel to commit, for they kept the golden calves of Bethel and Dan. ³⁰ In spite of this, Yahweh said to Jehu, "Since you have acted well, doing what seems just to me, and have dealt with the family of Ahab according to my will, your sons until the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." ³¹ But Jehu did not completely walk according to the Law of Yahweh, since he did not give up the sins into which Jeroboam had led Israel.

³² In those days, Yahweh made the land of Israel smaller, and Hazael conquered the Israelites taking their territory ³³ from the Jordan to the East, the whole land of Gilead, of the tribes of Gad, Reuben, Manasseh, from Aroer by the brook of Armon, the whole land of Gilead and Bashan.

³⁴ Now the rest of the story of Jehu, all that he did and his bravery are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ³⁵ When Jehu died, they buried him in Samaria, and his son Jehoahaz reigned in his place. ³⁶ Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-eight years.

Athaliah in Judah

+ 11 ¹ When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son had died, she was determined to wipe out all the descendants of the king. ² But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash, her nephew, and brought him

+ Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. When her son Ahaziah, the king of Judah dies, she thinks of taking over the kingdom by killing all her grandchildren. This would mean the end of David's descendants, or, the failure of Yahweh's promises. Joash escapes death under miraculous circumstances. Six

years later, the head of the priests works out a plot with the help of the "people of the land," that is to say, the free men who enjoy full rights as citizens (verses 14, 18, 19...). These remain faithful to David's family.

History shows that on several occasions the people are the ones who preserve the faith when

away from among the king's sons who were about to be killed, and put him and his wet nurse in the bedroom. So she hid him from Athaliah, so that the boy was saved. ³ And Joash remained hidden in the House of Yahweh for six years while Athaliah reigned over the land.

⁴ On the seventh year, Jehoiada, the chief priest, summoned the officers of the royal guard and of the Carites to the House of Yahweh. After concluding a pact with them under oath, he showed them the king's son.

⁵ Then he gave them these orders, "One third of your men who come on duty on the sabbath shall guard the king's house, ⁶ another third shall be at the foundation gate, and the last third at the back gates. Keep watch continuously. ⁷ Now about those who come off duty on the sabbath, two divisions of them shall guard the House of Yahweh and surround King Joash. ⁸ You shall be at his side, each with his weapons in his hand, and you will kill all who would cross your line. Take care of the king wherever he goes."

⁹ The commanders of the guards did what Jehoiada, the priest, had told them, and they showed up with all their men, those who were to go off duty on the sabbath as well as those who were to come on duty on that day.

¹⁰ Jehoiada entrusted to the officers the spears and shields of King David which were in the House of Yahweh.

¹¹ And then the guards stood from the southern corner of the house to the north, around the altar and the House of Yahweh.

¹² Then Jehoiada, the priest, brought out the king's son, crowned him and put the bracelets on him, then proclaimed and consecrated him king. All clapped their hands, shouting and crying out, "Long live the King!"

¹³ When Athaliah heard the noise of the people, she approached the crowd surrounding the House of Yahweh. ¹⁴ The king was standing by the pillar, according to the custom, and the officers and the trumpeters were with him. The people were filled with joy and they were blowing trumpets. On seeing this, Athaliah tore her clothes and cried out, "Treason, treason!"

¹⁵ Jehoiada, the priest, commanded the officers, "Surround her and bring her out to the courtyard, and kill anyone who tries to defend her." He gave this order, because he thought, "She should not die in the House of Yahweh."

¹⁶ They brought her out, and when they reached the palace of the king by the horses' entrance, there they killed her.

¹⁷ Jehoiada made a covenant between Yahweh and the king and the people so they would be the people of Yahweh. ¹⁸ All the citizens went to the temple of Baal and destroyed it. They broke the altars and the images into pieces, and killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, before his altar.

Then Jehoiada, the priest, posted guards over the House of Yahweh.

¹⁹ He led the officers, the guards of the king, the Carites guards and the citizens, and they accompanied the king:

4. 1 S 22, 7; 2 S 8, 18

10. 1 S 21, 10; 2 S 8, 7

12. 2 S 2, 4; 1 K 1, 39

17. Dt 4, 20; Jer 34, 8

the authorities fail to do so. Thus, in the fourth century A.D., the errors of the Anus - who denied the divinity of Christ - were accepted by many bishops supported by the Roman emperor. It was the resistance of Christian people who assured the victory of the faith.

The chief priest restores the child king and he also tries to give him directions. An agreement is signed according to which the people and the king commit themselves to be faithful to the Covenant of Yahweh.

to the palace, passing through the Gate of the Guards. King Joash sat on the royal throne.²⁰ All the citizens were happy and the city was at peace. Now regarding Athaliah, she had died by the sword in the king's palace.

Reign of Joash in Judah

12 ¹ Jehoash was seven years old when he began his reign.² It was then the seventh year of Jehu, and he reigned for forty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother was Zibiah of Beer-sheba.³ Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh as long as the priest Jehoiada guided him.⁴ But he did not demolish the sanctuaries on the hillsides where people continued offering sacrifices and burning incense.

⁵ Jehoash said to the priest, "All the money from the sacred contributions which the people bring to offer in the House of Yahweh, the money in cash, that which is offered as personal assessment, and that which is freely and voluntarily given in the House of Yahweh — ⁶ all these you can receive. Let each one receive from the hand of his acquaintance, but you are to repair the House of Yahweh, when anything needs to be repaired."

⁷ By the twenty-third year of the reign of Joash, the priests had not yet carried out the repairs needed in the House of Yahweh.⁸ So the king summoned Jehoiada the priest and the other priests with him, and said to them, "Why have you not carried out the repairs of the House yet? From now on, you will no longer keep any money during your service, but shall set it aside for the repair of the House."⁹ The priests agreed that henceforth, they would not accept money from the people and would not be in charge of the repair of the House.¹⁰ So Jehoiada, the priest, had a box made with a hole in the cover. He placed this by the altar, to the right side of those entering the House of Yahweh, and the priests who were at the gates put in it all the money offered in the House of Yahweh.

¹¹ Whenever they saw that the box was full, a secretary of the king would come, and to-

gether with the high priest, they would take and count the money.¹² Then they would turn the amount over into the hands of those responsible for the work of the House, who would, in turn, pay with this money the carpenters and bricklayers doing the repairs.¹³ From this amount, they also bought the stones, wood and everything necessary for the repair of the House of Yahweh.¹⁴ But of this money given for the House of Yahweh, they did not make any silver cups, or cutting tools, or water jars, or trumpets, or any golden or silver objects,¹⁵ but all the money was used to pay those who were repairing the House of Yahweh.¹⁶ Accounts were not asked from those responsible for paying the labourers, since they acted with great honour.¹⁷ Only the money offered for the expiation of sins was for the priests.

¹⁸ At that time Hazael, king of Aram, went up to fight against Gath. He captured it and was heading for Jerusalem.¹⁹ So Joash, king of Judah, took all the precious things that his fathers, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah, kings of Judah, had consecrated, with all that he himself had consecrated, and all the gold he could find in the treasury of the House of Yahweh and in those of the king's house. Then he sent them to Hazael, king of Aram, who left Jerusalem with them.

²⁰ Now the rest regarding Joash and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.

²¹ Some of his officials plotted a conspiracy against him, and they killed him in Beth-Millo, as he was going to Silla.²² Jozacar, son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad, son of Shomer, struck him down, and he died. He was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and his son Amaziah reigned in his place.

Jehoahaz, king of Israel

13 ¹ In the twenty-third year of Joash, son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, began to rule over Israel from Samaria, its capital; he reigned for seventeen years.² He acted badly with Yahweh and persisted in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, which had become the sins of Israel, without turning away from them.³ So the anger of

■ The following six chapters relate the history of the kingdom of Israel and Judah from Joash to the destruction of the kingdom of Israel (the northern kingdom) in 721 B.C., a period of over a hundred years.

In Jerusalem the capital of Judah, there are only four kings, the first two rule forty years each.

In Israel, at first the sons of Jehu know many setbacks. Their third descendant, Jeroboam II, will achieve a period of prosperity thanks to his victories. Meanwhile, the powerful kings of Assyria are conquering everywhere and they will soon threaten Israel with their armies and their power.

Yahweh burned against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of Hazael, king of Aram, and into the hands of Ben-hadad, son of Hazael, throughout that time.

⁴ But Jehoahaz prayed to Yahweh, and Yahweh listened to him for he had seen the oppression of Israel, how the king of Aram oppressed them. ⁵ And Yahweh gave Israel a liberator who would free them from the oppression of Aram, so the Israelites could live peacefully in their homes as before. ⁶ (But they did not turn away from the sins by which Jeroboam made Israel sin, for the sacred pillar still remained standing in Samaria.) ⁷ No more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots of war and ten thousand soldiers were left of the army of Jehoahaz, for the king of Aram had wiped out all the rest like dust.

⁸ The rest about Jehoahaz, all that he did and his bravery are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ⁹ When Jehoahaz slept with his fathers, they buried him in Samaria and his son Joash reigned in his place.

Joash, king of Israel

¹⁰ In the thirty-seventh year of Joash, king of Judah, Joash, son of Jehoahaz, began to reign over Israel in Samaria, its capital; he reigned for sixteen years. ¹¹ He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh; he did not turn away from the sins which Jeroboam, son of Nebat, made Israel commit. ¹² The rest about Joash and all that he did, his bravery and how he fought against Amaziah, king of Judah; are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ¹³ When Joash slept with his fathers, he was buried in Samaria, together with the kings of Israel, and Jeroboam sat upon his throne.

Death of Elisha

¹⁴ When Elisha became very sick so that he was about to die, Joash, king of Israel, went down to him and went before him, saying, "My father! My father! Chariot and horses of Israel!" ¹⁵ Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows." So he took a bow and arrows. ¹⁶ Elisha then said to the king, "Draw the bow," and the king drew the bow. Then Elisha put his hand on the king's hand ¹⁷ and said, "Open the window eastward." He opened it. Elisha then said, "Shoot!" And he shot. Elisha said, "Yahweh's arrow of victory, arrow of victory over Aram! You shall defeat Aram in Aphek until you utterly destroy them!" ¹⁸ And he added, "Take

the arrows." And he took them. Elisha said to the king, "Strike the ground with them." He struck three times and stopped. ¹⁹ So the man of God became angry at him, and said to him, "You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck down Aram completely. But now, you will strike down Aram only three times."

²⁰ Elisha died and they buried him. A little later, a detachment of Moabites conducted a raid as they used to do at the beginning of every year. ²¹ It happened that at that time, some people were burying a dead man when they saw the Moabites. So they quickly threw the body into the grave of Elisha, and then fled to safety. But as soon as the man's body touched the bones of Elisha, the man revived and stood on his feet.

²² Hazael, king of Aram, oppressed the Israelites throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. ²³ But Yahweh had pity and took compassion on them; he turned towards them because of his Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not utterly destroy them, or cast them far from his face. ²⁴ Hazael, the king of Aram, died; and his son Ben-hadad reigned in his place. ²⁵ Then Joash, son of Jehoahaz, took again from Ben-hadad the cities which Hazael had taken from Jehoahaz. Joash defeated him thrice and recovered the cities of Israel.

Amaziah, king of Judah

14 ¹ Amaziah, son of Joash, king of Judah, began to reign in the second year of Joash, king of Israel. ² He was twenty-five years old when he began his reign, and he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem. ³ He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh, yet not like his father David; rather he acted like his father Joash. ⁴ The Sanctuaries on the Hill-side still stood; there the people continued to offer sacrifices and to burn incense.

⁵ When the kingdom was firmly in his hands, Amaziah killed the officers who murdered the king, his father, ⁶ but did not kill the sons of the assassins, according to what is written in the Law of Moses where Yahweh gave this command: "You shall not put the fathers to death because of their sons, nor shall you put the sons to death because of their fathers, but everyone shall be punished on account of his own crimes."

⁷ Amaziah conquered ten thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt, and conquered the Rock by arms, calling it Joktheel, which is its name to this day.

⁸ Then Amaziah sent messengers to Joash, son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, king of Israel, to say to him, "Come up and let us see which of us two is better."⁹ Joash, king of Israel, sent as an answer to Amaziah, king of Judah: "A thornbush of Lebanon sent this message to a cedar of Lebanon: Give me your daughter to be my son's wife. But the wild beasts of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the bush."¹⁰ You now feel very proud since you conquered the Edomites. Be content with your fame and be quiet in your own house lest disgrace befall you and the people of Judah."

¹¹ But Amaziah did not listen: so Joash, king of Israel, came and confronted him in Beth-shemesh of Judah.¹² Judah was defeated by Israel, and everyone of them fled to his home.¹³ Joash, king of Israel, took Amaziah, son of Ahaziah, as prisoner in Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem.

He made an opening two hundred metres wide in the wall of Jerusalem, from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate.¹⁴ He took all the gold and silver, all that he found in the House of Yahweh and in the treasuries of the king's house, and hostages as well, and then returned to Samaria.

¹⁵ Now the rest about Joash, about his bravery and how he fought against Amaziah, king of Judah, is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.¹⁶ When Joash laid down to rest with his fathers, they buried him in Samaria with his fathers, and his son Jeroboam reigned in his place.

¹⁷ Now about Amaziah: he lived fifteen more years after the death of Joash, king of Israel.¹⁸ The rest of the history of Amaziah is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.¹⁹ There were people who conspired against him in Jerusalem. So Amaziah took refuge in Lachish, but they pursued him and killed him in that city.²⁰ His body was brought from there in a chariot, and they buried him in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.²¹ Then, all the people of Judah took Azariah who was sixteen years old, and proclaimed him king in place of his father Amaziah.²² He rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king, his father, died.

Jeroboam II, king of Israel

²³ Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria in the fifteenth year of the reign of Amaziah, king of Judah. He reigned for forty-one years.²⁴ and during his reign he acted badly towards Yahweh, for he did not turn away from the sins which Jeroboam, son of Nebat, made Israel commit.²⁵ He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath up to the Dead Sea, according to the word which Yahweh, the God of Israel, had said through the mouth of his servant, the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai from Gath-hepher.²⁶ Yahweh had seen the extreme bitter misery of Israel; there was no one left, neither slave nor freeman, who would help Israel.²⁷ But Yahweh did not decide to wipe out the name of Israel under the heavens, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, son of Joash.

²⁸ Now the rest regarding Jeroboam, all that he did and his bravery, how he fought and restored Hamath and Damascus back to Israel, is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.²⁹ When Jeroboam died, he was buried with the kings of Israel, and his son Zechariah reigned in his place.

Azariah, king of Judah

15 ¹ Azariah, son of Amaziah, king of Judah, began to reign in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Jeroboam in Israel.² He was sixteen years old when he began his reign; he reigned for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jecoliah of Jerusalem.

³ He did what pleased Yahweh, like his father Amaziah had done.⁴ But the Sanctuaries of the Hillsides were not demolished, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense on them.

⁵ Yahweh struck down the king. He became sick with leprosy, and he remained a leper to the day of his death. He lived in an isolated house, while Jotham, his son, was head of the king's household and administered justice in the kingdom.

⁶ Now the rest about Azariah and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of

21. 12, 21 27. 14, 24; 2 S. 8, 5 5. Lev 13, 46 9. 1 K 12, 29 35. Jer 20, 2

◆ The Bible dedicates only this paragraph to Jeroboam II, King of Israel (783-743 B.C.), in spite of his having restored greatness and prosperity to the kingdom.

In Jeroboam's victories, the author sees only God's last favour for his humiliated people.

This prosperity, however, brings about the exploitation of the people. This is the time when

the prophets Hosea and Amos announce – to everyone's disbelief – that this prosperity will be brief because it is not based on justice. At the death of Jeroboam, the kingdom of Samaria is coming to an end.

Religious division continues and the Israelites of the north, isolated from the religious center of Jerusalem, will not succeed in preserving their faith when confronted with pagan currents.



the Kings of Judah. ⁷ When Azariah died, they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and his son Jotham succeeded him.

The last kings of Israel

⁸ Zechariah, son of Jeroboam, began to reign over Israel in Samaria, its capital, in the thirty-eighth year of Azariah, king of Judah. For the six months that he stayed in power, ⁹ he acted badly towards Yahweh, as his fathers had done, for he did not turn away from the sins which Jeroboam, son of Nebat, made Israel commit.

¹⁰ Shallum, son of Jabesh, conspired against him, and struck him down at Ibleam. He killed him and reigned in his place.

¹¹ Now the rest regarding Zechariah is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ¹² In this way the promise Yahweh had made to Jehu was fulfilled: "Your sons until the fourth generation shall sit upon the throne of Israel." And so it was.

¹³ Shallum, son of Jabesh, began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah, king of Judah, and he reigned for a month in Samaria. ¹⁴ Then Menahem, son of Gadi, rebelled against him in Tirzah. He came to Samaria and killed Shallum in that city. Having killed Shallum, Menahem reigned in his place.

¹⁵ Now the rest about Shallum and the conspiracy which he plotted is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

¹⁶ Then Menahem seized Tappuah and killed its inhabitants, devastating its territory from Tirzah onwards, since they would not open the gates to him. And he ripped up the wombs of all the pregnant women.

¹⁷ Menahem, son of Gadi, began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of Azariah, king of Judah. He reigned for ten years in Samaria, ¹⁸ and he too acted badly with Yahweh, for he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, which he made Israel commit.

¹⁹ In his days, Pul, the king of Assyria, invaded the land of Israel. And Menahem had to give him a thousand talents of silver so that the king of Assyria would receive him as an ally and keep him in power. ²⁰ Menahem exacted the money from all the wealthy and prominent people of Israel to give it to the king of Assyria: fifty pieces of silver from each one. With this, the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land.

²¹ Now the rest regarding Menahem and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ²² When Menahem died, his son Pekahiah succeeded him.

²³ Pekahiah, son of Menahem, began to

reign over Israel in Samaria in the fiftieth year of Azariah, king of Judah. He reigned for two years, ²⁴ during which he acted badly towards Yahweh; he did not turn away from the sins which Jeroboam, son of Nebat, made Israel commit.

²⁵ His general, Pekah, son of Remaliah, rebelled against him. He led some fifty men from the province of Gilead, and they came to kill him in Samaria in the tower of the palace. With the king dead, Pekah succeeded him.

²⁶ The rest about Pekahiah and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

²⁷ In the fifty-second year of Azariah, king of Judah, Pekah, son of Remaliah, began to reign over Israel in Samaria, its capital. He reigned for twenty years, and he acted badly towards Yahweh, ²⁸ for he did not turn away from the sins which Jeroboam made Israel commit.

²⁹ In the time of Pekah, king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, came and seized Iyon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, the territory of Gilead and Galilee, and the whole land of Naphtali, and deported their inhabitants to Asshur. ³⁰ Then Hoshea, son of Elah, conspired against Pekah, son of Remaliah, killed him and reigned in his place. ³¹ The rest about Pekah and all that he did is written in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Jotham, king of Judah

³² Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign in the second year of Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel. ³³ Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jerusha, daughter of Zadok.

³⁴ He did what pleased Yahweh, as his father had done. ³⁵ but he did not abolish the Sanctuaries on the high places where the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense.

He built the Upper Gate of the House of Yahweh. ³⁶ The rest about Jotham and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ³⁷ In those days, Yahweh began to send Rezin, king of Aram, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, against Judah. ³⁸ When Jotham died, they buried him with his fathers in the city of his ancestor David, and his son Ahaz succeeded him.

Ahaz, king of Judah

16 ¹ In the seventeenth year of the reign of Pekah, son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began his reign.



² and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what pleased Yahweh, his God, as his father David had done. ³ He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even sacrificed his son in the fire, according to the hateful practices of those nations which Yahweh had expelled from the land, so the children of Israel could occupy their place. ⁴ He offered sacrifices in the sanctuaries on the hills, on the slopes and under every green tree.

⁵ Then Rezin, king of Aram, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to fight Jerusalem. They surrounded it, but could not conquer it. ⁶ At that time Rezin, king of Aram, recovered Elath for the Edomites, expelling the Jews from there. The Edomites then entered Elath and live there until now.

⁷ Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser, king of Asshur, to tell him, "I am your servant and your son. Come then and rescue me from the hands of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who wage war against me." ⁸ Ahaz took the silver and gold that was in the House of Yahweh and the treasures from the house of the king, and sent them as a gift to the king of Asshur. ⁹ The king of Asshur paid heed to him and went to attack Damascus; he seized that city and exiled its inhabitants to Kir, then he killed Rezin.

¹⁰ So King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet with Tiglath-pileser, king of Asshur. And when he saw the altar in Damascus, he sent Uriah, the priest, the measurement of that altar together with the design which he copied exactly in all its details.

¹¹ The priest Uriah built the altar according to the design the king had sent him from Damascus. He finished it before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus. ¹² When the king returned from Damascus, he saw the altar, approached it and went up to it. ¹³ He burned on that altar his holocausts and sacrifices. There he made his libation and shed the blood of his peace offerings. ¹⁴ He removed the altar of bronze that was before Yahweh, from the front of the House, from between the new altar and

the House of Yahweh, and he placed it on the north side of his new altar.

King Ahaz ordered the priest Uriah, ¹⁵ "Upon this great altar you shall burn the morning holocaust and the evening sacrifice, the king's holocaust and his sacrifice, the holocausts of the people of the land, their sacrifices and libations. You shall shed upon it all the blood of the holocausts and sacrifices. As for the bronze altar, I will deal with it." ¹⁶ The priest Uriah did as the king had commanded him.

¹⁷ The king dismantled the panelling of the stands, removed the washbasins from on top of them, took down the small bronze basin from the top of the oxen that supported it, and placed it upon the stone pavement. Now about the dais of the throne which had been built within the House of Yahweh, and the outer entrance for the king, ¹⁸ he removed them from the House of Yahweh because the king of Asshur had asked it.

¹⁹ The rest regarding Ahaz and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁰ When Ahaz died, they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and his son Hezekiah succeeded him.

End of the kingdom of Israel in the north

[17] ¹ Hoshea, son of Elah, began to reign in Israel in the twelfth year of Ahaz, king of Judah. He reigned for nine years in the city of Samaria. ² and he acted badly towards Yahweh though not as bad as the previous kings of Israel.

³ Shalmaneser, king of Asshur, came with his army to attack Hoshea, who surrendered to him and began paying taxes to him. ⁴ But the king of Asshur discovered that Hoshea was plotting against him, for Hoshea had

3. Dt 12,31; Jer 7, 31 4. 1 K 14, 23; Jer 2, 20 5. Is 7, 1 8. 1 K 15, 9 12. 1 K 12, 33 18. Ezk 46, 1

■ Here we have the description of the fall of the northern kingdom. Samaria is captured in 721 B.C. The people are deported to the other extreme of the Assyrian empire, and residents from those remote provinces are brought to Samaria to mix with the people in the countryside. Such was the practice among the Assyrian conquerors: displacing and intermingling the people to prevent rebellion.

From that time on, the Samaritans, or the Israelites of the north, will be a racially and religiously mixed people, and so the Israelites of

Judah will never consider them as their equals. Seven centuries later, in Jesus' time, the Samaritans will be neighbors to be avoided, because there are more suspicions than common memories.

Thus, the most important of the kingdoms coming from David and Solomon disappears two centuries after Solomon's death. Among the Jews, the hope will remain that when the Messiah comes he will reunite Judah and Israel and call all those who were scattered among the nations (see Ez 37:15).



sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and did not pay him the taxes as he had done every year. Shalmaneser arrested him, and then put him in prison.

⁵ The army of the king of Asshur subjected the whole of Israel, and they came to Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. ⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, exiled the Israelites to Asshur and made them settle in Halah, at the banks of Habor, the river of Gozan, as well as in the cities of the Medes.

Causes of the fall of Israel

+ ⁷ This happened because the children of Israel had sinned against Yahweh, their God, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, where they were subject to Pharaoh, but they had turned back to other gods. ⁸ They followed the customs of the nations which Yahweh had driven out before them.

⁹ The children of Israel introduced many innovations that offended Yahweh, their God. They built sanctuaries in all the cities, from the watch-

towers to the fortified cities. ¹⁰ They placed images and sacred pillars on all the hills and under every green tree. ¹¹ There they burned incense in their sanctuaries on the hills like the nations Yahweh had dispossessed for them.

They did wicked things, provoking Yahweh to anger. ¹² They served their filthy idols in spite of what Yahweh had told them: "You must not do such a thing." ¹³ Yahweh warned Israel and Judah through the mouth of prophets and seers, saying: "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and precepts according to the laws which I commanded your fathers and which I have sent to you by my servants, the prophets."

¹⁴ But they did not listen and refused as did their fathers who did not believe in Yahweh, their God. ¹⁵ They despised his statutes and the covenant he had made with their fathers, and the warnings he had given them. They went after worthless idols and they themselves became worthless, following the nations which surrounded

6. Dt 28, 36; Hos 9, 3; Am 5, 27
13. Jer 18, 11; 25, 5; Ezk 33, 11

7. Ex 32, 4; Jdg 2, 1; Jer 2, 6; Mi 6, 4; Ps 81
14. Dt 10, 16; Jer 7, 26

15. Jer 2, 5

10. 1 K 14, 23

+ The kingdom of Israel disappeared when Samaria was conquered by the Assyrians. It was too small and isolated to resist its powerful neighbour. The Bible, however makes us discover the deep cause of this disaster: *they had betrayed Yahweh their God.*

For God never abandons the persons and the institutions he has entrusted with a mission. Israel had been chosen to serve Yahweh and since it did not serve, it had to be destroyed.

They served their filthy idols. Though the first meaning of *idol* was: image, idols are not images of Christ and his servants the saints, as short-sighted believers think. An idol is everything that takes the place of the only God in our heart and our lives. He is the living God and gives life to those who serve him. The *filthy* idols bring sickness and confusion to the society which serves them. Whether they be gadgets, elements of luxurious life, idols of blood and flesh, with them we are always left sad and unclean.

Yet the idols had another significance for

Israel. They were a small people less advanced than the neighbouring nations. The idols were the symbol and the instrument of a foreign and alienating culture. With the Canaanite and Assyrian idols they imported the worship of sex, greed and violence. They forgot the problems of their own society and lost the thirst for justice that was their inheritance.

It is the same now when undeveloped people are enslaved by the idols of a Consumerist Society... When families are subdued to the "T.V. idiotizing box," religiously watching the advertising of greed, the erotic shows and what ever has been planned for them by the Consumerist Society, they become unable to build their own life in their own reality. Then the building of a nation in justice is no more than a beautiful dream.

They went after worthless idols and they became worthless (15). Jeremiah will also say: "They served foreign gods and so I will send them to foreign lands as slaves" (Jer 16:13); see also Jgs 3:7 and Rom 1:24.



them, in spite of what Yahweh had said, "Do not do as they do."

¹⁶ They abandoned all the commandments of Yahweh and fashioned two calves of bronze. They made sacred pillars and knelt before all the stars of heaven, and worshipped Baal.

¹⁷ They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire, practiced divination and magic, and sold themselves to evil-doing in the sight of Yahweh and kindled his anger.

¹⁸ So Yahweh became indignant with Israel and cast them far away from his presence, leaving only the tribe of Judah.

¹⁹ But neither did Judah keep the commandments of Yahweh, their God; on the contrary they followed the customs practised in Israel. ²⁰ Because of this, Yahweh rejected the whole race of Israel. He humbled them and delivered them into the hands of plunderers until the day came when he drove them far away from his presence.

²¹ When he divided the kingdom of David, Israel chose Jeroboam, son of Nebat, as king; he made them commit a great sin by separating themselves from Yahweh. ²² The Israelites followed Jeroboam in his sins, and henceforth, did not turn away from them ²³ until Yahweh had removed Israel from his presence, as he had warned them through his servants, the prophets. So Israel was exiled from its land to the country of Asshur until this day.

The origin of the Samaritans

■ ²⁴ The king of Asshur brought in people of Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim, and he settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the Israelites. These people occupied the country of Samaria and resided in its cities.

²⁵ When they settled there at the beginning, they did not worship Yahweh, so Yahweh sent lions which killed many of them. ²⁶ Then it was told to the king of Asshur, "The people

you brought and sent to Samaria to settle in its cities do not know how Yahweh, the God of the land, should be honoured, so he has sent lions which are killing them."

²⁷ So the king of Asshur commanded, "Let one of the priests we have banished from Samaria return there. Let him go and live with those people and teach them how to honour the God of that land." ²⁸ So, one of the priests who had been banished from Samaria came back, and staying in Bethel, taught these people how they should honour Yahweh.

²⁹ Yet each of these nations made its own gods, and placed them in the sanctuaries on the hills which the Samaritans had built. Each of these nations put their god in the city where they settled: ³⁰ the Babylonians set up the idol in Succoth, the inhabitants of Cuth made Nergal, the inhabitants of Hamath made Ashima, ³¹ those of Avva made Nibjaz and Tartak. Those of Sepharvaim burned their children in the fire in honour of Adramelech and Anammelech, their gods.

³² They worshipped Yahweh, but they appointed for themselves priests from among their people, who served Yahweh in the sanctuaries on the hills. ³³ They honoured Yahweh but at the same time, served their own gods, according to the customs of the nations where they had been banished. ³⁴ Until this very day, they still observe their old customs.

The Israelites who had remained in Samaria did not honour Yahweh nor did they follow the precepts and customs, the Law or the commandments which Yahweh had given to the children of Jacob to whom he had given the name Israel. ³⁵ Yahweh had made a covenant with them, commanding them, "Do not honour other gods or bow down before them, or serve them or offer them sacrifices." ³⁶ You shall honour Yahweh alone, who brought you out of the land of Egypt with the strength of his arm; before him you shall bow and to him alone shall you offer sacrifices. ³⁷ Keep the precepts, the ordinances, the Law and the commandments he wrote for you. Fulfill them all your days and do not adore strange gods. ³⁸ Do not forsake the covenant he made with you and do not adore strange gods, ³⁹ but adore only Yahweh, your God, and he shall free you from

17. 2 K 16, 3

26. Ezk 5, 17

■ The foreigners who are brought to Samaria meet with hardships which arouse religious restlessness in them: can the god of this land be angry with us because we do not offer sacrifices to him?

Answering the doubts of these basically religious people, though of a primitive culture, the

author highlights the demands of faith:

- it is not enough to honor the Lord along with the other gods. He is the only One and he asks us to destroy all the gods we have made for ourselves
- it is not enough to offer sacrifices to the Lord: we must do his will.



the hand of all your enemies." ⁴⁰ But they did not pay attention; instead they followed their ancient customs.

⁴¹ So these people honoured Yahweh but at the same time also served their idols; and after them, their children and their children's children continued doing what their fathers had done.

Hezekiah, king of Judah

◆ 18 ¹ Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, began to reign in Judah in the third year of Hoshea, son of Elah, king of Israel.

² He was twenty-five years old then, and his reign in Jerusalem lasted for twenty-nine years. His mother was Abijah, daughter of Zechariah.

³ He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh, like David, his ancestor.

⁴ He did away with the sanctuaries on the hills, demolished the standing stones and cut down the sacred pillars.

He also destroyed the bronze serpent that Moses had fashioned in the desert for, until that time, the Israelites were offering sacrifices to it and called it Nehushtan.

⁵ He trusted in Yahweh more than

any of the kings of Judah who preceded or succeeded him and he never departed from him. ⁶ He kept the commandments Yahweh had given through Moses. ⁷ For that reason, Yahweh was with him; he succeeded in all his undertakings. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and was no longer subject to him. ⁸ He imposed his authority on the Philistines as far as Gaza, and seized their land from the watchtowers to the fortified cities.

⁹ In the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign which was the seventh year of Hoshea, son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came against Samaria and besieged it. ¹⁰ At the end of three years, he conquered it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea, king of Israel, Samaria was conquered. ¹¹ The king of Assyria deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

¹² This happened to them because they did not listen to the voice of Yah-

41. Ezr 4, 1

3. 14, 3; 15, 3

4. Num 21, 6; Jn 3, 14

5. 23, 25

7. Dr 5, 29

◆ Here begins the last part of the Book of Kings: the history of the kingdom of Judah. The fall of Samaria and the disappearance of the northern kingdom bring about a religious renewal in the south.

Hezekiah did what is right in the eyes of Yahweh. This is the time when the prophet Isaiah is present at the side of king Hezekiah (716-687 B.C.). Even if Hezekiah did not – by far – have the faith of David, he dedicated himself to promoting fidelity to the Lord.

He did away with the sanctuaries on the hills. Here we note the effort on the part of the kings of Judah to see to it that the only place of worship would be the Jerusalem Temple. In the many rural sanctuaries, people went to offer their sacrifices to Yahweh in ways that were usually mixed up with pagan practices. By highlighting the Jerusalem Temple's monopoly with its better educated priests and Levites looking after the purity of the faith, Hezekiah promotes religious reform.

As to the bronze serpent which Hezekiah destroyed, see Nm 21:3.

It is also true that many fugitive priests had come from the north during the last days of Samaria. Some of them had succeeded in maintaining faith in Yahweh and religious unity. They had brought along sacred books and kept many ancient traditions on Moses' and Israel's past. This contribution was going to be extremely important for the writing of the Bible and also for Josiah's reform a century later (2 Kgs 22).

In 701 B.C. Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem and Hezekiah has to pay a high price to keep him away.

Beginning with 18:7 to the end of chapter 19 we have the story of the miraculous liberation of Jerusalem. Actually there are two stories that may correspond to two liberations from two Assyrian invasions.

◆ In 701 the king of Assyria sends his generals from Lachish to demand Hezekiah's surrender. But he has to return to his country and cannot carry out his threats. This story is in 18:17-19 and it concludes in 19:36-37.

In 690 B.C. there is another intervention related in 19:9-35. This time "the angel of the



weh, their God, and had broken his covenant; they did not listen to nor put into practice what Moses, the servant of Yahweh, had commanded them.

Sennacherib's invasion

¹³ In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up and invaded Judah; he laid siege to all the fortified cities and seized all of them. ¹⁴ Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent a message to Sennacherib who was in Lachish, "I have acted badly, stop your attack and I will do whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria imposed on Hezekiah a contribution of three hundred talents of silver and thirty of gold.

¹⁵ Hezekiah then handed over to him all the money that was found in the House of Yahweh and in the treasuries of the royal palace. ¹⁶ It was at that time that Hezekiah ordered that the gold sheets with which he himself had adorned the doorports be stripped from the gates of the House of Yahweh, and he gave them to the king of Assyria.

¹⁷ From Lachish the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army to King Hezekiah in Jeru-

salem. They halted at the channel of the Upper Pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field. The field commander called for the king; and ¹⁸ Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator, went out to him together with Sheb-nah the secretary and Joah, son of Asaph the recorder.

¹⁹ The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah this message from the great king of Assyria: How can you be so confident? ²⁰ You thought that words are as good as wisdom and replace strength in time of war? On whom are you relying to rebel against me? ²¹ You rely on Egypt, a broken staff which pierces the palm of him who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, for all who rely on him. ²² Yes, you may say to me: 'We rely on Yahweh our God.' But isn't he the one whose altars and high places Hezekiah removed when he commanded Judah and Jerusalem: You shall worship before this altar?

²³ Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king. I will give you two thousand horses if you are able to supply riders. ²⁴ How could you repulse even, one of the least of my master's generals? And you rely on Egypt for chariots and horsemen!

13. Is 36-37; Is 36, 1	17. Is 7, 3	21. Is 18, 2; 30, 1	24. Is 31, 1	25. Is 7, 17
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Lord came out and killed one hundred eighty-five thousand soldiers in the camp." The famous pagan historian, *Herodotus*, relates the sudden destruction of this army by a plague epidemic. A most natural event! And yet, at the time when the Holy City is about to fall and when God's promises seem to fail, some mice are spreading the deadly virus: The biblical author makes no mistake in seeing this as a manifestation of God. Jerusalem was liberated as Isaiah had predicted.

These two chapters appear almost word for word in the book of Isaiah, chapters 36-37. And so here we only emphasize the story of the first liberation, and in Isaiah 37, the story of the second one.

Make peace with me and surrender (v. 31). The Assyrian king proposes peace with the condition that the people be deported. For the

Jews this would mean the loss of their national and religious life by being dispersed in other lands. It would also mean that David's descendants would be deprived of power and according to the mentality of that time, that Yahweh was defeated by the gods of the conqueror. That is why God is going to do something.

These events invite us to trust in God's help. When God commits himself to act, he cannot fail if we do not get tired of hoping in him. Against all human hope, Jerusalem remains untouched. This is the image of a ruler whom people want to depose because of his honesty but who remains. Or the student who stays firm even though his friends mock his faith. Or the young people who remain pure in a culture without morality. Or the church reduced to a few faithful which is seemingly defeated by political forces and yet victorious.



²⁵ Do you think that I have come to attack and destroy this land without consulting Yahweh? He himself said to me: Go up to this land and conquer it!" ²⁶ Then Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Speak to your servants in Aramaic; we understand it. Do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of these people on the walls."

²⁷ But the field commander said, "Do you think that my master sent me to speak these words only to your master and to you? Is it not also to the men on the walls who, with you, will have to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?"

²⁸ Then the field commander stood and cried out with a loud voice in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king of Assyria: ²⁹ Do not let Hezekiah deceive you! No, he will not be able to help you! ³⁰ Do not listen to him when he tells you to trust in Yahweh, saying, 'Yahweh will save us; this city will not be given over to the king of Assyria.' Do not listen to Hezekiah but ³¹ to what the king of Assyria says. 'Make your peace with me and surrender. So I will let each of you eat of your vine and of your fig tree and drink the water of your cistern until I come again. ³² Then I will take you to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, of bread and vineyards, of oil and honey, that you may live and not die.

Hezekiah is misleading you when he says that Yahweh will save you. ³³ Have the gods of the nations rescued their land from the hands of the king of Assyria? ³⁴ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? And have the gods delivered Samaria from my hand? ³⁵ Who among all the gods of these nations

has been able to save his country from me? Do you think that Yahweh will deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

³⁶ The people were like deaf men and remained silent since the king had commanded them not to answer him.

³⁷ Then Eliakim with Shebna and Joah came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him what the field commander had said.

19 ¹ When King Hezekiah heard it he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went to the house of Yahweh. ² He sent Eliakim, Shebna and the elders among the priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.

³ And they said to Isaiah, "This is what Hezekiah says: 'Today is a day of distress, rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. ⁴ Would that your God might hear the words of the field commander, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent. May Yahweh your God rebuke him for the words he said, insulting the living God. Therefore offer a prayer for the few of us that are left.'"

⁵ When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, ⁶ he said to them: "Tell your master this word of Yahweh: Do not fear because of the words you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have insulted me. Listen! ⁷ I will let him be frightened. Then he will return to his country, and there I will have him slain by the sword."

⁸ The field commander returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹ This was because King Sennacherib had heard

hat Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was going out to fight him. . .

ienmacherib's letter to Hezekiah

¹⁰ Again Sennacherib sent messengers to Hezekiah with these words, "Say to Hezekiah, king of Judah that his God in whom he trusts may be deceiving him in saying that Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria. ¹¹ Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands they have destroyed! And will you be spared? ¹² Have the gods saved the nations that my fathers destroyed? Gozan and Haran, Rezeph and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the kings of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivvah?"

¹⁴ Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers and when he had read it he went to the house of Yahweh where he unrolled the letter and prayed saying, "O Yahweh, God of hosts and God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim! You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth: ¹⁵ give ear, Yahweh and hear! Open your eyes and see! Listen to all the words of Sennacherib who has sent men to insult the living God! ¹⁷ It is true, Yahweh, that he kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries of the earth. ¹⁸ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not true gods but gods made of wood and stone by human hands. ¹⁹ Now, O Yahweh our God, save us from his hand and let all the kingdoms of the earth know that you alone, Yahweh, are God."

Isaiah intervenes

²⁰ Then Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent word to Hezekiah: "You have called upon Yahweh and he has heard your prayer regarding Sennacherib, king of Assyria. ²¹ This is what Yahweh has spoken against him:

The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises and scorns you; the Daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head behind you.

²² Whom have you insulted and blasphemed?

Against whom have you raised your voice

and lifted up your eyes in arrogance? Against the Holy One of Israel!

²³ Through your servants you have insulted Yahweh.

For you have said:
With the enormous number of my chariots,

I have ascended the heights of the mountains,

the topmost recesses of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars and its choicest fir trees.

I have climbed the remotest heights of its border

to the densest of its forests.

²⁴ I have dug wells and drunk waters;

I have dried up with the soles of my feet all the streams of Egypt.

²⁵ Have you not heard

how I decreed it long ago,

how I planned from days of old

what now I have brought to pass?

Your ordained role was

to lay waste fortified cities,

to turn them into ruinous heaps.

²⁶ Shorn of power, their inhabitants have been dismayed and confounded;

they have been as the grass

and green plants in the field, as the grass on the housetops,

as corn blasted before it is grown up.

²⁷ I know whenever you rise or sit,

whenever you go out or come in;

and I know your rage against me.

²⁸ Because of your rage against me and of your arrogance that I have heard of,

I will put my hook in your nose

and my bridle in your mouth,

and I will turn you back

on the way by which you came.

²⁹ This will be a sign for you, O Hezekiah: This year you will eat the after growth grain, and next year what grows from that, but in the third year, sow and reap, plant vines and eat the fruit.

³⁰ A remnant of the house of Judah shall take root below and produce fruit above. ³¹ For a remnant will come from Jerusalem and survivors from Mount Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will accomplish this. ³² That is why Yahweh has spoken concerning the king of Assyria. He shall not enter this city nor shoot his arrows. ³³ He shall not raise a shield to oppose it or build a siege ramp against it. He shall leave by the way he came and he shall not enter the city, word of Yahweh. ³⁴ I will protect this city and so save it for my own sake and for the sake of David, my servant. ³⁵ It happened that the angel of Yahweh went out that night



and struck one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people rose early next morning there were all the corpses.

³⁶ So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed, returned home and lived in Nineveh. ³⁷ While he was worshipping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer slew him with the sword and then escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon, his son, succeeded him as king.

Hezekiah's illness

20 ¹ In those days Hezekiah fell mortally ill and the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, went to him with a message from Yahweh, "Put your house in order for you shall die; you shall not live."

² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh. ³ "Ah Yahweh! Remember how I have walked before you in truth and wholeheartedly, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Isaiah had still not reached the central courtyard when the word of Yahweh came to him. ⁵ "Go back and tell Hezekiah the ruler of my people what Yahweh, the God of his father David, says: 'I have heard your prayer and I have seen your tears. And now I will cure you. On the third day you will go up to the house of Yahweh. ⁶ See! I am adding fifteen years to your life and I will save you and this city from the power of the king of Assyria. I will defend it for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.'

⁸ Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that Yahweh will heal me and that I shall go up to the House of Yahweh within three days?" ⁹ Isaiah answered, "This shall be the sign for you in Yahweh's name, that Yahweh shall do what he has said: Do you wish the shadow of the second storey to go forward ten steps or to go back?" ¹⁰ Hezekiah said, "It is easy for the shadow to lengthen ten steps, but it shall be wonderful if the shadow goes back

ten steps."¹¹ The prophet Isaiah called on Yahweh, and Yahweh made the shadow go back ten steps, line by line, on the ten steps it had covered on the stairway.

¹² Isaiah then said, "Bring a fig cake to rub on the ulcer and let Hezekiah be cured!"

¹³ At that time Merodach-baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah after hearing that he was recovering from an illness. ¹⁴ Hezekiah rejoiced, so he showed the envoys his treasure house – the silver, the gold, the spices, the fragrant oils, his weapons and all that was in the treasury. There was nothing in this palace, or in all he possessed that Hezekiah did not show.

¹⁵ Then the prophet Isaiah went to the king and said, "What did these men say? Where did they come from?" The king answered, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon."

¹⁶ Isaiah said, "And what have they seen in your house?" The king answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my treasuries that I did not show them."

¹⁷ So Isaiah said to the king, "Listen to this word of Yahweh: ¹⁸ The days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have stored up to this day shall be taken to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says Yahweh.

¹⁹ Some of your own sons who are born of your blood shall be taken away and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

²⁰ Hezekiah answered Isaiah, "What you say is a good word from Yahweh"; for he thought "What does it matter just so I have peace and security in my own lifetime?"

²¹ Now the rest regarding Hezekiah and all about his bravery, how he built the great reservoir and how it supplied water to the city is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²² When Hezekiah slept with his fathers, his son Manasseh reigned in his place.

Manasseh, king of Judah

+21 ¹ Manasseh was twelve years old when he began his reign, and he reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah.

35. Gen 19, 13; Ex 12, 23; 2 S 24, 16 36. Is 37, 37; Is 38 5. Ps 39, 13 8. Jdg 6, 17 20. Is 22, 11

+ The tragic experience of God's people continues. After Hezekiah and his reforms, his son Manasseh takes the opposite attitude.

Manasseh is a king without faith who, moreover, openly promotes idolatry and who persecutes Yahweh's people as Jezebel had done in Israel a century before. With his godless, crime-filled reign, Manasseh succeeds in destroying the

hope placed in David's descendant by Hezekiah's reforms.

His reign lasted forty-five years, during which both faithful and prophets had to keep quiet or hide. The betrayal of Yahweh's Covenant was such that after Manasseh's death, the prophets made him responsible for the fall of Jerusalem.



² He treated Yahweh very badly, imitating the wretched practices of the people Yahweh had driven out from the land in order to give it to the Israelites. ³ He rebuilt the sanctuaries on the hills which had been destroyed by Hezekiah, his father. He built altars to the god Baal and made a sacred pillar similar to the one Ahab, king of Israel, had made. He knelt before all the stars of heaven and worshipped them. ⁴ He built altars in the courtyard of the House of Yahweh, about which Yahweh had said, "Jerusalem shall be the dwelling place of my Name."

⁵ He built altars for all the stars of heaven in the two courtyards of the House of Yahweh.

⁶ He sacrificed his son by fire. He practiced soothsaying and magic, he brought in seers and wizards, doing without ceasing what Yahweh condemned, and so provoking his anger.

⁷ He even put up the sacred pillar of the goddess Asherah in the House of Yahweh in spite of what Yahweh had said to David and to his son, Solomon: "I shall let my Name rest forever in this House, for I have chosen Jerusalem from among all the tribes of Israel. ⁸ I shall no longer let my Name wander out of the land I gave to your fathers, provided that you try to live according to all the Law I gave you through my servant Moses."

⁹ But they did not listen, and Manasseh led them to do things worse than those nations had done whom Yahweh had expelled before the Israelites. ¹⁰ So Yahweh spoke through the mouth of his servants, the prophets, saying,

¹¹ "Manasseh, king of Judah, has multiplied the wretched practices and has acted worse than the Amorites. He has made the people of Judah sin with his repugnant images.

¹² Therefore, I shall bring upon Jerusalem and upon Judah an evil so great that the ears of those who hear of it shall buzz. ¹³ Jerusalem and its kings shall suffer the fate of Samaria and of the family of Ahab. I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a plate to clean it, and then, turns it upside down. ¹⁴ I shall drive away the rest of my people and give them over into the hands of their enemies so that they shall become their prey and booty. ¹⁵ For they did what displeased me and made me angry from the

day when their fathers came out of Egypt to this day."

¹⁶ Manasseh also shed innocent blood in such a quantity that it filled up Jerusalem from one end to the other, besides the sins which he made Judah commit. ¹⁷ The rest regarding Manasseh, all that he did and the sins he committed, is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.

¹⁸ When Manasseh died, they buried him in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza, and his son Amon reigned in his place.

¹⁹ Amon was twenty-two years old when he began his reign, and he reigned for two years in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Meshullemeth, daughter of Haruz, of the city of Jotbah. ²⁰ He treated Yahweh badly, as his father Manasseh had done. ²¹ He completely followed in the footsteps of his father — he served the idols his father had served and bowed down before them. ²² He abandoned Yahweh, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of Yahweh.

²³ The officials of Amon conspired against him, and murdered him in his house. ²⁴ But the citizens killed all who had plotted against the king, and they proclaimed his son Josiah king in his place.

²⁵ The rest regarding Amon and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁶ They buried him in his tomb, in the garden of Uzza, and his son Josiah reigned in his place.

The book of the Law discovered

22 ¹ Josiah was eight years old when he began to govern, and he reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jedidah, daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. ² He did everything that was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and followed in the footsteps of David, his father, without turning aside either to the right or to the left.

3. 18, 4

4. 17, 16

12. 1 S 3, 11

24. 11, 20; 14, 20; 23, 30

2. 2 K 12, 3; 18, 3; Dt 2, 27

■ *Josiah followed the footsteps of David, his father. In the last days of the kingdom of Judah, a king "like David" is going to dedicate himself to renewal of the faith and Yahweh's Covenant, to the reconquest of his ancestors' territories.*

Following the death of the persecuting kings, the faithful slowly awaken. In 622 B.C. the acci-

dental discovery of the "Law" shakes up the kingdom.

I have found the book of the Law in the House of Yahweh. During the previous kingdoms, the sacred books had been forgotten or hidden. What was discovered was certainly most of Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy. This last book was mostly due to the Levites and the



³ In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent his secretary Shaphan, son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, to the House of Yahweh, saying, ⁴ "Go up to the high priest Hilkiah and give him the amount of money which the people offer for the House of Yahweh, and that which the gatekeepers have collected, and when these have been merged, ⁵ let them turn it over to those in charge of the House of Yahweh. ⁶ It shall be given to those carpenters and construction workers who do the repairs of the House. In the same way, they shall buy the wood and stones needed for the repair of the House. ⁷ But do not ask from them any account of the money, for they are honourable men."

⁸ When Hilkiah, the high priest, received the money, he said to Shaphan, the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the House of Yahweh." And he entrusted the Book to Shaphan who read it. ⁹ Then Shaphan went to the king and said, "We have gathered the money in the House, and this has been turned over to the caretakers of the House to make the repairs."

¹⁰ And Shaphan added, "The priest Hilkiah has turned over a book to me." And Shaphan read the book to the king so that he might know it. ¹¹ When the king heard the contents of the book, he tore his clothes and ¹² commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor the secretary Shaphan, and Asaiah, his minister, to do the following, ¹³ "Go and consult Yahweh about the threats of this book which you

have found. Consult him for me, for the people and for the whole of Judah, since our fathers did not listen to what this book says nor to its ordinances. This is why Yahweh felt so angry with us."

¹⁴ The priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to consult the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum, son of Tikva, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the new city.

¹⁵ She answered them, ¹⁶ "This is what Yahweh says: I shall bring evil upon this place and upon its inhabitants according to all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read, ¹⁷ for this people abandoned me and they have burned incense in honour of other gods. Because of all they have done, I am angry against this place, and the fire of my anger will not be quenched.

¹⁸ You shall deliver this answer to the king of Judah, who has sent you to consult Yahweh: Yahweh, the God of Israel says this – The warnings of this book shall not reach you, ¹⁹ for your heart has been touched and you have done penance in the presence of Yahweh when you heard what I have said against this place and its inhabitants, that this place shall be desolate and cursed. You have torn your garments and wept before me, and I have heard you, says Yahweh. ²⁰ Therefore, you shall join your fathers; you shall die and be buried in peace, without seeing any of the evils I shall send against this place."

Josiah's religious reform

23 ¹ The king summoned to his side all the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. ² Then he went up to the House of Yahweh followed by all the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The priests with the prophets and all the people went with him, from the youngest to the oldest. When all were

4. 12, 10 Lk 2, 36	8. Dt 28, 61; Jos 1, 8 2. Ex 24, 7	13. 1 K 22, 7; Jer 21, 2 3. Dt 4, 29	14. Ex 15, 20; Jdg 4, 4; Ne 6, 4;
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priests who had come from the north when Samaria fell. It insisted on fidelity to the Covenant, declaring without hesitation that it was a matter of life or death for the people of God.

We can see the impact of the sacred word. From then on, Josiah (who was then twenty-six years old) focuses on shaping his life, and that of

his people, according to the demands of the Law. He realizes that the Lord's protection is the only thing that can save his people from the great powers. The description of all that had to be destroyed gives us an idea of the wave of paganism which had invaded everything in Manasse's days.

gathered, the book of the Law found in the House of Yahweh was read.

³ The king stood by the pillar; he made a covenant in the presence of Yahweh, promising to follow him, to keep his commandments and laws, and to respect his ordinances. He promised to keep this covenant according to what was written in the book with all his heart and with all his soul. And all the people promised with him.

⁴ Then the king commanded the high priest Hilkiah as well as the priests of lesser rank and all the gatekeepers to bring out all the objects which had been made for Baal, Asherah and for all the stars of heaven. He had them burned outside Jerusalem, in the idle land of Kidron, and had their ashes thrown on the public burial ground of the people.

⁵ The kings of Judah had appointed pagan priests who offered sacrifices in the sanctuaries on the hills, in the different cities of Judah and in the suburbs of Jerusalem. Josiah did away with them and with those who offered incense to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the stars and all the heavenly host. ⁶ The Sacred Pillar that was in the House of Yahweh was brought out of Jerusalem and taken to the brook Kidron, where it was burned and its ashes thrown on the public grave.

⁷ The king demolished the house of the effeminate men who dedicated themselves to prostitution (as was done in the cult of Asherah). This was within the courtyards of the House of

Yahweh, and in this house too the women wove veils for Asherah.

⁸ Right after this he made all the priests from the cities of Judah come to Jerusalem, and he destroyed all the sanctuaries on the hills where they had offered sacrifice from Beer-sheba in the south to Geba in the north. He destroyed the Sanctuary of the Gates that was at the entrance of the gate of Joshua, the city governor. It was on the left side of the entrance gate to the city.

⁹ The priests who had served in the sanctuaries on the hills were maintained like those of Jerusalem, but they could not offer sacrifices in the House of Yahweh.

¹⁰ The king had the place for burning human sacrifices in the valley of Ben-hinnom destroyed, so that no one could sacrifice his sons or daughters in the fire according to the ritual of Molech. ¹¹ The horses which the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun were removed from the entrance of the House of Yahweh; these were in the atrium, near the house of the palace official, Nathanmelech. And the chariots of the sun were burned. ¹² There were altars which the kings of Judah had built on the roof of the palace of Ahaza. There were also altars built by Manasseh in the two courtyards of the House of Yahweh. Josiah had them all destroyed and reduced to dust, which was thrown into the brook Kidron.

¹³ The king destroyed the sanctuaries on the hills facing Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of Olives. Solomon, king of Israel, had built them for Ashtoreth the idol of the Sidonians, for Chemosh, the idol of Moab, and for Milcom, the idol of the Ammonites. ¹⁴ The king broke in pieces the images of the false gods, cut down the sacred pillars, and the places in which these had been were filled with human bones to make them unclean.

◆ ¹⁵ There was also the sanctuary of Bethel, with the altar which Jeroboam, king of

4. 21, 3	9. Dt 18, 6	12. Jer 19, 13	13. 18, 4	14. Lev 21, 1; Num 9, 6
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◆ Taking advantage of the decadence of the Assyrian empire, Josiah had just reconquered part of the land of Israel to the north which had become an Assyrian province a hundred years before. There too, he will destroy all the sanctuaries, idols and practices that offend Yahweh's demands.

For a few years the prophets believe that Yahweh's threats announcing the total destruction of Israel will not be fulfilled. In the reconquest, they even see a sign of the happy times when the Messiah will reunite Judah and Israel as one people with one covenant (Jer 31:31).



Israel, had made. In this place the people of Israel practiced a cult prohibited by Yahweh. The king destroyed it. He set the sanctuary on fire and burned the sacred pillar. ¹⁶ Looking around on all sides, Josiah saw the tombs on the mountain; he had the bones taken out of the tomb and burned on the altar. So the word of Yahweh was fulfilled which the man of God had proclaimed when Jeroboam was standing by the altar during a feast. Josiah noticed the tomb of this man of God, ¹⁷ and he said, "What is that monument that I see?" The people of the city said to him, "That is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah to announce what you have just done with the altar of Bethel." ¹⁸ The king commanded, "Leave the tomb in peace, and let no one touch his bones." And his bones together with the bones of the prophet of Samaria were not touched.

¹⁹ Josiah also removed all the sanctuaries on the hills in the cities of Samaria. These sanctuaries had been made by the kings of Israel and they had provoked the anger of Yahweh. The king destroyed them and did to them as he had done to the temple of Bethel.

²⁰ He slaughtered upon the altars all the priests of the sanctuaries on the hills who were found there, and he burned human bones on the altars. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

²¹ The king gave this order to all the people, "Celebrate the Passover in honour of Yahweh, our God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant."

²² A Passover like this had not been celebrated since the days of the Judges who had governed Israel, or during the time when the kings of Judah reigned. ²³ This most solemn Passover was celebrated in Jerusalem in the eighteenth year of King Josiah.

²⁴ Josiah obeyed all the words of the Law written in the book which the priest Hilkiah had found in the House of Yahweh. He immediately did away with the mediums and seers, the small household gods and the idols, and all those loathsome things seen in the lands of Judah and Jerusalem.

²⁵ There had never been before a king like him who returned to Yahweh with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength, observing all the Law of Moses, nor was another like him seen again.

²⁶ In spite of this, Yahweh did not turn from the fire of his anger. He was angry against Judah because of all the evils Manasseh had done. ²⁷ So Yahweh declared, "I shall also cast away Judah from my presence as I have cast Israel; I shall no longer take Jerusalem into consideration, though this is the city I have chosen and there is the House of which I have said: My Name dwells here."

²⁸ The rest regarding Josiah and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁹ In those days, the Pharaoh Neco crossed the river Euphrates and went to join the king of Asshur. King Josiah set out to confront him, but Neco killed him in Megiddo when he saw him. ³⁰ Josiah's servants brought his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem, and they buried him in his tomb. Then the people took Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, to anoint him and make him king in place of his father.

Josiah's sons

³¹ Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for three months in Jerusalem. His mother was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ³² He did what displeases Yahweh, imitating his fathers. ³³ The Pharaoh Neco bound Jehoahaz in chains in Riblah, in the land of Hamath, since he did not want him to reign in Jerusalem. Then he imposed on the land a contribution of one hundred talents of silver and ten of gold. ³⁴ And he installed as king another son of Josiah, Eliakim, as the successor to his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz away and brought him to Egypt, where Jehoahaz died.

³⁵ Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to the Pharaoh to pay the contribution which the Pharaoh himself exacted from him, though a

17. 1 K 12, 33; 13, 32

27. Dt 12, 5

24. Dt 18, 11; Gen 31, 19; Hos 3, 4

31. Jer 22, 11

25. Dt 6, 5; Mk 12, 30

o Josiah, the reformist king, dies the victim of a political mistake. For centuries, Israel had been squeezed in between Egypt and Assyria (or Asshur). Assyria was the most brutal and cruel nation of those days. When Babylon began to destroy Assyrian power, the Pharaoh, worried by the dynamism of this new "great" power, wants to help the weakened Assyria, forgetting the old rivalry.

Josiah refused to allow it. Jewish conscious-

ness longed for the destruction of "the cruel nation" (see Nahum's prophecies).

How could God allow the death of Josiah, the holy king of the reforms? It was such a stumbling block for Jewish consciousness that the author of this book prefers to say nothing about it. Much later, they will try to justify Josiah's tragic end by a mistake he made (2 Chr 35:21). His death will, in part, inspire the great prophecy of Zec 12:10 and, in the Bible, the name Megiddo becomes the symbol of a curse (Rv 16:16).



tax imposed on all the land. Everyone had to pay his quota according to what he possessed. So Jehoiakim collected from all the people the gold and silver demanded by the Pharaoh.

³⁶ Jehoiakim was thirty-five years old when he began his reign, and he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother was Zebidha, daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. ³⁷ He did what displeased Yahweh, imitating his fathers.

Nebuchadnezzar's invasion

24 ¹ In those days, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became subject to him for three years, after which he rebelled.

² Yahweh then sent against Jehoiakim, bands of Chaldeans, Arameans, Moabites and Ammonites. They raided the land of Judah and destroyed it according to the word Yahweh had spoken through his servants, the prophets.

³ All this happened only because Yahweh had ordered it so. He willed to cast the people far away from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh, and all the evils he had done. ⁴ And also because of the innocent blood he had shed that filled Jerusalem. Because of all this, Yahweh would not pardon them.

⁵ The rest regarding Jehoiakim and all that he did is written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ⁶ When Jehoiakim died, his son Jehoiachin succeeded him.

⁷ The king of Egypt did not leave his own land again because the king of Babylon had conquered all that belonged to the king of Egypt, from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

The first exile

+ ⁸ Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he succeeded his father, and he reigned for three months in Jerusalem. His mother was Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.

⁹ Jehoiachin treated Yahweh badly, as his father had done.

¹⁰ At that time, the officials of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to attack Jerusalem, surrounding the city. ¹¹ Nebuchadnezzar came while the city was being besieged by his men.

¹² Jehoiachin, king of Judah, surrendered together with his mother, his servants, his leaders and the palace officials. It was the eighth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. ¹³ Nebuchadnezzar captured them and he took away the treasures of the House of Yahweh and of the king's house. He also destroyed all the objects of gold which Solomon, king of Israel, had made for the altar of Yahweh. So the word Yahweh had spoken, was fulfilled.

¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar brought into exile all the leaders and prominent men, the blacksmiths and locksmiths, all the men of valour fit for war. A total of ten thousand were exiled to Babylon. Only the poorest sector of the population was left. ¹⁵ Nebuchadnezzar also carried away Jehoiachin with his mother, his wives, the ministers of the palace, and the prominent men of the land.

¹⁶ So all the prominent people numbering seven thousand, the blacksmiths numbering a thousand, and all the men fit for war were deported to Babylon by the king of Babylon.

2. Is 5, 26; Jer 1, 15

4. 21, 16

13. 20, 17

14. Jer 52, 28

+ The destruction of the kingdom of Judah takes place in two stages:

598 B.C. Jehoiakim has just died. His son, Jehoiachin surrenders in the city under siege. First exile of the elite to Babylon. The Chaldeans (people of Babylon) force Zedekiah to be king.

- 587 B.C. Zedekiah rebels against the Chaldeans who come to destroy Jerusalem and its temple. Second exile to Babylon.

The Bible states that this destruction – as that of Samaria – would not have occurred, because God is faithful to his covenant, if there had not been such an accumulation of sins and rebellions. To the very last moments, everything could have been saved if Zedekiah had listened to the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 38).

However, against all hope, the Jewish nation will rise from its ashes sixty years after its destruction. History shows us that the great

¹⁷ He made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king of Jerusalem, in place of Jehoiachin. And he changed his name to Zedekiah.

¹⁸ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

¹⁹ He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, as Jehoiakim had done. ²⁰ So the punishment of Yahweh fell on Jerusalem and Judah, until he cast them away far from his presence.

The Chaldeans conquer and destroy Jerusalem

25 ¹In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched with his entire army and laid siege to Jerusalem. They camped outside the city and built siege works all around it. ² The city was under siege up to the eleventh year of Zedekiah.

³ On the ninth day of the fourth month famine became a serious problem in the city, and throughout the land there was no bread for the people. ⁴ When the city was opened by a breach in the wall, the Judean army fled through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden while the Chaldeans were still around the city and they fled towards the Arabah. ⁵ The Chaldeans followed in hot pursuit of King Zedekiah and caught up with him and captured him in the plains of Jericho. All his army deserted and scattered.

⁶ The Chaldeans seized the king and led him away to Riblah in the

territory of Hamath and there the king of Babylon passed sentence on him.

⁷ There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah in his presence. He then put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with a double bronze chain and took him to Babylon.

⁸ On the seventh day of the fifth month in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, commander of the bodyguard and servant of the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem and ⁹ set fire to the House of Yahweh and the royal palace as well as to all the houses in Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The Chaldean army under the commander of the bodyguard completely demolished all the walls around Jerusalem.

¹¹ Nebuzaradan, commander of the bodyguard, carried off into exile some of the poorest among the people, the remnant of Jews left in the city, those who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the remainder of the artisans. ¹² But he left those among the very poor who were capable of working in vineyards and cultivating the soil.

¹³ The Chaldeans broke into pieces the bronze pillars, the stands and the bronze Sea in the House of Yahweh and carried off all this bronze to Babylon.

¹⁴ They also took the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, the spoons and all the bronze articles used in the temple service. ¹⁵ The commander of the bodyguard took the basins, censers, sprinkling bowls, pots, lampstands, ladles and bowls – all that was made of gold or silver.

¹⁶ The two pillars, the Sea, the movable

18. Jer 52, 1

1. Jer 39, 1-10

empires – the Hitties, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans – disappeared forever. We find their statues in museums and their archives recovered only after thirty centuries of complete oblivion. The people of Judah however, will go back to their land. Purified by their trials and encouraged

by the prophets, they will return seeking a new Covenant, a more sincere and interior one, with their God. They come back from the exile under the guidance of Zerubbabel, a descendant of king Jehoiachin and Jesus' ancestor.



stands which King Solomon had made for the House of Yahweh – all this bronze was of immeasurable weight. ¹⁷ The pillars were each eighteen cubits high. Each had a thickness of four fingers and was hollow. On top of each pillar was a bronze capital five cubits high, and above and around the capital there was filigree work with pomegranates made of bronze.

¹⁸ The commander of the bodyguard took captive Seraiah, the chief priest and Zephaniah the next priest in rank, as well as three doorkeepers.

¹⁹ He also took from those in the city a eunuch in command of the fighting men, five personal advisers to the king who were discovered in the city, the commander's secretary, responsible for military conscription, and sixty of his men who were found in the city.

²⁰ Nebuzaradan took all these away to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹ There at Riblah in the territory of Hamath the king of Babylon had them put to death. So Judah was taken away captive from its own land.

²² As for the remnant of the people whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had left behind, he appointed Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, as their governor.

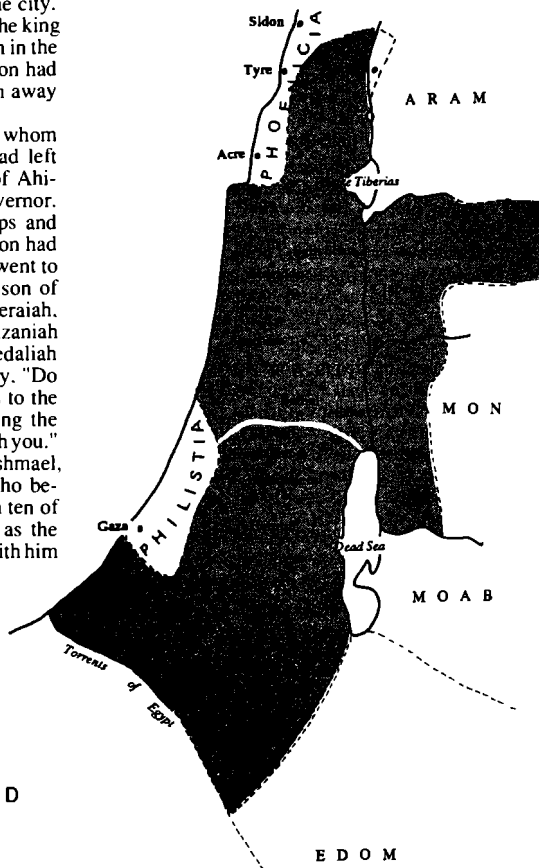
²³ When the commanders of the troops and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah as governor, they went to him at Mizpah. These were Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, Johanan, son of Kareah, Seraiah, son of Tanhumeth, from Natophah, Jaazaniah the Macaathite, with their men. ²⁴ Gedaliah told them and their men most solemnly. "Do not be afraid of submitting yourselves to the Chaldeans. Live in the country obeying the king of Babylon, and all will be well with you."

²⁵ In the seventh month, however, Ishmael, son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, who belonged to the king's family, came with ten of his men and killed Gedaliah as well as the Judeans and the Chaldeans who were with him

at Mizpah. ²⁶ Then all the people, from the greatest to the least, set out with the commanders of the troops and took refuge in Egypt, in fear of the Chaldeans.

²⁷ On the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Evil-merodach, king of Babylon, in the year he came to the throne pardoned Jehoiakim king of Judah and released him from prison. ²⁸ He spoke kindly to him, and gave him more honourable treatment than the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ²⁹ Jehoiakim put aside his prison's garment and for the rest of his life ate at the king's table.

³⁰ Day by day, for as long as he lived, he was maintained by the king of Babylon.



KINGDOM OF DAVID AND SOLOMON



1^o CHRONICLES

For those of us wishing to know the history of Israel, the Chronicles do not teach many new things; what is written here was already related in the books of Samuel and Kings. The difference lies in the way of selecting the events and in their presentation.

The author of Chronicles wanted to show that the future of the Jewish people depended on their faithfulness to the Law of Moses and to the prescriptions of worship.

In his time, the Jews were no longer an independent nation, but more or less an autonomous province of the Persian empire. There was a growing desire among them to become a "theocracy," that is to say, a kingdom of God, ruled in his name by the priests. They were trying to forget the Persian administrators who left them quite free and they were organizing national life around the Temple and the law of Moses. They were looking forward to the coming of "David's son" and they used to say: "If the Law were followed exactly throughout the country for one whole day, the Messiah would come."

This is why the author is almost exclusively interested in the history of the kings of Judah, David's descendants. While the author gives us a list of David's ancestors all the way back to Adam, he does not say a word about the kingdom of Israel where most of the chosen people lived because Israel separated from the kingdom of David. The author gives us many colourful details not found in the books of Samuel and Kings, but generally speaking, his story seems unreal and boring to us. Moreover, carried away by his enthusiastic faith, he delights in great numbers and, at times, he distorts reality to strengthen his point (compare 1 Kings 22:30 and 2 Chro 20:35; Sam 12:31 and 1 Chro 20:3).

How can we benefit from reading this book? On each page we will find the conviction that the believing people must have no other ambition but to fulfil the will of God; other victories will come as a gift. Moreover, it is a reminder that Christ's people, even though they do not have visible borders now and do not live in isolation among other people, must not lose their originality in order to blend with the masses. Believers will never totally resemble those who do not believe, nor will they think in exactly the same way. They have their own mission and are concerned about the visible unity of the church, around those whom God placed among them as his representatives.

Peoples and cities and their relationship with the "sons of Israel"

1 ¹ Adam, Seth, Enosh, ² Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, ³ Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, ⁴ Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth.

⁵ Sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, the Medes, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras.

⁶ Sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Diphath, Togarmah. ⁷ Sons of Javan: Elisha, Tarshish, the Kittim, the Danites.

⁸ Sons of Ham: Cush, Misraim, Put, Canaan.

⁹ Sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabra, Raama, Sabteca, Sons of Raamah: Sheba, Dedan. ¹⁰ Cush became father of Nimrod, the first potentate on earth.

¹¹ Misraim became father of the people of Lud, of Anam, of Lehab, of Naphtu, ¹² of Pathros, Casluh and Capthor, from which the Philistines came. ¹³ Canaan became father of Sidon, his first-born, then Heth, ¹⁴ and the Jebusites, the Amorites, Gergashites, ¹⁵ Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁶ Arvadites, Zemarites, Hamathites.

¹⁷ Sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram. Sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech.

¹⁸ Arpachshad became father of Shelah, and Shelah became father of Eber. ¹⁹ To Eber were born two sons; the first was called Peleg, because it was in his time the earth was divided, and his brother was called Joktan.

²⁰ Joktan became father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazamaveth, Jerah, ²¹ Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²² Ebal, Abimael, Sheba, ²³ Ophir, Havilah, Jobab: all these are sons of Joktan.

²⁴ Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, ²⁵ Eber, Peleg, Reu, ²⁶ Serug, Nahor, Terah, ²⁷ Abram, that is Abraham.

Descendants of Abraham

²⁸ Sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael. ²⁹ Sons of Ishmael: Nebaioth (his first born) then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ³⁰ Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, ³¹ Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah.

³² Sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: Zimran, Jokshan, ³³ Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan. Sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoth, Abida, Eldaah.

³⁴ Abraham was the father of Isaac who had two sons: Esau and Israel. ³⁵ The descendants of Esau were

Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jilam and Korah. ³⁶The descendants of Eliphaz were: Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, Timna and Amalek. ³⁷The descendants of Reuel were Zerah, Shammah, and Mizpah. ³⁸The sons of Seir were: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. ³⁹The clans descended from Lotan were Hori and Homam. Lotan's sister was named Timna. ⁴⁰The clans descended from Shobal were Alian, Manahath, Ebal, Shephi, and Onam. The descendants of Zibeon were Aiah and Anah. ⁴¹Anah had a son named Dishon, who was the ancestor of the clans of Hanuran, Eshban, Ithuran, and Cheran. ⁴²Ezer was the ancestor of the clans of Bilhan, Zavaan, and Jaakan.

⁴³Here are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before an Israelite king ruled: Bela son of Bero; his city was called Dinhabah. ⁴⁴When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah became king. ⁴⁵When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites became king. ⁴⁶When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad became king; he defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, and his city was called Avith. ⁴⁷When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah became king. ⁴⁸Samlah died and Saul of Rehoboth-han-nahar became king. ⁴⁹When Saul died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor became king. ⁵⁰When Baal-hanan died, Hadad became king. His city was called Palti; his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred, from Mezahab.

⁵¹After Hadad died, these were the chiefs of Edom: Chief of Timna, Chief of Ailah, Chief Jetheth, ⁵²Chief Dholibamah, Chief of Elah, Chief Pinon, ⁵³Chief Kenaz, Chief Teman, Chief Mibzar, Chief Magdiel, and Chief Iram.

The sons of Jacob and the descendants of Judah

¹These are the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar and Zebulun; ²Dan, Joseph and Benjamin, Nephthali; Gad and Asher.

³Judah had five sons in all. The first three were born to him by Bath-shua the Canaanite woman. They were Er, Onan and Shelah. Er, Judah's first-born, was so evil that Yahweh put him to death. ⁴By his daughter-in-law Tamar, Judah had two more sons, Perez and Zerah. ⁵Perez had two sons, Hezron and Hamul. ⁶His brother Zerah had five sons: Zimri, Hetan, Heman, Calcol and Dara. ⁷One of them, Achur, son of Carmi — brought trouble upon the people of Israel by keeping a pot that had been devoted to God. ⁸Ethan had one son, Azariah.

⁹Hezron became the father of Jerahmeel, Ram, and Caleb. ¹⁰Ram was the father of Amminadab; Amminadab of Nahshan. ¹¹Nahshan, who was a prince of the tribe of Judah, was the father of Salmon; Salmon of Boaz; ¹²Boaz of Obed; Obed of Jesse. ¹³Jesse had seven sons: Eliab, the first-born, Abinadab, Shammah, ¹⁴Nethanel, Raddai, ¹⁵Ozem and David, the youngest. Jesse had two daughters: Zerwiah and Abigail. ¹⁶Zerwiah had three sons: Abishai, Joab and Asahel. ¹⁷Abigail married Jether the Ishmaelite. They had a son named Amasa.

¹⁸Caleb, son of Hezron, married Azubah and had a daughter named Jerioth. Jerioth had three sons: Jether, Shobab and Ardun. ¹⁹Azubah died, and Caleb married Ephrath, and they had a son named Hur. ²⁰Hur became father of Uri and grandfather of Bezalel.

²¹When Hezron was sixty years old he married Machir's daughter, the sister of Gilead. They had a son named Segub, who had a son named Jair. ²²Jair ruled twenty-three towns in the land of Gilead. ²³But the kingdoms of Geshur and Aram took from them the

villages of Jair, that is Kenath and its towns, sixty towns in all. All this had belonged to the descendants of Machir, father of Gilead.

²⁴After Hezron's death, his son Caleb married Ephrathah, his father's widow. They had a son named Ashur, the father of Tekoa.

²⁵Jerahmeel, Hezron's eldest son, had five sons: Ram, his first-born, Bunah, Oren, Ozem and Ahijah. ²⁶Jerahmeel had another wife called Atarah; she was the mother of Onam.

²⁷Ram had three sons: Maaz, Jamin and Eker.

²⁸Onam was the father of Shammai and Jada; Shammai, of Nadab and Abishur. ²⁹Abishur's wife was called Abihail; she bore him Ahban and Molid. ³⁰Nadab had two sons, Seled and Appaim, but Seled died leaving no son. ³¹Appaim was the father of Ishi, who was the father of Sheshan, Sheshan was the father of Ahlai. ³²Jada, Shammai's brother, had two sons: Jether and Jonathan. Jether died leaving no sons. ³³Jonathan had two sons: Peleth and Zaza.

These were all descendants of Jerahmeel.

³⁴Sheshan had no sons, only daughters. ³⁵He had an Egyptian slave named Jarha to whom he gave his daughter in marriage. ³⁶They had a son named Attai. The ancestral line from Attai to Elishama is as follows: Attai, Nathan, ³⁷Zabab, Ephlal, Obed, ³⁸Jehu, Azariah, ³⁹Helez, Eleasah, ⁴⁰Sismai, Shallum, ⁴¹Jekamiah, and Elishama.

⁴²The first-born son of Caleb, Jerahmeel's brother, was named Mesha. Mesha was the father of Ziph, who was the father of Meresha. ⁴³Meresha was father of Hebron who had four sons: Korah, Tappuah, Rekem and Shema. ⁴⁴Shema became father of Raham and grandfather of Jorkeam. Rekem became father of Shammai ⁴⁵and grandfather of Maon. Maon became father of Bethzur.

⁴⁶Caleb had a concubine named Ephah who gave birth to Haran, Moza and Gazez. Haran also had a son named Gazez. ⁴⁷Jahdai had six sons: Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah and Shaaph. ⁴⁸Caleb had another concubine, Maacah, who gave birth to Sheber and Tirhanah. ⁴⁹Later she had two more sons: Shaaph, who founded the town of Madmannah, and Sheva, who founded the towns of Machbenah and Gibeia. The daughter of Caleb was Achsah.

⁵⁰The following were also descendants of Caleb. Hur was the first-born son of Ephrath. Hur's son Shobal was father of Kiriath-jearim; ⁵¹Salma, father of Bethlehem, and Haroeh, father of Beth-gader. ⁵²Shobal, the father of Kiriath-jearim was the father of the people of Haroah, that is half of the Manahathites, ⁵³and also the clans living in Kiriath-jearim: the Ithrites, Puthites, Shumathites and Mishraites. The people of the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol belonged to these clans.

⁵⁴Sons of Salma: Bethlehem, Netophath, Atroth Beth-Joab, and the Zorites, who were one of the clans in Manaheth. The Sofrites lived in the town of Jabez: the Tirathites, Shimeathites, and Sucathites. They were Cainites, descendants of Jamat, the Rechabites' ancestor.

The descendants of David

³These are the sons of David who were born to him while he was in Hebron: the first-born Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel; second, Daniel, whose mother was Abigail from Carmel; ³third, Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; fourth, Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith; ⁵fifth, Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital; sixth, Ithrean, whose mother was

Eglah. ⁴ All six were born to him in Hebron, where he ruled for seven years and six months.

He ruled as king for thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ⁵ Many sons were born to him in Jerusalem. By his wife Bathsheba, daughter of Ammiel, he had four sons: Shimea, Shobab, Nathan and Solomon. Nine other sons were: ⁶ Ithar, Elishama, Eliphelet, ⁷ Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, ⁸ Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

⁹ All these were sons of David, besides other sons by the concubines. Tamar was their sister.

¹⁰ These are the descendants of King Solomon from father to son: Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, ¹¹ Joram, Ahaziah, Joash, ¹² Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, ¹³ Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, ¹⁴ Amon, and Josiah. ¹⁵ Josiah had four sons: Johanan, the first-born, Jehoiaikim second, Zedekiah third, and Shallum fourth. ¹⁶ The sons of Jehoiaikim were: Jeconiah and Zedekiah.

¹⁷ These are the descendants of King Jeconiah, who was taken captive by the Babylonians. Jeconiah had seven sons: Shealtiel, ¹⁸ Malchiram, Pedaiiah, She-nazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah. ¹⁹ Pedaiiah had two sons: Zerubbabel and Shimei. Zerubbabel had two sons, Meshullam and Hananiah, and one daughter, Shelomith. ²⁰ Meshullam had five sons: Hashubah, Ohel, Berechiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-besed. ²¹ Hananiah's two sons were Pelatish and Jeshiah. Jeshiah was the father of Rephaiah, who was the father of Aman, who was the father of Obadiah and grandfather of Shecaniah. ²² Shecaniah's son was Shemaiah and his five grandsons were: Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Nedariah, and Shaphat. ²³ Neariah's three sons were: Elieonai, Hizkiah and Azrikam. ²⁴ Elieonai's seven sons were: Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah, and Anani.

Heads of families of the twelve tribes

4 ¹ Some of the descendants of Judah are: Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and Shobai. ² Shobai was the father of Reaiah, who was the father of Jahath, the father of Ahumai and Lahad: these people lived in Zorah.

³ These were the descendants of Hareph, the father of Elam: Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash, whose sister was called Hazzeleponi. ⁴ Penuel became father of Gedor, and Ezer the father of Hushah. These are the descendants of Hur, the first-born of Ephraim, father of Bethlehem.

⁵ Ashhur, father of Tekoa, had two wives: Helah and Naarah. ⁶ Naarah bore him four sons: Ahuzzam, Hephher, the Temei and the Haahashitari. ⁷ Ashur had three sons by Helah: Zereth, Zohar, Ethnan. ⁸ Koz became father of Anub and Zobebah, and the clans of Aharhel son of Harum. ⁹ Jabez was the most known of them. His mother had given him the name Jabez, to recall that "in pain she had given birth to him." ¹⁰ Jabez called on the God of Israel, "If you truly bless me, you will give me much land. Be with me, and keep me from anything that might harm me or cause me pain." God gave him what he had prayed for.

¹¹ Chelub, the brother of Shuhah, became father of Mehir, who was the father of Eshton. ¹² Eshton had three sons: Bethrapha, Paseah and Tehinnah. Tehinnah was the father of Imahah. The descendants of these men lived in Rechah.

¹³ Kenaz had two sons, Othniel and Seraiah. Othniel also had two sons: Hathath and Meonothai. ¹⁴ who became the father of Ophrah. Seraiah became the father of Joab, the founder of Craftsman's Valley, where skilled workers lived.

¹⁵ Caleb, son of Jephunneh had three sons: Iru, Elah and Naam. Son of Elah: Kenaz.

¹⁶ The sons of Jchallelel were: Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria, and Asarel.

¹⁷ Ezrah had four sons: Jeher, Mered, Ephraim, and Jalon. Mered's wife Bithiah, a daughter of the King of Egypt, gave birth to a daughter, Miriam, and two sons, Shammai and Ishbah. Ishbah was the father of Eshtemoa. ¹⁸ Mered also had a wife from the tribe of Judah who gave birth to three sons: Jered, the father of Gedor; Heber, father of Socoi; and Jekuthiel, father of Zanoah.

¹⁹ Hodiah married the sister of Naham. Their descendants formed the clan of Garm, which lived in the town of Keilah, and the clan of Maacath, which lived in the town of Eshtemoa.

²⁰ The sons of Shimon were: Amnon, Rinnah, Benhanan, and Tilon.

The sons of Ishi were: Zoheth and Ben-zoheth.

²¹ The descendants of Shelah son of Judah were: Er, father of Lecah; Laadah, father of Mareshah; and the clans of linen weavers of Beth-ashbea; ²² Jokim and the people who lived in Cozeba; Joash and Saraph who went to Moab to take wives before returning to Bethlehem (these are events of long ago.) ²³ They were potters and lived in the towns of Netaim and Gederah; they stayed with the king there, employed in his workshop.

²⁴ Simeon had five sons; Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerach, and Shaul. ²⁵ Shaul's son was Shallum, his grandson was Mibsam, and his great-grandson was Mishma. ²⁶ The sons of Mishma were: Hammuel, Zakur, Simi. ²⁷ Simi had sixteen sons and daughters, but his brothers did not have many children, and none of their families increased as the families of Judah did.

²⁸ They lived in Beersheba, Moladah and Hazar-shual, ²⁹ Bilhah, Ezem and Tolad, ³⁰ Bethuel, Hormah and Ziklag. ³¹ Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susim, Bethbiri, Shaaraim. These were their towns until the reign of David. ³² Their outlying villages were: Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Tochen and Ashan, five towns, ³³ with all their surrounding villages as far as Baalath. Here they had their settlements and sorted themselves into their various groups.

³⁴ Meshobab, Jarmelech, Joshua son of Amaziah, ³⁵ Joel, Jehu son of Joshubiah, son of Seraiah, son of Asiel, ³⁶ Elieonai, Jaakobah, Jeshohiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, ³⁷ Ziza, Ben-shiphi, Benal-lon, Ben-jedaiah, Ben-shimri, Ben-shemaiah, ³⁸ These men came with their clans and families; they grew in number and spread. ³⁹ As they searched for pasture for their flocks they travelled from the Gerar pass to the eastern end of the valley. ⁴⁰ where they found good, fat pasture; the land was broad, untroubled and peaceful.

Hamites had been living there before them. ⁴¹ But in the time of Hezekiah king of Judah this group of Simeon's tribe arrived there, overran their tents and the dwellings they found there. They wiped them out through an anathema still in force today and settled in their place, since there was pasture for their flocks.

⁴² Some of them, belonging to the sons of Simeon, reached Mount Seir: five hundred men led by Pelathiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi. ⁴³ They defeated the surviving fugitives of Amalek and still live there today.

5 ¹ Descendants of Reuben, first-born of Israel. He was indeed the first-born but, when he had relations with his father's concubine, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel. The group of Joseph, however did not keep this first-born right

²because Judah proved more powerful than his brothers (and from him proceeds the Ruler), but the first-born right belongs to the tribes of Joseph.

³Sons of Reuben, first-born of Israel: Hanoch, Palu, Hezron, Carmi.

⁴Sons of Joel: Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son, ⁵Micah his son, Reaiah his son, Baal his son, ⁶Beerah his son, whom Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria carried off into exile. He was a prince of the Reubenites.

⁷His kinsmen, by clans, grouped according to their kinship: Jeiel, the chief, Zechariah, ⁸Bela son of Azaz, son of Shema, son of Joel.

⁹These lived in Aroer as far as Nebo and Baal-Mehon. ¹⁰These extended to the east toward the River Euphrates, reaching the desert, because their flocks had multiplied in the land of Galaad.

¹¹In the days of Saul they waged war against the Agarties who were defeated, and they occupied their homes east of Galaad.

¹²The sons of Gad lived opposite them, in the land of Bashan, as far as Salchah. ¹³First, Joel, and then Shaphan, Yami and Basat in Basan.

¹⁴The other families of the tribe were those of Michael, Mesullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber.

¹⁵These are the descendants of Abihail, whose ancestors were traced back as follows: Abihail, Huri, Jaroah, Gilead, Michael, Jeshishai, Jahdo, Buz. ¹⁶Ahi son of Abdiel, and grandson of Guni, was head of these clans.

¹⁷They had settled in the territory of Gilead and Bashan, in the towns there and all over the pasture lands of Sharon. ¹⁸(All were listed in the family records in the days of king Jotham of Judah and King Jeroboam of Israel).

¹⁹The people of Reuben, Gad, and half tribe of Manasseh, were 44,760 valiant men, well-trained in the use of shields, swords, and bows. ²⁰They waged war against the Hagrite tribes of Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab, and as they put their trust in God and called on him for help, ²¹they were victorious over the Hagrites and all their allies. ²²They took with them from the Hagrites' livestock, 50,000 camels, 25,000 sheep, and 2,000 donkeys. ²³They took 100,000 prisoners of war, but many of the enemy had been killed for it was God's war. And they settled in what had been Hagrite territory until the exile.

²⁴The half tribe of Manasseh settled in the land between Bashan and Baal-hermon, Senir and Mount Hermon, and they were very numerous. ²⁵These are the heads of their clans: Ephraim, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel. These were famous warriors and leaders of their clans.

²⁶But they were unfaithful to the God of their ancestors and worshipped the gods of the peoples whom God had driven out of the land. ²⁷So the God of Israel brought against them the anger of Pul, king of Assyria, and of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, who deported the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. They were taken off to Halah near Habor and the river Gozan. They are still there today.

The ancestral line of the high priests

²⁸Sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

²⁹Sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

³⁰Sons of Amram: Aaron, Moses and Mary. Sons of Aaron: Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

³¹The descendants of Eleazar from one generation to the next are as follows: Phinehas, Abishua, Bukki, Uzzi, ³²Zerahiah, Meraioth, ³³Amariah, Ahitub, ³⁴Zadok, Ahimaaz, ³⁵Azariah, Johanan, ³⁶Azariah

(the one who served as priest in the Temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem), ³⁷Amariah, Ahitub, ³⁸Zadok, Shallum, ³⁹Hilkiah, Azariah, ⁴⁰Seraiah, Jehoazadac. ⁴¹Jehoazadac was deported when Yahweh, through King Nebuchadnezzar, sent into exile the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

The families of Levi

6 ¹Levi had three sons: Gershom, Kohath and Merari.

²These are the names of the sons of Gershom: Libni and Shimei.

³Sons of Kohath: Amran, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. ⁴Sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of Levi according to their ancestors.

⁵Descendants of Gershom from one generation to the next: Libni, Jahath, Zimmah, ⁶Joah, Iddo, Zerah, Jeathra.

⁷Descendants of Kohath from one generation to the next: Amminadab, Korah, Assir, ⁸Elkanah, Ebiasaph, Assir, ⁹Tahath, Uriel, Uzziash, Shaul. ¹⁰Elkanah had two sons, Amasai and Ahimoth. ¹¹Elkanah, son of Ahimoth, Zophai, Nahath, ¹²Eliab, Jeroham, Elkanah. ¹³The sons of Elkanah were: Samuel his first-born, and Abijah. Samuel had two sons: Joel, the first-born, and Abijah, the younger.

¹⁴Descendants of Merari from one generation to the next: Mahli, Libni, ¹⁵Shimei, Uziah, Shimea, Hagiah, Asaiah.

¹⁶These are the men David named to lead the singing in the Temple of Yahweh when the ark had come to rest there. ¹⁷They were responsible for the singing before the Holy Tent of the Tent of Meeting until Solomon had built the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. They did their duties in accordance with the rules.

¹⁸These are the men who accomplished this ministry, and their sons:

Of the clan of Kohath: Herman, the leader of the first choir, was the son of Joel. His ancestral line went back to Jacob as follows: Herman, Joel, Samuel, ¹⁹Elkanah, Jeroham, Eliel, Toah, Zuph, ²⁰Elkanah, Mahath, Amasai, ²¹Elkanah, Joel, Azariah, Zephaniah, ²²Tahath, Assir, Ebiasaph, Korah, ²³Izhar, Kohath, Levi, Jacob.

²⁴His brother Asaph was leader of the second choir. His ancestral line went back to Levi as follows: Asaph, Berchiah, Shimea, ²⁵Michael, Baaseiah, Malchiah, ²⁶Ethni, Zerah, Adaiash, ²⁷Ethan, Zimmah, Shimei, ²⁸Jahath, Gershom, Levi.

²⁹Ethan of the clan of Merari was the leader of the third choir, at the left side. His ancestral line went back to Levi as follows: Ethan, Kishi, Abdi, Malluch, ³⁰Hashabiah, Amaziash, Hilkiah, ³¹Amzi, Bani, Shemer, ³²Mahli, Mushi, Medrari, Levi.

³³Their brother Levites were in charge of the Holy Tent of the Temple of Yahweh. ³⁴Aaron and his descendants burnt the offerings on the altar for burnt offering and on the altar of incense. They were responsible for all the worship in the Most Holy Place and for the atonement for Israel's sins, according to the instructions of Moses, the servant of God.

³⁵This is the line of Aaron's descendants: Eleazar, Phinehas, Abishua, ³⁶Bukki, Uzzi, Zerahiah, ³⁷Meraioth, Amariah, Ahitub, ³⁸Zadok, Ahimaaz.

³⁹These are the places they lived in, according to the boundaries of their settlements.

⁴⁰To the sons of Aaron of the Kohath clan (to whom the first share of land was assigned) they gave Hebron in the land of Judah and the pasture lands

nearby. ⁴¹The fields and villages of this town, however, had been given to Caleb, son of Jephunneh. ⁴²The following towns were given to the descendants of Aaron: Hebron, a city of refuge, Jattir, Libnah, Esh-temoa, ⁴³Hilen, Debir, ⁴⁴Ashan, and Bethm-She-mesh, with pasture lands near them. ⁴⁵In the territory of Benjamin they were given the following towns with their pasture lands: Geba, Alemeth, and Anathoth. A total of thirteen towns was given them for all their families to live in.

⁴⁶To the rest of the clan of Kohath, family by family, ten towns were given from the territory of the half tribe of Manasseh. ⁴⁷The clan of Gershon, family by family, were given thirteen towns from the territories of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and from the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan. ⁴⁸The clan of Merari, family by family, were given twelve towns from the territories of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. ⁴⁹The people of Israel gave these towns with their pasture lands to the Lev-ites.

⁵⁰They received from the territories of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin the towns to which they gave names.

⁵¹The clans of Kohath obtained towns by lot from the tribe of Ephraim. ⁵²They were given the following towns with their pasture lands: Shechem, the city of refuge in the hill country of Ephraim, Gezer, ⁵³Jokmeam, Beth-Horon, ⁵⁴Aijalon, and Gath Rim-mon. ⁵⁵In the territory of the half tribe of Manasseh, they were given the towns of Aner and Beileam with their pasture lands.

⁵⁶The clan of Gershon, family by family, were given the following towns with their pasture lands. In the territory of the half tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan, and Ashtaroth. ⁵⁷In the territory of Issachar: Kedesh, Daberath, ⁵⁸Ramoth, and Anem. ⁵⁹In the territory of Asher: Mashal, Abdon, ⁶⁰Hukok, and Rehob. ⁶¹In the territory of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee, Hammon, and Kiriatshaim.

⁶²To the rest of the clan of Merari were given the following towns with their pasture lands. In the territory of Zebulun: Rimmon and Tabor. ⁶³In the territory of Reuben, beyond the Jordan River near Jericho: Bezer on the high, flat land, Jahzah, ⁶⁴Kedem-moth, and Mephath. ⁶⁵In the territory of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead, Mahanaim, ⁶⁶Heshbon, and Jazer.

Clans and families of the northern tribes

7 ¹Issachar had four sons: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron.

²Tola had six sons: Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jah-mai, Ibsam, and Shemuel. They were heads of fam-ilies of the clan of Tola and famous warriors. In the time of David, the descendants numbered 22,600. Uzzi had one son, Izrahiah. ³Izrahiah had four sons: Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah. All five of these were chiefs ⁴and they were obliged to enlist their troops: 36,000 men, for they had many wives and children. ⁵The family records of all the clans of Issa-char listed a total of 87,000 men able to give military service.

⁶Benjamin had three sons: Bela, Becher, and Je-diah.

⁷Bela had five sons: Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth and Iri. They were head of families in the clan and famous warriors. Their family records listed 22,034 men able to give military service. ⁸Becher had nine sons: Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jere-moth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. ⁹Their family

records listed 17,200 men able to give military service. ¹⁰Jediael had one son, Bilhan who had seven sons: Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Chenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar. ¹¹They were heads of fam-ilies in the clan and famous warriors. ¹²Shuppin and Huppin also belonged to this tribe.

¹³Naphtali had four sons: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shallum. They were descendants of Bilhan.

¹⁴Manasseh had Asriel by his Aramean concu-bine. She gave birth also to Machir, father of Gilead. ¹⁵Gilead was the father of Ifer and Eleeg. The son of Ifer was Zelophehad. Zelophehad had only daugh-ters.

¹⁶Maacah, wife of Machir, gave birth to two sons, whom they named Peresh and Sheresh. Peresh had two sons: Ulam and Rakem. ¹⁷Ulam had a son named Bed-an. These were the descendants of Gilead, the son of Machir and grandson of Manas-seh. ¹⁸Gilead's sister Molecheth had three sons: Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mah-lah. ¹⁹Sherida had four sons: Ahian, Shechem, Likhi and Aniam.

²⁰These are the descendants of Ephraim from one generation to the next: Shuthelah, Bere, Tahath, Elea-dah, Tahath, Zabad, Shuthelah. Ephraim's two other sons, Ezer and Elead, ²¹were killed when they tried to steal the cattle belonging to the people of Gath. ²²Eph-raim, their father, mourned for them for a long time: and his brothers came to comfort him. ²³Then Eph-raim went to his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to a son whom she called Beriah, because of the trouble that had come to their family. ²⁴Beriah's daughter, Sheerah, built Lower and Upper Beth-horon and Uzzan-sheerah.

Ephraim also had a son named Rephah. The de-scendants of ²⁵Rephah were as follows: Resheph, Te-lah, Tahan, ²⁶Ladan, Ammihud, Elishama, ²⁷Nun, Joshua. ²⁸They had lands and settlements in Bethel and its towns, in Naasan to the east, in Gezez and its towns to the west, Schechem and its towns, as far as Ayyah and its towns. ²⁹Beth-shean, Taanach, Megid-do, Dor, each with its towns, were controlled by the descendants of Manasseh. In all these places lived the descendants of Joseph, son of Jacob.

³⁰Asher had four sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah; and one daughter, Serah. ³¹Sons of Beriah: He-ber and Malchiel. Malchiel was the father of Birzath: ³²Heber had three sons: Japhlet, Shomer and Hothani; and one daughter Shura. ³³Japhlet had three sons: Pasah, Birnah and Ashvath. ³⁴Shomar, his brother, also had three sons: Rohgah, Hubbah and Aram. ³⁵His brother Hotham had four sons: Zophah, Imna, She-leah, and Amal. ³⁶The sons of Zophal were: Suah, Hamepher, Shual, Beri and Imrah. ³⁷Bezer, Hod, Shamra, Shilshah, Ithran and Beerah. ³⁸The sons of Ithram were Jephunneh, Pispah, Ara, ³⁹and the sons of: Ulla were descendants of Asher. They were heads of families, and famous warriors; Asher's descendants in-cluded 26,000 men able to give military service.

8 ¹Benjamin became father of Bela, his first-born, Ashbel second, Ahiram third, ²Nohah fourth, Rappa fifth. ³Bela had sons: Addar, Gera, Abihud, ⁴Abishua, Naaman and Ahoah, ⁵Gera, Shephuphan and Huram.

⁶These are the sons of Ehud. They were heads of families of the inhabitants of Geba and led them into exile at Manahath: ⁷Naaman, Ahijah and Gera. It was he who led them into exile, he became the father of Uz-zah and Ahihud.

⁸He became father of Shaharaim in the plains of

Moab after he had dismissed his wives, Hushim and Baara. ⁹By his new wife he had sons: Jobab, Zibia, Meshah, Malcam, ¹⁰Jeuz, Sachia, Mirmah. These were his sons, heads of families.

¹¹By Hushim he had sons: Abitub and Elpaal. ¹²Sons of Elpaal: Eber, Misham and Shemed: it was he who built Ono and Lud with its outlying towns.

¹³Beriah and Shema. They were heads of families of the inhabitants of Aijaloz. ¹⁴Shashak was his brother.

Jeremoth, ¹⁵Zebadiah, Arad, Eder, ¹⁶Michael, Ishpah. Joha were sons of Beriah. ¹⁷Zebadiah Meshulam, Hizki, Haber, ¹⁸Ishmerai, Izliah, Jobab were sons of Elpaal. ¹⁹Jakim, Zichri, Zabdai, ²⁰Elioenai, Zillethai, Eliel, ²¹Adaiah, Beraiah, Shimran were sons of Shimei.

²²Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, ²³Abdon, Zichri, Hanan, ²⁴Hananiah, Elam, Anthothiah, ²⁵Iphdeiah, Penuel were sons of Shashak. ²⁶Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah, ²⁷Jareshai, Elijah, Zichri were sons of Jeroham. ²⁸These were the heads of families, grouped according to their kinship. They lived in Jerusalem.

²⁹At Gibeon lived Abi-gibeon, whose wife was Maacah. ³⁰His first-born son was Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, ³¹Gedor, Ahio, Zecher, ³²and Mikloth who became father of Shimeah. These also, near their kinsmen, lived with their kinsmen in Jerusalem.

³³Ner was father of Kish, Kish father of Saul, Saul father of Jonathan, Malchi-shua, Abinadab and Eshbaal. ³⁴Son of Jonathan: Meribbaal. Meribbaal became father of Micah. ³⁵Sons of Micah: Pithon, Melech, Tarea, Ahaz. ³⁶Ahaz became father of Jehoaddah, Jehoaddah father of Alemeth, Aznaveth and Zimri. Zimri became father of Moza, ³⁷Moza father of Binea. Raphah his son. Eleasah his son, Azel his son. ³⁸Azel had six sons, whose names were these: Azrikam, Bocheru, his firstborn, then Ishmael, Shehariah, Obadiah, Hanan. All these were sons of Azel. ³⁹Sons of Eshek his brother: Ulam, his firstborn, Eush second, Eliphelet third. ⁴⁰Ulam had sons, stout fighting men and bowmen. They had numerous sons and grandsons, a hundred and fifty of them.

All these were sons of Benjamin.

Inhabitants of Jerusalem after the exile

9 All the Israelites were classified in related groups, but they were listed in the Book of the Kings of Israel. As for those of Judah, they were deported to Babylon for their faithlessness. ²The first who came back to their towns and their estates were Israelites, priests, Levites and helpers. ³So in Jerusalem lived Judeans, Ben-jaminites, Ephraimites and Manassites.

⁴Uthai son of Ammihud, son of Omri, son of Imri, son of Bani, one of the sons of Perez son of Judah. ⁵Of the Shilonites: Asaiah, the firstborn, and his sons. ⁶Of the sons of Zerah: Jeuel. Also their kinsmen: six hundred and ninety.

⁷Of the tribe of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshulam, son of Hodaviah, son of Hassenuah; ⁸Ibneiah son of Jeroham; Elah son of Uzzi, son of Michri; Mesulam son of Shephatiah, son of Reuel, son of Ibnijah. ⁹They had nine hundred and fifty-six kinsmen, grouped according to their kinship. All these men were heads of family.

¹⁰Of the priests: Jedaiah, Jehoiairib, Jachin, ¹¹Azaiah son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, ruler of the house of

God. ¹²Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, Maasai son of Adiel, son of Jahzerah, son of Meshullam, son of Meshillemith, son of Immer. ¹³They had kinsmen, heads of families, one thousand seven hundred and sixty men who undertook the duties of the Temple of God.

¹⁴Of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah of the sons of Merari, ¹⁵Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, Mattaniah, son of Imma, son of Zichri, son of Asaph, ¹⁶Obadiah son of Shemaiah, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun, and Berechiah son of Asa, son of Elkannah who lived in the villages of the Neophathites.

¹⁷The keepers of the gate: Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman and their kinsmen. Shallum, was their head, ¹⁸and they still keep station at the royal gate, to the east. These were the gatekeepers of the camp of the Levites. ¹⁹Shallum son of Kore, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, with his brother Korahites, of the same family, were responsible for the liturgical service; they were "keepers of the threshold for the Tent," for their fathers had guarded the entrance of the camp of Yahweh. ²⁰At one time, Phinehas son of Eleazar had ruled them and they served before Yahweh. ²¹Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was keeper of the gate at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ²²All the keepers of the gate at the thresholds were picked men; there were two hundred and twelve of them and they were registered in their various villages. These were appointed by David and Samuel the seer because of their loyalty. ²³They and their sons had the guardianship of the gates of the House of Yahweh, the house of the Tent. ²⁴On the four sides stood the keepers of the gate, east, west, north, and south. ²⁵Their kinsmen in their villages would come to join them for a week from time to time, ²⁶since the four head gatekeepers themselves lived there permanently. Some of them were responsible for the chambers and treasuries of the house of God. ²⁷They spent the night in the precincts of the house of God, their duties being to guard it and open it.

²⁸Some of them were responsible for the furnishings of worship; they counted them whenever they put them away and took them out. ²⁹Others were in charge of the furniture and all the sacred furnishings, the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, the spices, ³⁰but only the priests prepared the mixture for the spices.

³¹One of the Levites, Mattithiah the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, was responsible for the offerings that were to be baked on the pan. ³²Some of their kinsmen the Kohathites were responsible for the loaves to be set out in rows sabbath by sabbath.

³³These are the cantors, heads of the levitical families. When free from service they lived in the Temple chambers, because they were on duty day and night.

³⁴These were the heads of the families of the Levites, grouped according to their families. These heads lived in Jerusalem.

The ancestors of Saul. His death.

³⁵In the city of Gibeon lived Abigibeon and Jeiel, whose wife was called Maacah. ³⁶His firstborn was Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, ³⁷Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah. ³⁸Mikloth became father of Shimeam. Their descendants lived in Jerusalem near other families of their clans.

³⁹Ner became father of Kish, Kish father of Saul, Saul father of Jonathan, Malchi-shua, Abinadab and Eshbaal. ⁴⁰Jonathan's son Meribbaal, became father of Micah. ⁴¹Micah had four sons: Pithon, Melech, Tah-

rea and Ahoz. ⁴²Ahaz became father of Jarah, Jarah father of Alemeth, Azmaveth and Zimri; Zimri became father of Moza, ⁴³Moza father of Binea, whose son was ⁴⁴Rephaiah, whose son was Eleasah, whose son was Azel. Azel had six sons; their names were these: Azrikam, his firstborn, then Ishmael, Bocheru, Sheariah, Obadiah, Hanan. These were the sons of Azel.

10 ¹The Philistines attacked Israel, and the Israelites fled or were killed on Mount Gilboa. ²The Philistines came up with Saul and killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. ³The fighting grew heavy about Saul; he was hit by enemy arrows and badly wounded. ⁴Then Saul said to the young man carrying his weapon, "Draw your sword and kill me. I do not want these godless Philistines to come and gloat over me." But the young man was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and threw himself on it. ⁵Then the young man threw himself on his sword too and died. ⁶And so Saul died, he and his three sons and all his own together.

⁷All the Israelites who were in the valley heard that the army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead. So they abandoned their towns and ran away. The Philistines then came in and occupied them.

⁸When the Philistines came on the following day to strip the dead, they found Saul and his sons lying on Mount Gilboa. ⁹They stripped him and, taking his head and his armor, had them carried around the land of the Philistines to proclaim the good news to their idols and their people. ¹⁰They placed his armor in the temple of their god, but his head they hung in the temple of Dagon.

¹¹When all the people of Gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²the valiant men went and took the bodies of Saul and his sons away and brought them to Jabesh. They buried their bones under the oak tree in Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days.

¹³Saul died because he had been unfaithful to Yahweh; he had disobeyed the commands of Yahweh; he had even consulted the spirits of the dead. ¹⁴As he had not consulted Yahweh, Yahweh put him to death and gave control of the kingdom to David son of Jesse.

David is anointed king

11 ¹All the people of Israel went to David at Hebron "Look, we are your own flesh and blood. ²Even when Saul was our king, you led Israel in battle; and Yahweh your God said to you, 'You are the man who shall be shepherd of my people Israel and shall be ruler over them.'" ³So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them at Hebron in the presence of Yahweh, and he became king of Israel, just as Yahweh, and he became king of Israel, just as Yahweh had promised through Samuel.

⁴David with all the Israelites attacked Jerusalem (that is to say, Jebus); there lived the Jebusites. ⁵They said to David, "You will not get in here." But David captured the fortress of Zion, and it became the City of David. ⁶David said, "The first man to attack the Jebusites shall become leader and commander of the army." Joab son of Zeruiah attacked first and became commander. ⁷David went to live in the fortress, and because of this it was called the City of David. ⁸He then built a wall around the city, and the Millo as well as the surrounding wall, while Joab restored the rest of the city. ⁹David grew greater and greater, and Yahweh Sabaoth was with him.

David's champions

¹⁰These are the famous warriors of David, those who during his rule struggled with him and with all Israel, to make him king as Yahweh had promised. ¹¹This is the list of David's warriors: Jashobeam the Hachmonite, leader of the Thirty; one day he wielded his battle-axe against three hundred whom he killed at one time.

¹²After him there was Eleazar son of Dodo, the Ahohite, one of the three champions. ¹³He was with David at Pasdammim where the Philistines had gathered to attack. There was a field full of barley there. When the Israelites started to run away, ¹⁴Eleazar took a stand in the middle of the field, defended it and fought the Philistines. So Yahweh brought about a great victory.

¹⁵The Thirty leading soldiers went down to David at the rock near the Cave of Adullam while a company of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of the Rephaim. ¹⁶David was then on a fortified hill, and a group of Philistines had occupied Bethlehem. ¹⁷David sighed, "Oh, if someone would fetch me a drink of water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem!" ¹⁸At this The Three, forcing their way through the Philistines camp, drew water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem and, bringing it away, presented it to David. But David would drink none of it and poured it out as an offering to Yahweh. ¹⁹"God keep me," he said, "from doing this! Am I to drink the blood of these men? For at the risk of their lives they brought it." And so he would not drink it. Such were the deeds of The Three.

²⁰Abishai, the brother of Joab, was leader of The Thirty. He fought with his spear against three hundred whom he killed, winning himself a name among The Thirty. ²¹He was the most famous of The Thirty and became their captain, but he was not as famous as The Three.

²²Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a hero from Kabzeel, did many brave deeds; he killed the two Ariels of Moab. One snowy day, he went down and killed the lion in a pit. ²³He also killed an Egyptian, a huge man; seven and a half feet tall. The Egyptian had a gigantic spear in his hand, but Benaiah attacked him with a club, snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed the man with it. ²⁴Such were the deeds of Benaiah son of Jehoiada, winning him a name among the thirty leading soldiers. ²⁵He was famous among The Thirty, but he was not as famous as The Three. David put him in command of his bodyguard.

²⁶The other valiant warriors were: Asahel third brother of Joab. Elhanan son of Dodo, from Bethlehem. ²⁷Shammoth from Harod, Helez the Pelonite. ²⁸Ira son of Ikesh, from Tekoa. Abiezer from Anathoth. ²⁹Sibbecai from Hushah. Ilai from Ahoh. ³⁰Maharai from Netophah. Heled son of Baanah, from Netophah. ³¹Ithai son of Ribai, from Gibeath of Benjamin. Benaiah from Pirathon. ³²Hurai from the valleys near Gaash. Abiel from Bethaarabah. ³³Azmaveth from Baharum. Eliabba from Shaalbom. ³⁴Beneshashem from Gizon. Jonathan son of Shagee from Harar. ³⁵Ahiam son of Sachar, from Harar. Eliphelet son of Ur. ³⁶Hepher from Mecherah. Ahijah the Pelonite. ³⁷Hezro from Carmel. Naarai son of Ezbai. ³⁸Joel the brother of Nathan. Mibhar son of Hagri. ³⁹Zekek the Ammonite. Naharai from Beerot. armorbearer to Joab son of Zeruiah. ⁴⁰Ira from Jattir. Gareb from Jattir. ⁴¹Uriah the Hittite. Zabab son of Ahlai. ⁴²Adina son of Shiza (a leading member of the tribe of Reuben, with his own group of thirty soldiers). ⁴³Hanan son of Maachah. Josphaphat the Mithnite.

⁴⁴Uzzia from Ashteroth. Shama and Jeiel, sons of Hotham the Aroerite. ⁴⁵Jediael son of Shimri, and Joha his brother, the Tizite. ⁴⁶Eliel the Mahavite. Jeribai and Joshaviah, sons of Elnaam. Ithmah the Moabite. ⁴⁷Eliel, Obed, and Jaasiel from Zoba.

David's early followers

12 ¹The following men came to David in Ziklag where he had gone to escape from King Saul. They were valiant and reliable warriors, members of the tribe of Benjamin, to which Saul belonged. ²They were archers who could use either the right or the left hand, both in slinging stones and in shooting arrows with the bow. ³They were Ahiezer the leader, and Joash, sons of Hashemur from Gibeath, Jeziel and Pelet, sons of Aznaveth, Berach and Jehu from Anathoth, ⁴Ismaiah from Gibeon, a famous soldier and one of the leaders of The Thirty; ⁵Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan and Jozabad from Gederoh, ⁶Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah, Shephatiah from Hariph, ⁷Elkanah, Eshiah, Azazel, Jozzer, Jashobeam, Korathites, ⁸Joelah, Zebadiah, sons of Jeroham from Gedor.

⁹Some Gadites also joined David's troops when he was at the desert fort. They were valiant fighting men and experts with shield and spear. They were as fierce-looking as lions and as quick as mountain deer. ¹⁰Ezer was the leader, Obadiah second, Eliab third, ¹¹Mishmannah fourth, Jeremiah fifth, ¹²Atai sixth, Eliel seventh, ¹³Johanan eighth, Elzabad ninth, ¹⁴Jeremiah tenth, Machbannai eleventh. ¹⁵These sons of Gad were troop commanders, each one in command of a unit, the junior officers placed over a hundred, and senior officers over a thousand. ¹⁶These are the men who crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it overflowed its course, and scattered all the people who lived on its banks, both east and west.

¹⁷Those men from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah came to David at the fort. ¹⁸David went to meet them and said, "If you come to me as friends, to give me help, then I am ready to join you. But if it is to betray me to my enemies, when I have done no wrong, then may the God of our ancestors see and punish you."

¹⁹Then God's spirit took control of one of them, Amasai, leader of The Thirty, and he called out: "Yours we are, David! We are with you, son of Jesse! Peace to you, peace to him that helps you, for God is on your side."

David welcomed them and made them officers in his army.

²⁰Some people from the tribe of Manasseh went over to David's side as he was setting out with the Philistines to fight Saul. But David did not help the Philistines, because their chiefs, after consultation, sent him back to Ziklag. They were afraid he would betray them to his former master Saul. ²¹He was on his way to Ziklag when these Manassites joined him: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, Zilethai, commanders of thousands in Manasseh. ²²They were reinforcements for David and his troops, since they were all outstanding soldiers and became officers in the army. ²³Indeed new men joined David's forces almost every day, so that his camp grew into an enormous camp.

The warriors who assured David's kingship

²⁴These are the figures from the list of experienced warriors who joined David at Hebron to trans-

fer Saul's kingship to him in accordance with the command of Yahweh:

²⁵Sons of Judah carrying shield and spear: 6,800 men equipped for battle. ²⁶Of the sons of Simeon: 7,100 well-trained men. ²⁷Of the sons of Levi: 4,600 in addition to Jehoiada, in command of the Aaronites, with 3,700 men; ²⁸Zadok, a young and able fighter and 22 commanders of his family.

²⁹Of the sons of Benjamin: 3,000 kinsmen of Saul, most of them hitherto in the service of the House of Saul. ³⁰Of the sons of Ephraim: 20,800 men famous in their families. ³¹Of the half tribe of Manasseh: 18,000 men assigned by name to go and proclaim David king. ³²Of the sons of Issachar, expert in knowing the times when Israel should take action, and the way to do it: 200 leaders and all their kinsmen under their command.

³³Of Zebulun: 50,000 men fit for service, ready to fight with weapons of every kind. ³⁴Of Naphtali: 1,000 commanders, and with them 37,000 men armed with shield and spear. ³⁵Of the Danites: 28,600 men ready for battle. ³⁶Of Asher: 40,000 men fit for service, ready for battle. ³⁷From Transjordan: 120,000 men of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, with weapons of every kind.

³⁸All these warriors, ready for battle, came to Hebron willingly to proclaim David king over all Israel; and the rest of Israel, too, were all of one mind in making David king. ³⁹For three days they stayed there, eating and drinking with David, for their kinsmen had sent food for them. ⁴⁰Moreover from as far as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali their neighbors brought provisions, by donkey and camel, mule and ox — flour cakes, fig cakes, bunches of raisins, wine, oil, quantities of oxen and sheep; for there was joy in Israel.

The ark is brought to Jerusalem

13 ¹David consulted with the commanders of thousands, of hundreds, and with all the leaders.

²To the whole assembly of Israel David said, "If you agree and if Yahweh our God wills it so, we will send messengers to the rest of our brothers throughout the territories of Israel, and also to the priests and Levites in their towns and nearby lands, and tell them to gather here with us. ³We will then go and get the ark of our God, for in the time of Saul we neglected it."

⁴They agreed to this, for in the eyes of all the people it was the right thing to do. ⁵So David gathered all the people together from the Shihor of Egypt to the Pass of Hamath to bring the ark of God from Kirith-jearim. ⁶Then David and all Israel went up to Baalah, to Kirith-jearim in Judah, to bring up the ark of God which bears the name of Yahweh who is seated on the Cherub. ⁷At Abinadab's house they placed the ark of God on a new cart. Uzziah and Ahio were leading the cart. ⁸David and all Israel danced before God with all their might, singing to the accompaniment of lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets. ⁹When they came to the threshing floor of the Javelin, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah stretched out his hand and took hold of the ark. ¹⁰Then the anger of Yahweh blazed out against Uzzah, and he killed him because he had laid his hand on the ark, and he died there in the presence of God. ¹¹David was disturbed that Yahweh had punished Uzzah in anger, and so that place has been called Perez-uzzah ever since.

¹²David went in fear of God that day and said, "How can I bring the ark of God to my home?" ¹³So David did not take the ark home to the City of David,

but took it to the house of a man named Obed-edom of Gath. ¹⁴The ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom, in his house, for three months, and Yahweh blessed the family of Obed-edom and everything that belonged to him.

14 ¹Hiram, king of Tyre, sent messengers to David with cedar wood and stonemasons and carpenters to build him a palace. ²David then knew that Yahweh had established him as king over Israel, and that for the sake of his people Israel his kingdom was being made prosperous.

³At Jerusalem David took more wives and fathered more sons and daughters. ⁴These are the names of the children born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, ⁵Ibhar, Elishua, Elpelet, ⁶Nogab, Nepheg, Japhia, ⁷Elishama, Beeliada, Eliph-elet.

⁸When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king of all Israel, they all marched up to capture him. On hearing this, David went out to meet them. ⁹When the Philistines arrived, they began plundering the Valley of the Rephaim. ¹⁰David consulted Yahweh, "Shall I attack the Philistines? Will you turn them over to me?" Yahweh answered him, "Attack! I will turn them over to you." ¹¹The Philistines went up to Baal-perazim and there David defeated them. David said, "God has broken through them just as water breaks through a dam." For this reason that place was called Baal Perazim. ¹²They had left their gods behind them there, and David ordered them to be burned.

¹³Again the Philistines started plundering in the valley. ¹⁴David again consulted God, and God answered, "Do not attack them from the front; go around and get ready to attack them from the other side, near the balsam trees. ¹⁵When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, launch your attack, for God is going out ahead of you to defeat the army of the Philistines." ¹⁶David did as God had ordered, and they defeated the Philistine army from Gibeon as far as Gezer.

¹⁷David became famous everywhere, and Yahweh made every nation afraid of him.

15 ¹David put up buildings for himself in the City of David and prepared a place for the ark of God, and he put up a tent for it. ²Then he said, "Only the Levites shall move the ark of God, since Yahweh has chosen them to carry the ark and to serve him always."

³Then David gathered all Israel together in Jerusalem to bring the ark of God up to the place he had prepared for it. ⁴David called together the sons of Aaron and the sons of Levi: ⁵of the sons of Kohath, Uriel the chief and his hundred and twenty kinsmen; ⁶of the sons of Merari, Asaiah and his two hundred and twenty kinsmen; ⁷of the sons of Gershon, Joel and his hundred and thirty kinsmen; ⁸of the sons of Elizaphan, Shemaiah and his two hundred kinsmen; ⁹of the sons of Hebron, Eliel and eighty kinsmen; ¹⁰of the sons of Uzziel, Amminadab and his hundred and twelve kinsmen.

¹¹David called in the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and the Levites Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab. ¹²He told them, "You are the heads of families of the Levites. Purify yourselves, you and your brothers, and bring the ark of Yahweh, the God of Israel, up to the place I have prepared for it. ¹³The first time you were not there to carry it and Yahweh

our God punished us for not consulting him as we should have done."

¹⁴So the priests and the Levites purified themselves to bring up the ark of Yahweh, the God of Israel, ¹⁵and the Levites carried the ark of God with the poles on their shoulders, as Moses had ordered according to the command of Yahweh.

¹⁶David then told the leaders of the Levites to assign duties for some Levites to sing and play a joyful tune with their various musical instruments: harps and lyres and cymbals. ¹⁷The Levites then appointed Heman son of Joel, Asaph son of Berechiah, one of his brothers, Ethan son of Kushaiah, one of their Merarite kinsmen; ¹⁸and with them, next in rank, their kinsmen as keepers of the gate: Zechariah son of Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphlehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel. ¹⁹Heman, Asaph and Ethan the cantors, were to clash the cymbals of bronze; ²⁰Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah and Benaiah were to play the keyed harp. ²¹Mattithiah, Eliphlehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel and Azaziah, giving the beat, were to play the octave lyre. ²²Chenaniah was chosen to be in charge of the transportation, because he was very skillful at doing these things. ²³Berechiah and Elkanah were to be gatekeepers to the ark. ²⁴The priests Shebaniah, Josphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah and Eliezer were to sound the trumpet before the ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah were to be gatekeepers to the ark.

²⁵So David, with the leaders of Israel and the commanders of thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh from Obed-edom's house with great rejoicing. ²⁶And while God was securing the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven sheep. ²⁷David was wearing a robe of fine linen, like all the Levites who carried the ark, as well as the cantors and Chenaniah, the officer in charge of its transportation. David also wore the linen. ²⁸Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh with shouts of joy to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, making music with harp and lyre. ²⁹Now as the ark of the covenant of Yahweh entered the City of David, Michal the daughter of Saul was watching from the window and saw King David dancing and leaping with joy and she despised him.

16 ¹They brought the ark of God in and put it inside the tent that David had prepared for it; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. ²And when David had finished offering the sacrifices, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh. ³He then distributed to all the Israelites, men and women, a loaf of bread each, a piece of roasted meat, and a raisin cake.

David organizes the levitical cult

⁴David appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of Yahweh, to commemorate, thank and praise Yahweh, the God of Israel: ⁵first Asaph, second Zechariah, then Uzziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel. These were to play the harp and the lyre, while Asaph was to clash the cymbals. ⁶The priests Benaiah and Jahaziel were to keep sounding the trumpet before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh. ⁷That day, David entrusted this song of praise to Asaph and his brethren:

⁸ Give thanks to Yahweh, call upon his name, proclaim his deeds to the peoples.

⁹ Sing to him, sing his praise; tell of all his marvels.

¹⁰ Glory in his holy name, let the hearts that seek Yahweh rejoice!

¹¹ Seek Yahweh and his strength, seek his face untiringly;

¹² Recall the wondrous deeds he has done, his miracles, the judgments from his mouth.

¹³ Descendants of Israel his servant, sons of Jacob his chosen one,

¹⁴ he is Yahweh our God; he rules over all the earth. ¹⁵ He remembers his covenant forever, his promises for many generations,

¹⁶ the covenant he made with Abraham, his promise to Isaac.

¹⁷ That he gave as law to Jacob, an everlasting covenant for Israel.

¹⁸ For he said, "I give you a land Canaan, your own possession."

¹⁹ When they were easily counted, few in number, strangers to the country.

²⁰ They wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another.

²¹ But he let no one oppress them, and punished kings for their sake:

²² "Do not touch my anointed ones, do not harm my prophets."

²³ Sing to Yahweh, all the earth. Proclaim his salvation day after day.

²⁴ Tell his glory among the nations and his wonders to every people.

²⁵ Yahweh is great, and highly to be praised, more fearsome than all gods.

²⁶ Nothingness are all the gods of the nations, Yahweh himself made the heavens;

²⁷ splendor and majesty go before him, praise and joy are in his sanctuary.

²⁸ Give to Yahweh, families of the peoples, give to Yahweh glory and praise. ²⁹ Give to Yahweh the glory due his name. Bring out offerings and bow before him, worship Yahweh in his sacred ornaments.

³⁰ Be quiet before him, all the earth! Firm has he made the world, not to be moved.

³¹ Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice! Say among the nations, "Yahweh is King!"

³² Let the sea thunder and all that it holds, let the fields exult and all that is in them,

³³ let all the trees cry out for joy, and rejoice before Yahweh, for he comes to rule the earth.

³⁴ Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, his love endures forever.

³⁵ Say, "Save us, O God, our Saviour gather us and deliver us from among the nations,

that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in praising you."

³⁶ Blessed be Yahweh the God of Israel from all eternity and forever! And let all the people say, "Amen! Alleluia!"

³⁷ David left there, before the ark of the Covenant of Yahweh, Asaph and his brother Levites with the permanent charge of the worship that was held before the ark as each day's ritual required. ³⁸ He left also Obed-edom, with his sixty-eight kinsmen. Obed-edom son of Jeduthun, and Hosah were to be keepers of the gate.

³⁹ He left Zadok the priest and the priests, his kinsmen, before the Holy Tent of Yahweh at the High place in Gibeon ⁴⁰ to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh regularly, morning and evening, on the altar for burnt

offerings and to carry out all that is written in the Law of Yahweh laid down for Israel. ⁴¹ With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those who were chosen and assigned by name to give praise to God. "For his love is everlasting." ⁴² With them were Heman and Jeduthun who were to sound the trumpets, cymbals and musical instruments accompanying the hymns to God. The sons of Jeduthun were given charge of the gate.

⁴³ Then all went away, each to his own house, and David returned to bless his household.

The prophecy of Nathan

17 ¹ Once David was living in his palace, he said to the prophet Nathan, "Here am I living in a house of cedar, while the ark of Yahweh's covenant dwells beneath a tent cloth." ² Nathan said to David, "Do all that is in your mind, for God is with you."

³ But that very night Yahweh said to Nathan, ⁴ "Go and tell my servant David, 'Yahweh says this: You yourself are not to build a temple for me to live in. ⁵ I have never lived in a temple from the day I brought Israel out until today, but went from tent to tent, from one shelter to another. ⁶ In all my journeying with the whole of Israel, did I say to any one of the rulers of Israel whom I had appointed as shepherds of my people: Why do you not build me a temple of cedar wood?"

⁷ This you must say to my servant David: This is the word of Yahweh Sabaoth: I took you from following the sheep, to be leader of my people Israel. ⁸ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have defeated all your enemies as you advanced. I will make your name as great as the name of the greatest on earth. ⁹ I will provide a place for my people Israel; I will plant them there and they shall live in that place and never be disturbed again; nor shall the wicked ever again oppress them, as they did ¹⁰ in the days when I appointed judges over my people Israel. For now I will subdue all their enemies. Moreover I tell you that I will build you a house. ¹¹ And when your days are ended and you must die and be buried with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will make his kingdom strong. ¹² He will build a temple for me and I will make his throne firm forever. ¹³ I will be a father to him and he a son to me. I will not withdraw my support from him, as I withdrew it from Saul. ¹⁴ I will put him in charge of my people and his kingdom shall be established forever."

¹⁵ Nathan told David accordingly all these words and this vision.

David's prayer

¹⁶ King David then went in and, seated before Yahweh, said: "I am not worthy of what you have already done for me, Yahweh God, nor is my family. ¹⁷ Yet in your eyes, O God, this is still not enough. For you have made a promise for my descendants reaching into the distant future and you have looked on me as a great man. ¹⁸ What more can I say to you? For you know your servant David. ¹⁹ You yourself have done this because you have looked kindly on your servant and you wanted to show your own greatness.

²⁰ O Yahweh, there is none like you, no God except you alone, that we have ever heard of. ²¹ Is there another people on the earth like your people Israel, whom you rescued from slavery in Egypt to make

them your own people, giving yourself a name for great and terrible things by driving nations out before you people whom you rescued from Egypt?

²² You made your people Israel your own people forever; and you, Yahweh, have become their God. ²³ Now, Yahweh, let the promise you have made to me and to my descendants be always kept. ²⁴ May this promise hold good and your name be exalted forever; may they say, 'Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel, is God for Israel.' And let my descendants be established before you forever.

²⁵ O my God, you have just made known to me that you will build me a house; because of this I have to offer this prayer in your presence. ²⁶ Yes, Yahweh, you are God indeed, and you have made this kind promise to me. ²⁷ Be pleased, then, to bless my house so that they may remain forever in your favor You, Yahweh, are the one who blesses, and your blessing will rest on them forever."

The wars of David

18 ¹ After this, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, taking Gath and its outlying villages. ² He also defeated the Moabites; the Moabites became subject to David, paying him taxes.

³ At Hamath David defeated Hadadezer, king of Zobah who was trying to gain control of the territory by the river Euphrates. ⁴ David captured one thousand chariots, seven thousand horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers from him; David hamstringed all the chariot teams, keeping only a hundred of them. ⁵ The Arameans of Damascus came to the help of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, but David killed twenty-two thousand men of the Arameans. ⁶ Then David established governors in Aram of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to David, paying him taxes. Wherever David went, Yahweh gave him victory.

⁷ David took the golden shields of the guards of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. ⁸ From Tibhath and from Cun, towns belonging to Hadadezer, David took a great quantity of bronze; with this Solomon would make the bronze-Sea and the bronze pillars and furnishings.

⁹ When Tou, king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, ¹⁰ he sent his son Hadoram to King David to greet him and to congratulate him on fighting and defeating Hadadezer, since Hadadezer was the enemy of Tou. Hadoram brought articles of every kind in gold, silver and bronze. ¹¹ Which King David also consecrated to Yahweh together with the silver and gold he had taken from all the nations: Edom, Moab, Ammonites, Philistines, Amalek.

¹² After that David defeated the Edomites in the Valley of Salt, eighteen thousand of them. ¹³ He imposed governors on Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. Wherever David went, Yahweh gave him victory.

¹⁴ David ruled over all Israel, administering law and justice to all his people. ¹⁵ Joab son of Zeruiah was in command of the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; ¹⁶ Zadok son of Ahitub and Abiathar son of Ahimelech were priests; Shavsha was secretary; ¹⁷ Benaiah son of Jehoiada was in command of the Cherethites and Pelethites; David's sons were the chief assistants of the King.

19 ¹ Afterwards Nahash, king of the Ammonites, died and his son Hanun became king. ² David thought, "I will show kindness to Hanun, son of Na-

hash, since his father was kind to me." And David sent messengers with his condolences on his father's death. But when David's servants reached Hanun in the land of the Ammonites to present these condolences, ³ the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun, "Do you think David means to honor your father when he sends you messengers of sympathy? On the contrary he has sent them here as spies to explore the land, so that he can conquer it." ⁴ Hanun had David's servants seized, shaved their beards, cut their clothes half-way up to the hips and sent them away. ⁵ As soon as David was told what had happened to these men, he sent someone to meet them, for the men were too ashamed to return home. And he said, "Stay in Jericho, until your beards have grown again, and come back then."

⁶ The Ammonites saw that they had made David their enemy and so Hanun and the Ammonites sent a thousand talents of silver to hire chariots and charioteers from the Arameans of Upper Mesopotamia, of Maacah and of Zobah. ⁷ They hired thirty-two thousand chariots; also the king of Maacah with his army. These came and encamped before Medeba, while the Ammonites came out from all their cities and got ready to fight. ⁸ When David heard this, he sent Joab with the whole army and the warriors. ⁹ The Ammonites marched out and took up their positions at the entrance to the town, but the kings who had come remained in the open country. ¹⁰ Joab, seeing that he had to fight on two fronts, to his front and to his rear, chose the best fighters of the Israelites and drew them up in line facing the Arameans. ¹¹ He placed the rest of the troops under the command of his brother Abishai, to face the Ammonites. He said to him, ¹² "If the Arameans prove too strong for me, you shall come to my help; if the Ammonites prove too strong for you, I will come to yours. ¹³ Take courage and fight hard for the sake of our people and the towns of our God. And may Yahweh do as he thinks right."

¹⁴ Joab and the force with him advanced to attack the Arameans, who fled before him. ¹⁵ When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were running away, they too fled before Abishai, Joab's brother, and withdrew into their town. Then Joab came back to Jerusalem.

¹⁶ Seeing that they had been defeated by Israel, the Arameans sent messengers and mobilized the Arameans from beyond the river, with Shophach, commander of Hadadezer's army, at their head. ¹⁷ News of this was brought to David, who gathered the Israelite troops, crossed the Jordan, and met them. David drew up his line of battle facing the Arameans, and the fighting began. ¹⁸ But the Arameans fled before Israel, and David killed seven thousand of their chariot teams and forty thousand foot soldiers. He also killed Shophach, their general. ¹⁹ When the kings who were subject to Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with David and became subject to him. After this the Arameans refused to give help to the Ammonites.

20 ¹ At the turn of the year, the time when kings go to war, Joab set out with the army to invade the land of the Ammonites and went to lay siege to Rabbah. David, however, remained in Jerusalem. Joab attacked Rabbah and destroyed it. ² David took the gold crown from the head of the Ammonite idol Milcom; they found that it weighed about seventy five pounds. In it was set a precious stone which made an ornament for David's head. He carried off a great quantity of loot from the town. ³ He brought away its population and set them to work with saws, iron picks, and axes. David treated all the Ammonite towns in the:

⁴After this, war broke out again with the Philistines at Gezer. This was when Sibbecai of Hushah killed Sippai, a descendant of the Rephaim. The Philistines were defeated. ⁵War with the Philistines broke out again, and Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi, the ruler of Goliath of Gath, the shaft of whose spear was as thick as a weaver's beam. ⁶There was another giant at Gath, where there was a giant with six fingers in each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all. He too was a descendant of Rephaim. ⁷He defied Israel and Jonathan, son of David's brother Shimea, killed him.

⁸These men were descended from Rephaim of Gath and they were killed by David and his guards.

The census

21 ¹Satan wanted to bring trouble on the people of Israel and so he made David take a census of the Israelites. ²David said to Joab and to the senior army officers, "Go, and take a census of Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, then come back that I may know their number." ³Joab said, "May Yahweh multiply the people a hundred times! My lord king, are they not all our servants? Why do you want to do this? Will you bring guilt upon Israel?"

⁴But the king enforced his order on Joab, and Joab went away, traveling through the whole country of Israel before he returned to Jerusalem. ⁵Joab gave David the figures for the census of the people: the whole of Israel numbered one million, one hundred thousand men capable of drawing sword, and Judah our hundred and seventy thousand capable of drawing sword. ⁶But Joab disapproved of the king's command, and, because of this he had not taken any census of Levi or of Benjamin.

⁷God looked with displeasure on what had been done and so he began to punish Israel. ⁸Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by doing this. But now I beg you to forgive me for this fault. I have been very foolish." ⁹Then Yahweh spoke to Gad, David's prophet. ¹⁰"Go and say to David, 'Yahweh says this: I offer you three things; choose one of them for me to do to you.'" ¹¹So Gad went to David and said, "Yahweh says this, 'Take your choice: ¹²three years of famine, three months running away from the armies of your enemies, or three days of Yahweh's own word, and epidemic in your land, with Yahweh's destroying angel bringing death throughout Israel.' Now decide how I am to answer him who sends me." ³David said to Gad, "This is a hard choice, but let me rather fall into the power of Yahweh, since his mercy is very great; and not into the power of men."

¹⁴So Yahweh sent an epidemic on Israel, and seven thousand men of the Israelites died. ¹⁵God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, Yahweh looked and changed his mind; and he said to the destroying angel, "Enough! Now withdraw your hand." The angel of Yahweh was standing beside the threshing floor of Oman the Jebusite. ¹⁶David saw the angel of Yahweh standing between the heavens and earth with a naked sword in his hand, ready to destroy Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces. ¹⁷And David prayed to God, "Was it not I who sinned, by ordering this wicked census? But these, say your flock, what have they done? Yahweh my God, let your hand be heavy on me and on my family; but let your people escape the plague."

¹⁸The angel of Yahweh then said to Gad, "David must go up and build an altar to Yahweh on the thresh-

ing floor of Oman the Jebusite." ¹⁹So David obeyed the command which Gad had spoken in the name of Yahweh. ²⁰Now Oman, as he turned, had seen the angel and had hidden, with his four sons.

Oman was threshing wheat ²¹when David came to him. When Oman looked up and saw David coming, he left the threshing floor and with his face to the ground did homage to David. ²²Then David said to Oman, "Sell me your threshing floor, to build an altar to Yahweh. Let me have it at its full price, that the plague may be turned away from the people." ²³"Take it," Oman said to David, "and let my lord the king do as he thinks right. Look, I will give you the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing sled for the wood and the wheat for the grain offering; I give them all."

²⁴But King David said to Oman, "No, I must buy it from you at the full price: I will not take for Yahweh what is yours, or offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing." ²⁵So David gave Oman six hundred gold coins for the threshing place.

²⁶David built an altar there to Yahweh and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. He called on Yahweh, and Yahweh answered him with fire from heaven on the altar for burnt offerings ²⁷and ordered the angel to put his sword away. ²⁸Then David saw that Yahweh had answered him on the threshing floor of Oman the Jebusite, so he kept on offering sacrifices there. ²⁹The Holy Tent of Yahweh that Moses had made in the wilderness and the altar for burnt offerings were at that time at the High place at Gibeon, ³⁰but David had not been able to go there before God to consult him, so fearful was he of the sword of the angel of Yahweh.

22 ¹Then David said, "Here is where the Temple of Yahweh God will be; and this is where the people of Israel are to offer burnt offerings.

Preparations for the building of the temple

²David gave orders to gather all the strangers living in the land of Israel and he set stonecutters to prepare stone blocks for building the Temple of God. ³David furthermore stored up great quantities of iron to make nails for the wooden gates and for clamps, and more bronze than could be weighed; ⁴logs of cedar too, beyond the number, the Sidonians and Tyrians having brought cedar logs to David in great quantities.

⁵Then David said, "My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the Temple to be built for Yahweh must be of great splendor, and famous for its magnificence in every country. I will make preparations for him." And so, before he died, David laid away large amounts of the materials needed. ⁶He then sent for his son Solomon and instructed him to build a Temple for Yahweh, the God of Israel. ⁷"My son, my heart was set on building a temple for the name of Yahweh my God. ⁸But Yahweh told me, 'You have shed much blood and fought great battles; it is not for you to build a temple for my name, since you have shed so much blood on the earth in my presence.' ⁹But now a son is born to you. He shall be a man of peace, and I will give him peace from all the enemies that surround him; for Solomon is his name, and in his days I will give Israel peace and quiet. ¹⁰He shall build a temple for my name; he shall be a son to me and I a father to him. His dynasty will rule Israel forever. ¹¹Now, my son, may Yahweh be with you and give you success in building a temple for Yahweh your God, as he has said concerning you. ¹²Yet may he give you insight and wisdom so that you may govern Israel according to his Law. ¹³Success will be yours if you carefully observe the

statutes and the ordinances that Yahweh has prescribed to Moses for Israel. Be strong and stand fast, be fearless, be confident. ¹⁴ Poor as I am, I have set aside for the Temple of Yahweh four thousand tons of gold, and nearly forty thousand tons of silver and more bronze and iron than can be weighed; I have stored up wood and stone too, to which you must add more. ¹⁵ You will have many workmen, stonecutters, masons, carpenters, skilled artisans of every kind, ¹⁶ while your supply of gold and silver, bronze and iron, will be unlimited. Set to work, then, and may Yahweh be with you!"

¹⁷ David then commanded all the Israelite leaders to help his son Solomon. ¹⁸ "Is not Yahweh your God with you? He has given you peace on all sides, since he has let me conquer all the people who lived in this land, and the land has been subdued for Yahweh and for his people. ¹⁹ So now devote heart and soul to the search for Yahweh your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of Yahweh your God, so that the ark of the covenant of Yahweh and the holy things of God may be brought to the Temple that is built for the name of Yahweh."

The work of the Levites

23 ¹ When David was very old, he made his son Solomon king over Israel. ² He then gathered all the Israelite leaders together, with the priests and Levites.

³ A census was taken of those Levites thirty years old or older. The total was thirty-eight thousand; ⁴ twenty-four thousand of these were responsible for the services of the house of Yahweh; six thousand were scribes and judges; ⁵ four thousand were keepers of the gate; four thousand praised Yahweh on the instruments David had made for that purpose.

⁶ Then David divided the Levites into three groups, according to their clans: Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

⁷ For the Gershonites: Ladan and Shimei. ⁸ Sons of Ladan: Jehiel first, Zetham, Joel; three in all. ⁹ Sons of Shimei: Shelomoth, Haziel, Haran; three in all. These are the heads of families of Ladan. ¹⁰ Sons of Shimei: Jahath, Zizah, Jeush, Beriah; these were the sons of Shimei; four in all. ¹¹ Jahath was the eldest, Zizah the second, then Jeush and Beriah, who had not many children and were counted as one family.

¹² Sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, Uzziel; four in all. ¹³ Sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses. Aaron and his descendants were set apart to be in charge of the sacred objects forever, to burn incense in the presence of Yahweh, to serve him and to bless the people in his name forever. ¹⁴ As for Moses, the man of God, his sons were included among the Levites. ¹⁵ Sons of Moses: Gershom and Eliezer. ¹⁶ Sons of Gershom: Shebuel, the first. ¹⁷ Eliezer had sons: Rehabiah, the first. Eliezer had no other sons, but the sons of Rehabiah were very numerous.

¹⁸ Sons of Izhar: Shelomith, the first. ¹⁹ Sons of Hebron: Jeriah first, Amariah second, Jahaziel third, Jekameam fourth. ²⁰ Sons of Uzziel: Micah first, Isshiah second.

²¹ Sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. Sons of Mahli: Eleazar and Kish. ²² Eleazar died leaving no sons but only daughters; their cousins, the sons of Kish, married these. ²³ Sons of Mushi: Mahli, Eder, Jeremoth; three in all.

²⁴ These were the sons of Levi by their families, the heads of families, and those registered by name, individually; whoever was twenty years old or older had his duty in the service of the Temple of Yahweh.

²⁵ For David had said, "Yahweh, the God of Israel, has given peace to his people, and he dwells in Jerusalem forever. ²⁶ The Levites are no longer required to carry the Holy Tent or anything used in its service."

²⁷ According to the last words of David, the Levites who had been registered were of twenty years and older. ²⁸ Their duty is to assist the sons of Aaron with the service of the Temple of Yahweh, in the courts and chambers, to purify everything that is sacred; their duty is to serve the Temple of God. ²⁹ They are also responsible for the loaves set out in rows, and for the flour for the grain offering, the wafers of unleavened bread, the cakes baked on the griddle or mixed, and they are to weigh and measure the Temple offerings. ³⁰ They have to be present every morning to give glory and praise to Yahweh, and also in the evening. ³¹ And at every burnt offering to Yahweh on the sabbath, New Moon or solemn feast, in such numbers as are prescribed. They must always be present before Yahweh. ³² In serving the Temple of Yahweh they observe the ritual of the Tent of Meeting, the ritual of the sanctuary and the ritual of their brethren, the sons of Aaron.

The classification of the Priests

24 ¹ These are the groups to which the descendants of Aaron belong. Sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar. ² Nadab and Abihu died in their father's lifetime leaving no children, so Eleazar and Ithamar became priests. ³ David divided them into groups with the help of Zadok, one of Eleazar's sons, and Ahimelech, one of the sons of Ithamar, and made a register of them according to their duties. ⁴ The sons of Eleazar were found to have more leading men than the sons of Ithamar: accordingly, from the heads of families of the sons of Eleazar they made sixteen groups, and from those of the sons of Ithamar, eight. ⁵ They divided them, both parties, by lot: there were Temple officials and spiritual leaders among the sons of Eleazar, as well as among the sons of Ithamar. ⁶ One of the Levites, the scribe Shemaiah son of Nethanel, recorded them in the presence of the king, his officers, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech son of Abiathar and the heads of the priestly and levitical families. They took turns in drawing lots for each family of the sons of Eleazar and for the sons of Ithamar.

⁷ The first lot fell to Jehoiaib, to Jedaiiah the second, ⁸ Harim the third, Scorim the fourth, ⁹ Malchijah the fifth, Mijamin the sixth, ¹⁰ Hakkoz the seventh, Abijah the eighth, ¹¹ Jeshua the ninth, Shecaniah the tenth, ¹² Eliashib the eleventh, Jakim the twelfth, ¹³ Huppah the thirteenth, Ishbaal the fourteenth, ¹⁴ Bilgah the fifteenth, Immer the sixteenth, ¹⁵ Hezir the seventeenth, Hapizzazz the eighteenth, ¹⁶ Pethahiah the nineteenth, Jehezkel the twentieth, ¹⁷ Jachin the twenty-first, Gamul the twenty-second, ¹⁸ Delaiah the twenty-third, Maaziah the twenty-fourth.

¹⁹ These men were registered according to their various duties, to enter the Temple of Yahweh according to the regulations that Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given through Haran, their ancestor.

²⁰ As regards the rest of the sons of Levi:

Sons of Amram: Shubael. Sons of Shubael: Jehdeiah. ²¹ For Rehabiah, the sons of Rehabiah: the eldest, Isshiah. ²² Izharites: Shelomoth; sons of Shelomoth: Jahath. ²³ Sons of Hebron: Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, Jekameam the fourth. ²⁴ Sons of Uzziel: Micah; sons of Micah: Shamir, the brother of Micah: Isshiah; sons of Micah: Isshiah, Zechariah. ²⁵ Sons of Merari: Mahli and

Mushi. Sons of Jaaziah: his son; ²⁷ sons of Merari: for Jaaziah his son: Shoham, Zaccur, Ithri: ²⁸ for Mahli: Eleazar who had no sons; ²⁹ for Kish: the sons of Kish: Jerahmeel. ³⁰ Sons of Mushi: Mahli, Eder, Jerimoth.

³¹ These were the sons of Levi by their families. The head of each family and one of his younger brothers drew lots for their assignments, just as their relatives, the priests descended from Aaron, had done. King David, Zadok, Ahimelech, and the heads of families of the priests and of the Levites were witnesses.

The cantors

25 ¹ For the liturgy, David and the senior army officers set apart the sons of Asaph, of Heman and of Jeduthun, who prophesied playing lyre and harp and cymbal, and a list was made of those with these duties to perform.

² Sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph who prophesied whenever the king commanded.

³ For Jeduthun: sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Hashabiah, Matithiah; there were six of them under the direction of their father Jeduthun who, to the sound of the lyre, sang praise and thanks to the Lord.

⁴ For Heman: sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romantiez, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, Mahazioth. ⁵ All these were sons of Heman, the king's seer; these sounded the trumpet when Yahweh's word came. God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters; ⁶ all of them sang in the Temple of Yahweh under their father's direction to the sound of cymbal, harp and lyre, for the liturgy in the house of Yahweh at the king's direction.

⁷ All of these, whether of Asaph, Jeduthun or Heman, who were trained in singing to Yahweh, all of them skilled men, were altogether two hundred and eighty-eight. ⁸ They drew lots to determine the assignment of duties of each of them whether they were young or old, experts or beginners. ⁹ The first lot fell to Asaphite, Joseph. The second was Gedaliah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ¹⁰ The third was Zaccur, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

¹¹ The fourth was Izri, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ¹² The fifth was Nethaniah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ¹³ The sixth was Bukkiah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

¹⁴ The seventh was Jesharelah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ¹⁵ The eighth was Jeshaiiah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ¹⁶ The ninth was Mattaniah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

¹⁷ The tenth was Shimei, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ¹⁸ The eleventh was Azarel, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ¹⁹ The twelfth was Hashabiah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

²⁰ The thirteenth was Shubael, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ²¹ The fourteenth was Jeremoth, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

²² The fifteenth was Matithiah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ²³ The sixteenth was Hananiah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

²⁴ The seventeenth was Joshbekashah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ²⁵ The eighteenth was Hanani, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

²⁶ The nineteenth was Mallothi, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ²⁷ The twentieth was Eliathah, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ²⁸ The twenty-first was Hothir, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

²⁹ The twenty-second was Giddalti, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ³⁰ The twenty-third was Mahazioth, he and his sons and brothers were twelve. ³¹ The twenty-fourth was Romantiez, he and his sons and brothers were twelve.

The keepers of the gate

26 ¹ These are the assignments of work for the Levites who served as Temple guards. For the Korahites: Meshelemiah son of Kore, one of the sons of Ebiasaph. ² Meshelemiah had sons: Zechariah the first-born, Jedaiel the second, Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth, ³ Elam the fifth, Jochanan the sixth, Eliehoenai the seventh.

⁴ Obbededom had sons: Shemaiah the first-born, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, Sacar the fourth, Nethanel the fifth, ⁵ Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peullethai the eighth; God had indeed blessed him. ⁶ Shemaiah had sons who were important men in their clan because of their great ability. ⁷ Sons of Shemaiah: Othni, Rephael, Obed, Elzabad and his brothers, Elihu and Semachia, brave men. ⁸ All these were sons of Obbededom. These and their sons and brothers were highly qualified for this work. For Obbededom, sixty-two.

⁹ Meshelemiah had sons and brothers: eighteen brave men.

¹⁰ Hosah, son of Merari, had sons: Shimri was the first, for although he was not the first-born his father had made him the chief. ¹¹ Hilkiyah was the second, Tefaliah the third, Zechariah the fourth. Altogether thirteen members of Hosah's family were Temple guards.

¹² The Temple guards were divided into groups, according to their families, and they were assigned duties in the Temple, just as the other Levites were.

¹³ They drew lots, junior and senior family alike, to see which gate it would be responsible for. ¹⁴ For the east side the lot fell to Shelemiah, whose son Zechariah was a shrewd counselor; when they drew lots, the lot for the north side fell to the latter. ¹⁵ To Obbededom went the south, and to his sons the storehouse. ¹⁶ To Shuppi and Hosah went the west with the Gate of the Felled Tree trunk on the upper road. Watches were established for each family. ¹⁷ On the east, six daily; on the north, four daily; on the south, four daily; at the storehouse, two each side; ¹⁸ for the Parbar. ¹⁹ These were the orders of the gatekeepers among the Korahites and Merarites.

²⁰ Others of their fellow Levites were in charge of the Temple Treasury and the storerooms for gifts dedicated to God.

²¹ The sons of Ladan, sons of Gershon, through Ladan had the Jehielites for heads of the families of Ladan the Gershonite. ²² The Jehielites, Zetham and Joel his brother, were responsible for the treasuries of the Temple of Yahweh.

²³ As regards the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites, and Uzzielites:

²⁴ Shebuel son of Gershon, son of Moses, was the officer responsible for the treasuries. ²⁵ His kinsmen through Eliezer: Rehabiah his son, Jeshaiiah his son, Joram his son, Zichri his son, Shelomoth his son.

²⁶ This Shelomoth and his kinsmen were in charge of all the gifts dedicated to Yahweh by King David and by the heads of families as officers of thousands, of hundreds, or as other senior officers. ²⁷ There was a part of the loot they captured in battle and dedicated for use in the Temple ²⁸ and also the things that Samuel and the seer Saul son of Kish, Abner son of Ner, and Joab son of Zeruiah had dedicated. All that had been dedicated

was under the responsibility of Shelomoth and his kinsmen.

²⁹ For the Izharites: Chananiah and his sons were in charge of Israel's civil affairs as officials and judges.

³⁰ For the Hebronites: Hashabiah and his kinsmen, one thousand seven hundred fighting men, were appointed as overseers of all Israel west of Jordan, for all the service of Yahweh and the service of the king. ³¹ For the Hebronites: Jerijah the chief. In the fortieth year of David's reign, the family line of the Hebronite families was investigated and fighting men were found belonging to them at Jazer in Gilead. ³² King David appointed two thousand seven hundred fighting men, kinsmen to Jerijah and heads of families, as overseers of the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh for all the service of Yahweh and the sacrifices of the king.

Military and civil organization

27 ¹ Census of the sons of Israel; The heads of families, the commanders of thousands and hundreds, and other officers who served the king in all that referred to the divisions of twenty-four thousand men each, that were on duty for a month, each month of the year. ² For the first month Jashobeam, son of Zabdiel, ³ son of Perez, and chief of all the officers of the division had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ⁴ For the second month Dodai, the Ahohite had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ⁵ For the third month Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the chief priest, had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ⁶ Benaiah who was champion of The Thirty, was overseer for The Thirty and for his division. Ammizabad was his son. ⁷ For the fourth month was Asahel, the brother of Joab; his son Zebadiah succeeded him. He had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ⁸ For the fifth month, Shamuth the Izrahite had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ⁹ For the sixth month, Ira son of Ikesh of Tekoa had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ¹⁰ For the seventh month, Helez the Pelonite, an Ephraimite, had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ¹¹ For the eighth month, Sibbecai of Hushah, a Zerahite, had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ¹² For the ninth month, Abiezer of Anathoth, a Benjaminite, had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ¹³ For the tenth month, Maharai of Netophah, a Zerahite, had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ¹⁴ For the eleventh month, Benaiah of Pirathon, an Ephraimite, had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ¹⁵ For the twelfth month, Heldai from Netophah, of Othniel, had charge of a division of twenty-four thousand men. ¹⁶ Overseers for the tribes of Israel: Eliezer son of Zichri was chief officer for the Reubenites, Shephatiah, son of Maacha for the Simeonites, ¹⁷ Hashabiah, son of Kemuel for the Levites, Zadok for the Aaronites, ¹⁸ Elihu, one of David's brothers, for the Judaeans, Omri son of Michael for the Issacharites, ¹⁹ Ishmaiah, son of Obadiah for the Zebulunites, Jeremiah, son of Azriel for the Naphthalites, ²⁰ Hoshea, son of Azaziah for the Ephraimites, Joel, son of Pedaiah for the half tribe of Manasseh, ²¹ Iddo, son of Zechariah for the half tribe of Manasseh in Gad, Jaasiel, son of Abner for the Benjaminites, ²² Azazel, son of Jeroham for the Danites. These were the officials for the tribes of Israel.

²³ David took no census of those who were twenty years old and under, since Yahweh had promised to make Israel as numerous as the stars of heaven.

²⁴ Joab, son of Zeruiah began a census, but he did not

finish it for God punished Israel because of this census. The final figures were never recorded in the official records of King David.

²⁵ This is the list of those who administered the king's property. Overseers for the king's storerooms: Azmaveh son of Adiel. Commissioner for the stores in provincial towns, villages, castles: Jonathan son of Uziah. ²⁶ For the agricultural workers employed on the land: Ezri son of Chelub. ²⁷ For the vineyards: Shimei of Ramah. For those in the vineyards who looked after the wine cellars: Zabdi of Shepham. ²⁸ For the olives and sycamores in the lowlands: Baalhanan of Geder. For the stores of oil: Joash. ²⁹ For cattle in pasture at Sharon: Shitrai of Sharon. For cattle in the valleys: Shaphat son of Adlai. ³⁰ For camels: Obil, the Ishmaelite. For donkeys: Jehdeiah of Meranoth. ³¹ For flocks: Jaziz, the Hagrite. All these were overseers for King David's property.

³² Jonathan, David's uncle, was a skillful adviser and a scholar. ³³ Ahithophel was the king's counselor. Hushai the Archite was Friend of the King. ³⁴ Jehoiada, son of Benaiah, and Abiathar succeeded Ahithophel. Joab was commander of the king's armies.

David's instructions for the temple

28 ¹ David held a meeting in Jerusalem of all the officials of Israel, the overseers for the tribes, and the officials in the royal service, the commanders of thousands, the commanders of hundreds, the overseers for all the property and livestock of the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, leading soldiers, and important men. ² Then King David got up and said:

"My brothers and my people, listen to me. I had set my heart on building a settled home for the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, as a footstool for our God. I have made preparations for building, ³ but God has said to me, 'You are not to build a temple for my name, for you have been a man of war and have shed blood.'

⁴ Yahweh, the God of Israel, chose me and my descendants to rule Israel forever. He chose Judah for leader, my family within the tribe of Judah, and of my father's sons myself. He was pleased to make me king of all Israel. ⁵ Of all my sons — he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of Yahweh over Israel. ⁶ He said to me, 'Solomon your son is the man to build my Temple and my courts, for I have chosen him to be a son to me and I will be a father to him. ⁷ I will make his kingdom last forever if he continues to obey carefully all my laws and commands as he does now.'

⁸ So now in the sight of all Israel and of the assembly of Yahweh, and in the hearing of our God, I tell you to observe and meditate on all the commandments of Yahweh your God, so that you may possess this prosperous land and leave it to your children after you as an inheritance forever.

⁹ And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, serve him with an undivided heart and a willing mind; for Yahweh knows all our thoughts and desires. If you seek him, he will let you find him; but if you turn away from him, he will abandon you forever. ¹⁰ Realize at this moment that Yahweh has chosen you to build a house for him as sanctuary. Be strong and set to work."

¹¹ David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, the buildings, the treasures, the upper rooms, the inner apartments and the room where the mercy Seat would be. ¹² He also gave him a description of all he had in mind for the courts of Yahweh's House, all the surrounding apartments, the treasures of Yahweh's House and the treasures of votive offerings;

¹³also of the orders of priests and Levites, the liturgical duties in Yahweh's House. ¹⁴He instructed him about how much silver and gold was to be used for making the utensils. ¹⁵The bullion for the golden lampstands and their lamps, the gold bullion for the silver lampstand, for the lampstand and its lamps according to the requirements for each lampstand, ¹⁶gold bullion for the tables on which the rows of bread were set, for each of these tables, the silver for the silver tables, ¹⁷the forks, the sprinkling bowls, basins of pure gold, the gold bullion for the bowls, for each of the bowls, ¹⁸the bullion of refined gold for the altar of incense. He gave him the plans for the chariot, for the golden cherubim with wings outspread covering the ark of the covenant of Yahweh - ¹⁹all this in accordance with the plan drawn according to the instructions which Yahweh himself gave him to carry out.

²⁰Then David said to his son Solomon, "Be strong, stand firm; be fearless, be determined and set to work, because Yahweh God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or abandon you before you have finished all the work to be done for the House of Yahweh. ²¹Here are the orders of priests and Levites for all the duties of the House of God; every willing man of any aptitude will help you in all this work; the officials and all the people are entirely at your command."

29 ¹Then King David said to the whole assembly, "Solomon my son, whom Yahweh has chosen, is still young and the work is great; this palace is not for men but for Yahweh God. ²With all my means, I have provided for the house of my God, adding gold to gold, silver to silver, bronze to bronze, iron to iron, wood to wood, onyx, inlaid stones, colored and striped stones, precious stones of every kind, masses of alabaster. ³What is more, the gold and silver that I have in my own treasury I give out of love for the house of God, above what I have provided already for the Holy House - ⁴115 tons of the finest gold, gold of Ophir, 265 tons of pure silver for plating the walls of the buildings. ⁵Whatever gold you have, whatever silver, or workmanship of the craftsman's hand, will each of you offer it to Yahweh today?"

⁶Then the heads of families, the officials for the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and those who managed the king's affairs, ⁷gave for the service of the house of God 190 tons of gold, 380 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron. ⁸Those who had precious stones brought them to Jehiel, the Gershonite for the treasury of Yahweh's House. ⁹The people rejoiced at what had been given so readily, since their gifts to Yahweh had been made wholeheartedly. King David too was filled with joy. ¹⁰In sight of the whole assembly David blessed Yahweh and said:

"May you be blessed, Yahweh God of Israel our ancestor, forever and ever! ¹¹Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness, the power, splendor, length of days, glory, for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours.

Yours is the sovereignty forever, O Yahweh; you are supreme ruler over all. ¹²Riches and honor go before you, you are ruler of all, in your hand lie strength and power; You are the one who gives greatness and strength to all.

¹³At this time, our God, we give you thanks, we praise the splendor of your name. ¹⁴For who am I and what is my people to have received all that we give you back now? All comes from you; what we have received from your own hand we have given to you. ¹⁵For we are strangers before you, settlers only, as all our ancestors were; our days on earth pass like a shadow, and there is no hope beyond.

¹⁶Yahweh, our God, all this wealth that we have brought together to build a house for your holy Name, comes from your hand, all is yours. ¹⁷O my God, I know that you examine the heart and delight in honesty, and in honesty of heart I have willingly given all this; and now with joy I have seen your people here offer their gifts willingly. ¹⁸O Yahweh, God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep such thoughts in the hearts and minds of your people forever, and direct their hearts toward you. ¹⁹Give Solomon my son a heart determined to keep your commandments, your decrees, your statutes; may he practice them all, and build this palace I have prepared for you."

²⁰Then David said to the whole assembly, "Bless now Yahweh your God!" And the whole assembly blessed Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, and went on their knees to give honor to Yahweh and to the king. ²¹The following day, the Israelites offered sacrifices and burnt offerings to Yahweh: a thousand bulls, a thousand rams, a thousand lambs with their wine offerings, as well as many sacrifices for the whole of Israel. ²²They ate and drank that day in Yahweh's presence with great joy. Then they made Solomon, son of David, their second king and anointed him to rule over them in the name of Yahweh, and anointed Zadok as priest. ²³Solomon sat on the throne of Yahweh, in place of David his father. He prospered, and all Israel obeyed him. ²⁴All the officials, all the champions, and even all the sons of King David, swore fidelity to King Solomon. ²⁵Yahweh exalted Solomon greatly in the eyes of all Israel, and gave him a glorious reign such as had not been enjoyed by any king over Israel before him.

²⁶David son of Jesse had reigned over the whole of Israel. ²⁷His reign over Israel had lasted forty years; he had reigned in Hebron for seven years, and in Jerusalem for thirty-three. ²⁸He died at a good old age, with his fill of days, of riches, of honor. Then his son Solomon succeeded him. ²⁹The history of King David, from first to last, can be found in the records of Samuel, the prophet, the records of Nathan the prophet, and the records of Gad, the prophet. ³⁰These records tell how he ruled, how powerful he was, and all the things that happened to him, to Israel, and to the surrounding kingdoms.

2 CHRONICLES

Solomon's gift of wisdom

1 Solomon, son of David, took firm control of the Kingdom of Israel. Yahweh, his God, was with him and exalted him greatly. **2** Solomon then spoke to all Israel, to commanders of thousands and of hundreds, to the judges, and to all the princes of Israel, the heads of families. **3** Then Solomon, and with him the whole assembly, went to the High place at Gibeon, where God's Tent of Meeting was, which Moses, the servant of God, had made in the wilderness; **4** David, however, had brought the ark of God from Kiriat-jearim to the place he had prepared for it, having set up a tent for it in Jerusalem. **5** The bronze altar that Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, had made stood there in front of the Holy Tent of Yahweh; Solomon, with the assembly, came to this altar, looking for Yahweh's presence. **6** Solomon went up to the bronze altar that was by the Tent of Meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

7 That night, God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask what you would like me to give you." **8** Solomon replied to God, "You showed great kindness to David my father; and you have made me king in his place. **9** Yahweh God, the promise you made to David my father has now been fulfilled, since you have made me king over a people who are so many that they cannot be counted. **10** Therefore now give me wisdom and knowledge to act as leader of this people, for who could govern a people so great as yours?"

11 God said to Solomon, "Since that is what you want, you have asked, not for riches, treasure, honor, the lives of your enemies, or even for a long life, but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people of whom I have made you king; **12** therefore wisdom and knowledge are granted you. I give you riches too, and treasures, and honor such as none of the kings had that were before you, nor shall any have that come after you."

13 Solomon left the High place and the Tent of Meeting at Gibeon and returned to Jerusalem. **14** Solomon built up a force of chariots and horses; he had one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses; these he stationed in the chariot towns and with the king in Jerusalem. **15** During his reign, silver and gold became as common in Jerusalem as stone, while cedar wood was as plentiful as the ordinary sycamore trees in the foothills of Judah. **16** Solomon's horses were imported from Cilicia; the king's agents took delivery of them from Cilicia at a fixed rate. **17** They imported chariots from Egypt for 600 pieces of silver each, and horses for 150 each. These men acted in the same way for all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram. **18** Solomon decided to build a house for Yahweh's Name and a palace for himself.

Solomon and Huram

2 **1** He put 70,000 men to work transporting materials, 80,000 to quarry in the hill country, and 3,600 supervisors in charge of them. **2** Solomon then sent this message to Hiram king of Tyre, "Deal with

me as you dealt with my father David when you sent him cedars to build a house to live in. **3** I am now building a house to honor Yahweh, my God, to acknowledge his holiness by burning incense of scented spices in his presence, by the loaves that are perpetually set out, by offerings morning and evening, on the sabbath. New Moon, and the solemn festivals of Yahweh our God – and this forever in Israel. **4** The house I am building will be large, for our God is greater than all gods. **5** Yet no one can really build a temple for God because the heavens and the heaven cannot contain him. And I cannot build him a house for anything more than to burn incense in his presence. **6** So send me a man skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, iron, scarlet, crimson, violet, and the art of engraving too; he is to work with the skilled men whom my father David provided here in Judah and Jerusalem. **7** From Lebanon send me cedar wood, juniper and alghummim, since I know your servants are experts in felling the trees of Lebanon. My servants will work with yours. **8** They will prepare wood in bulk for me, since the house I wish to build is to be of astounding size. **9** For the woodmen who are to fell the trees I assign twenty thousand kors of grain, twenty thousand kors of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil – this is for the main-

10 In a letter sent to King Solomon, Hiram king of Tyre replied, "Because Yahweh loves his people he has made you king. **11** Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who has made the heavens and the earth, and given King David a wise son, full of understanding and skill, who is going to build a house for Yahweh and a palace for himself and his court. **12** And I am also sending you a skilled craftsman, Hiramabi, **13** the son of a Danite woman by a Tynan father. He is skilled in the use of gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, wood, scarlet, violet, fine linen, crimson, in engraving of all kinds, and in the execution of any design suggested to him. Let him be put to work with your craftsmen and those of my lord David, your father. **14** So now let my lord send his servants the wheat, barley, oil and wine, as already suggested.

15 For our part, we will cut down all the cedar trees you need from Lebanon, and bring them to you in rafts by sea to Joppa, and you will transport them to Jerusalem."

16 Solomon took a count of all the foreigners living in the land of Israel, following the census that David his father had taken; it was found there were a hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred. **17** He impressed seventy thousand of these for carrying loads, eighty thousand for quarrying in the hill country, and three thousand six hundred as overseers to make sure the people worked.

The building of Yahweh's house

3 **1** Solomon then began to build Yahweh's House in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where David his father had a vision. It was the place prepared by David, the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. **2** Solomon began building in the second month of the fourth year of his reign, on the second day. **3** The

house which Solomon built was 90 feet long and 30 feet high. ⁴The Hall in front of the Great Room of the Temple was 30 cubits long across the width of the house, and its height was 180 feet. He plated it on the inside with pure gold. ⁵The Great Room he faced with juniper which he plated with pure gold, and on it set palms and festoons. ⁶He adorned the building with precious stones of great beauty; the gold was gold from Parvaim, ⁷and with this he faced the house, the beams thresholds, walls and doors; on the walls he carved cherubs.

⁸He then built the Holy of Holies; its length, across the width of the Great Room, was 30 feet, and its width 30 feet. He plated it with 25 tons of fine gold; ⁹the gold nails weighed 20 ounces. He also plated the upper rooms with gold. ¹⁰In the Holy of Holies he made two cherubs of wrought metal work and plated them with gold. ¹¹The total span of the cherubs' wings was 30 feet, each being 7 1/2 feet long, with one wing touching the wall of the room, while the other touched that of the other cherub. ¹²One wing of a cherub, 7 1/2 feet long, touched the wall of the apartment; the second, 7 1/2 feet long, touched the wing of the other cherub. ¹³The spread of these cherubs' wings was 30 feet. They stood on their feet, facing the Hall.

¹⁴He made the Veil of violet, scarlet, crimson and fine linen; he worked cherubs on it.

¹⁵In front of the Great room he made two pillars 52 feet high, and on the top of each a capital measuring 7 feet. ¹⁶He set festoons like in the Holy of holies, at the tops of the pillars, and a hundred pomegranates which he placed on the festoons. ¹⁷He set up the pillars in front of the house, one on the right, the other on the left: the one on the right he called Jachin, the one on the left Boaz.

4 ¹He made an altar of bronze, 30 feet long, 30 feet wide and ten high. ²He made the Sea of cast metal, 15 feet from rim to rim, circular in shape and 7 feet high; a cord 44 feet long gave the measurement of its girth. ³Under it and completely encircling it were pomegranates; they went around the Sea over a length of 44 feet; the pomegranates were in two rows, of one and the same casting with the rest. ⁴It rested on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, three facing east; on these, their hind-quarters all turned inward, stood the Sea. ⁵It was a hand's breadth in thickness, and its rim was shaped like the rim of a cup, like a flower. It could hold 15,000 gallons of water.

⁶He made ten basins, arranging five on the right side, five on the left, for washing the victim for the burnt offering which was purified there; but the Sea was for the priests to wash in. ⁷He made the ten golden lampstands in the way prescribed and placed them in the Great room, five on the right and five on the left. ⁸He made a hundred golden sprinkling bowls.

⁹He made the court of the priests and the great court with its gates and plated the gates with bronze. ¹⁰He placed the Sea some distance from the right-hand side, to the southeast.

¹¹Huram also made the pots, the shovels and the bowls.

Thus he completed the work he had to do for King Solomon in the house of God: ¹²the two pillars; the two moldings of the capitals surmounting the pillars; the two sets of filigree to cover the two moldings of the capitals surmounting the pillars; ¹³the four hundred pomegranates for the two sets of filigree, with the pomegranates of each filigree in two rows; ¹⁴the ten stands and the ten basins on the stands; ¹⁵the Sea

and the twelve oxen beneath it; ¹⁶the pots, the shovels, the forks, and all their accessories made by Huram-abi of burnished bronze for King Solomon, for Yahweh's House. ¹⁷The king made them by the process of sand casting, near the Jordan between Succoth and Zeredah. ¹⁸Solomon made all these articles in such quantities, that the weight of bronze could not be reckoned.

¹⁹Solomon placed all the furnishings he had made in the house of God: the golden altar and the tables for the loaves of offering; ²⁰the lampstands of pure gold with their lamps to burn, as prescribed, before the sanctuary, of pure gold; ²¹the floral work, the lamps, the extinguishers, of gold (and it was pure gold); ²²the knives, the sprinkling bowls, incense boats, of fine gold; the door of the Temple, the inner doors (for the Holy of Holies) and the Temple doors (for the Hekal), of gold.

The ark is brought to the temple

5 ¹So all the work that Solomon did for Yahweh's House was completed, and Solomon brought the dedicated offerings of his father David, the silver and the gold and the vessels, and put them in the Temple storerooms.

²Then Solomon called the leaders of the tribes and clans of Israel together in Jerusalem to bring the ark of the covenant of Yahweh up from the City of David, which is Zion. ³All the men of Israel assembled around the king in the seventh month, at the time of the feast. ⁴All the leaders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark ⁵and the Tent of Meeting with all the sacred vessels that were in it; the levitical priests carried them.

⁶King Solomon, and all the community of Israel gathered with him in front of the ark, sacrificed sheep and oxen, countless, innumerable. ⁷The priests brought the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to its place, in the place, in the sanctuary of the house, that is, in the Holy of Holies, under the cherubs' wings. ⁸For there where the ark was placed the cherubs spread out their wings and sheltered the ark and its poles. ⁹The poles of the ark were long enough for their ends to be seen from the Holy Place in front of the sanctuary, but not from outside; ¹⁰they are still there today. There was nothing in the ark except the two stone slabs that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where Yahweh had made a covenant with the Israelites when they came out of Egypt.

¹¹Finally the priests came out of the sanctuary. All the priests were present, for they had purified themselves whatever group they belonged to. ¹²All the Levite musicians, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun with their sons and brothers, were stationed to the east of the altar, robed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps, and lyres. A hundred and twenty priests accompanied them on the trumpet. ¹³All those who played the trumpet, or who sang, united in giving praise and glory to Yahweh. Lifting their voices to the sound of the trumpet and cymbal and instruments of music, they gave praise to Yahweh. "For he is good, for his love is everlasting." Just then a cloud filled the sanctuary, the building of Yahweh.

¹⁴Because of the cloud the priests could no longer perform their duties: for the Glory of Yahweh filled the house of God.

6 ¹Then Solomon said: "Yahweh has chosen to live in the thick cloud. Yes, I have built you a majestic temple, ²a place for you to live in forever."

³Then the king turned and asked God's blessing on the whole assembly of Israel, who were standing there. ⁴He said, "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who has spoken through the mouth of David, my father and has now carried out by his hand what he said: ⁵From the day I brought my people out of Egypt until now I did not choose any city in the land of Israel as the place to build a house where my Name would be, and I did not choose anyone to be prince of my people Israel. ⁶But now I have chosen Jerusalem as the place where my Name will be, and you, David, to rule my people.' ⁷My father David had set his heart on building a house for the Name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, ⁸but Yahweh said to him, 'You have set your heart on building a temple for my name, and in this you have done well; ⁹and yet, you are not the man to build the house; your son, born of your own body, shall build me a house.' ¹⁰Yahweh has kept the promise he made: I have succeeded David my father and am seated on the throne of Israel, as Yahweh promised; and now I have built a house for the Name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, ¹¹and have placed in it the ark containing the covenant that Yahweh made with the people of Israel."

Solomon's prayer

¹²Then in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel Solomon stood before the altar of Yahweh and stretched out his hands. ¹³Solomon had made a bronze pedestal and had placed it in the middle of the court; it was 7 feet long, 7 feet wide and 7 feet high. Solomon mounted it, and knelt down on it in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel; he stretched out his hands to heaven. ¹⁴and said, "Yah-weh, God of Israel, not in heaven nor on earth is there such a God as you; you are true to your covenant and show graciousness toward your servants when they live in wholehearted obedience to you. ¹⁵You have kept the promise you made to your servant David my father; what you promised with your mouth, today you have carried out by your hand. ¹⁶And now, Yahweh, God of Israel, keep the promise you made your servant David when you said, 'You shall always have someone from your line to rule as king of Israel, if only your sons are careful how they behave, following my Law as you yourself have done.'

¹⁷So now, God of Israel, let the words come true which you spoke to your servant David my father. ¹⁸Yet will God really live with men and women on the earth? Why, the heavens and their own heavens cannot contain you! How much less this house that I have built! ¹⁹Listen to the prayer and grant the requests of your servant, Yahweh my God; listen to the cry and to the prayer your servant makes to you. ²⁰Day and night let your eyes watch over this house, where you have promised that your Name would be.

²¹Hear the prayers of your servant and of Israel your people as they pray in this place. From heaven where your dwelling is, hear; and, as you hear, forgive.

²²If anyone sins against his neighbor, and the neighbor calls down a curse on him and makes him swear an oath before your altar in this house, ²³hear from heaven, and act; decide between your servants: punish the wicked one, bringing his conduct down on his own head; and vindicate the innocent, rewarding him as his innocence deserves.

²⁴If Israel your people are defeated by the enemy because they have sinned against you, but they return to you and praise your name and humbly pray to you

for forgiveness, in this house, ²⁵hear from heaven. Forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave to them and to their ancestors.

²⁶When the heavens are shut and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray in this place and praise your name, having been humbled by you, and repent of their sin, ²⁷hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servant and of your people Israel. Teach them to do what is right; and send rain on your land which you have given your people as an inheritance.

²⁸Should there be famine in the land or epidemic or the crops are destroyed by scorching winds or swarms of locusts, should this people's enemies lay siege to one of their cities, if there is any plague or sickness, ²⁹if any person, or all Israel your people, should, out of heartfelt sorrow, pray, stretching out his hands toward this house, ³⁰hear from heaven where your home is. Forgive, and deal with each as his conduct deserves, for you know each heart - you alone know the hearts of all humankind - ³¹that they may come to you and follow your ways as long as they live in the land you gave to our ancestors.

³²And the foreigner too, not belonging to your people Israel, if he comes from a distant country for the sake of your Name and of your mighty hand and outstretched arm, if he comes and prays in this house, ³³hear from heaven where your home is, and grant all the foreigner asks, so that all the peoples of the earth may come to know your name and, like your people Israel, revere you, and know that your Name dwells in this house I have built.

³⁴If your people go out to war against their enemies whatever way you send them, and if they turn toward the city you have chosen and toward the house I have built for your Name and pray to you, ³⁵hear from heaven their prayer and give them victory.

³⁶If they sin against you - for there is no one who does not sin - and you are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they are led away captive to a land far or near, ³⁷if in the land of their exile they come to themselves and repent, and in the country of their captivity they pray to you saying, 'We have sinned, we confess how sinful and wicked we have been,' ³⁸and if they turn again to you with all their heart and soul in the country of their captivity to which they have been deported, and pray, turning toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen, and toward the house I have built for your name, ³⁹hear from heaven where your home is. Hear their prayer, be merciful to them, and forgive your people the sins they have committed against you.

⁴⁰Now, O my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. ⁴¹And now rise Yahweh God, come to your resting place, you and the ark of your power. Let your priests, Yahweh God, be blessed in all they do, and your faithful people rejoice in prosperity.

⁴²Yahweh God, do not reject the face of your anointed king and remember David your servant."

Dedication of Yahweh's house

7 ¹When Solomon had finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifices that had been offered; and the Glory of Yahweh filled the Temple. ²The priests could not enter the temple of Yahweh's House because the glory of Yahweh filled his house. ³All the people of Israel.

seeing the fire come down and the Glory of God resting on the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the earth; they worshiped and gave praise to Yahweh. "for he is good, for his love is everlasting." ⁴Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before Yahweh. ⁵King Solomon offered twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep in sacrifice; and so the king and all the people dedicated Yahweh's House. ⁶The priests stood in their places, and also the Levites who gave praise to Yahweh on the instruments that David had made to accompany the canticles of Yahweh, "for his love is everlasting." They played and sang the hymns of praise that David had composed. By their side were the priests sounding the trumpet, while all Israel stood.

⁷Solomon consecrated the inside part of the court that is in front of Yahweh's House; he offered the burnt offering there and the fatty parts of the peace offerings since the bronze altar Solomon had made could not hold the burnt offering, the grain offering and the fatty part. ⁸Solomon then celebrated the feast for seven days. Enormous crowds of Israelites gathered together with him from the Pass of Hamath to the border of Egypt. ⁹On the eighth day they held a closing celebration, for they had been seven days celebrating the dedication of the altar. ¹⁰On the twenty-third day of the seventh month Solomon dismissed the people who returned to their homes, rejoicing and with happy hearts for the goodness Yahweh had shown to David, to Solomon and to his people Israel.

¹¹Solomon finished Yahweh's House and the royal palace and successfully concluded all he had set himself to do in both of them. ¹²Then Yahweh appeared to Solomon in the night and said, "I have heard your prayer. I choose this house to be the place where sacrifices are to be offered to me. ¹³When I close the skies and there is no rain, when I command the locust to devour the land, when I send an epidemic among my people, ¹⁴and my people who bear my name humble themselves, and pray and look for me, and turn from their wicked ways then I myself will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and restore their land. ¹⁵From now on, my eyes are open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is offered in this place. ¹⁶From now on, I have chosen and consecrated this house as the place where my name will be forever; my eyes and my heart will be there forever.

¹⁷For your part, if you serve me faithfully as David your father did, if you do all that I order you and keep my statutes and my ordinances, ¹⁸I will make your royal throne secure, according to the promise I made to David your father when I said: Israel will always be ruled by one of your descendants. ¹⁹But if you turn away from me and forsake the commandments and statutes I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰then I will cast the Israelites out from the land I have given them, and I will reject this house that I have consecrated as the place where my Name would be, so that it may be an example for all the nations. ²¹All those who pass by this place which is now so exalted, will be astounded; they will whistle and say, 'Why has Yahweh treated this country and this Temple like this? this Temple like this?' ²²And the answer will be, 'Because they abandoned Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods, which they worshipped and served: that is why he has brought all these disasters on them.'

Solomon's works

8 ¹Solomon spent twenty years in building Yahweh's House and his own palace. ²Then he rebuilt the towns that Hiram had given him and settled Israelites in them. ³He went against Hamath of Zobah and conquered it; ⁴he built Tadmor in the wilderness and all the storing towns which he built in Hamath. ⁵He rebuilt Upper Beth-horon and Lower Beth-horon, fortified towns with walls and gates and bars, ⁶also Baalath and all the storing towns owned by Solomon, all the towns for his chariots and horses, and all it pleased Solomon to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon and in all the countries subject to him. ⁷Solomon employed for forced labor all those who remained of the Hittite, Amorite, Perizzite, Hivite and Jebusite peoples, that is the non-Israelites ⁸whose descendants were left in the country and had not been killed by the Israelites. Their descendants continue to be slaves down to the present time. ⁹Upon the Israelites, however, Solomon did not impose slave labor; these served as fighting men; they were officers of his chariots and commanders of horsemen.

¹⁰Solomon appointed two hundred and fifty overseers to make all these people work.

¹¹Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter from the City of David up to the house he had built for her. For he said, "I can't let a woman live in the palace of David king of Israel; these are holy places where the ark of Yahweh has been."

¹²Solomon then offered burnt offerings to Yahweh on Yahweh's altar which he had built in front of the porch. ¹³Observing the daily rule for burnt offerings according to the requirements of Moses for sabbaths, New Moon and the three annual feasts: the feast of Unleavened Bread, the feast of Weeks and the feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁴He established the priestly orders in their duties according to the regulations of his father David. He also enforced the rules affecting the Levites who offered praise and served with the priests according to the daily ritual, and the different orders of gatekeepers at each gate, for such had been the commandments of David, the man of God. ¹⁵They did not change anything of the royal ordinances applying to the priests and the Levites, not even in the matter of treasurership. ¹⁶In this way all of Solomon's work was completed from the day when the foundations of Yahweh's House were laid, until the end - And so Yahweh's House was finished.

¹⁷Then Solomon went as far as Eziongeber and Elath on the shores of the sea, in the land of Edom. ¹⁸Hiram sent him ships manned by his own men, who were experienced sailors. These men went with Solomon's men to Ophir and from there they brought back almost sixteen tons of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba

9 ¹The fame of Solomon having reached the queen of Sheba, she came to Jerusalem to test him with difficult questions. She came with immense riches, camels loaded with spices, great quantities of gold and precious stones. On coming to Solomon, she asked him all the questions that she had in mind, ²and Solomon had an answer for all her questions, not one was too difficult for him to explain. ³When the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, the palace he had built, ⁴the food at his table, the accommodations for his officials, the organization of his staff and the way they

were dressed, his cupbearers and the burnt offerings he offered in the Temple of Yahweh, it left her breathless; ⁵and she said to the king, "What I heard in my own country about you and your wisdom was true, then! ⁶I could not believe what they told me not even half of your wisdom for the reality surpasses what I heard. ⁷How happy your wives are! How happy these servants of yours who wait on you always and hear your wisdom! ⁸Blessed be Yahweh your God who loves you and made you king to rule in his name. Because your God loves Israel and wants to preserve them forever, he has made you their king to administer law and justice."

⁹And the queen of Sheba gave King Solomon almost five tons of gold and great quantities of spices and precious stones. There never were spices like those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. ¹⁰Similarly the servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon, who carried gold from Ophir, brought alummim wood and precious stones. ¹¹Of the alummim wood the king made floorboards for Yahweh's House and for the royal palace, and lyres and harps for the musicians; nothing like them had ever been seen before in the land of Judah. ¹²And King Solomon, in his turn, gave the queen of Sheba everything she expressed any wish for, besides returning what she had brought to the king. Then she went home, she and her servants, to her own country.

¹³The weight of gold coming to Solomon in one year was over twenty-five tons, ¹⁴not counting the taxes paid by the traders and merchants; all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country also brought gold and silver to Solomon. ¹⁵King Solomon made two hundred great shields of beaten gold, and plated each shield with about fifteen pounds of gold, and ¹⁶also three hundred small shields of beaten, and plated each of these with about eight pounds of gold; and he put them in the Hall of the Forest of Lebanon. ¹⁷The king also made a great ivory throne and plated it with purest gold. ¹⁸The throne had six steps, with a steps, with a platform behind and arms at either side of the seat; two lions stood beside the arms, ¹⁹and twelve lions stood on either side of the six steps. No throne like this was ever made in any other kingdom.

²⁰All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the furnishings in the Hall of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; silver was not considered valuable in the time of Solomon. ²¹And the king also had ships that went to Tarshish with Hiram's men, and once every three years the ships of Tarshish would come back bringing gold and silver, ivory, apes and baboons. ²²King Solomon was richer and wiser than any other king in the world. ²³All the kings of the earth consulted Solomon to hear the wisdom God had given him, ²⁴and each would bring his own present: gold vessels, silver vessels, robes, armor, spices, horses and mules; and this went on year after year.

²⁵Solomon had four thousand stalls for his horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horses; these were stationed in the chariot towns and near the king in Jerusalem. ²⁶Solomon extended his power over all the kingdoms from the river to the land of the Philistines and the Egyptian border. ²⁷In Jerusalem the king made silver as common as stone, and cedars as plentiful as the sycamores of the Lowlands. ²⁸Horses were imported for Solomon from Cilicia and all the other countries too.

²⁹The rest of the history of Solomon, from first to last, is recorded in the History of Nathan the prophet, in the Prophecy of Ahijah of Shiloh, and in the Vision

of Iddo, the seer concerning Jeroboam son of Nebat. ³⁰Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel for forty years. ³¹Then Solomon rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David his father; his son Rehoboam succeeded him.

The division of the kingdom

10 ¹Rehoboam went to Shechem where all the people of northern Israel had gone to proclaim him king. ²As soon as Jeroboam son of Nebat heard the news - he was still in Egypt where he had gone to escape from king Solomon - he returned from Egypt. ³The people of the northern tribes sent for him, and he came with the whole assembly.

And they said this to Rehoboam, ⁴"Your father placed heavy burdens on us. If you make these burdens lighter for us, we will serve you." ⁵He said, "Come back to me in three days." And the people went away.

⁶King Rehoboam consulted the older men who had served as advisers to his father Solomon and asked them, "What reply do you advise me to give to this people?" ⁷They said, "If you are kind to these people and listen to them and treat them fairly, then they will serve you forever." ⁸But he rejected the advice given him by the elders and consulted the bloody young men who had grown up with him. ⁹He asked, "How do you advise us to answer these people who have said to me, 'Lighten the burden your father put on us?'" ¹⁰These bloody young men who had grown up with him replied, "Give this answer to these people who have said, 'Your father gave us a heavy burden to bear, you must lighten it for us.' Say this to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist!'" ¹¹My father made you bear a heavy burden, but I will make it heavier still! My father beat you with whips; I am going to beat you with bullwhips!"

¹²Jeroboam with all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day according to what the king had said. ¹³"Come back to me on the third day." ¹⁴King Rehoboam, rejecting the advice of the elders, gave them a harsh answer ¹⁵and spoke to them as the bloody young men had recommended, "My father made you bear a heavy burden, but I will make it heavier still. My father beat you with whips; I am going to beat you with bullwhips!" ¹⁶The king in fact paid no attention to the people's wishes, and this was brought about by God to carry out what Yahweh had spoken through Ahijah of Shiloh to Jeroboam son of Nebat. ¹⁷When all Israel saw that the king paid no attention to their wishes, they gave him this answer: "Down with David and his descendants! What have they ever done for us? To your tents, men of Israel; let's go home. From now on let Rehoboam look out for himself!"

¹⁸So the people of Israel rebelled and Rehoboam was left with those people of Israel who lived in the towns of Judah. ¹⁹King Rehoboam sent Adoram who was in charge of forced labor, but the Israelites stoned him to death; ²⁰whereupon King Rehoboam was obliged to mount his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. And the people of Israel have been in rebellion against the family of David until the present day.

11 ¹Rehoboam went to Jerusalem and called together the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, a hundred and eighty thousand selected warriors, to fight the northern tribes of Israel and win back the kingdom of Rehoboam. ²But the word of Yahweh came to the prophet Shemaiah, ³"Say this to Rehoboam son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the Israelites in

Judah and Benjamin, "Yahweh says this: ⁴Do not attack your fellow Israelites; let everyone go home, for what has happened is my doing." ⁵They obeyed Yahweh's command and went back, instead of fighting against Jeroboam.

Rehoboam

Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem and built fortified towns in Judah. ⁶He rebuilt Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, Bethzur, Socoh, Adullam, ⁸Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, ¹⁰Zorah, Ajalon, Hebron; these were fortified towns in Judah and Benjamin. ¹¹He fortified them with walls and put commanders in them with stores of food, oil and wine. ¹²In each of these towns were shields and spears. He made them very strong to keep Judah and Benjamin under control.

¹³From all the territory of Israel, priests and Levites came south to Judah. ¹⁴The Levites, indeed, abandoned their pasture lands and their holdings, and came to Judah and Jerusalem, since Jeroboam and his sons did not recognize them as the only priests of Yahweh ¹⁵and had appointed priests of his own to serve at the high places to worship the goats and the bull calves he had made. ¹⁶Members of all the tribes of Israel, people who sincerely wanted to worship Yahweh the God of Israel, followed them and came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to Yahweh, the God of their ancestors. ¹⁷These Israelites added strength to the kingdom of Judah, and gave their support to Rehoboam son of Solomon for three years, because during three years he followed the example of David and Solomon.

¹⁸Rehoboam took as wife Mahalath the daughter of Erimoth, son of David and of Abihail, daughter of Eliab, son of Jesse. ¹⁹She bore him sons: Jeush, Shearaiah and Zerah. ²⁰After her, he married Maacah daughter of Absalom, who bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza and Shelomith. ²¹Rehoboam loved Maacah, daughter of Absalom, more than all his other wives and concubines. He had in fact a total of eighteen wives and sixty concubines, twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters. ²²Rehoboam favored Abijah, Maacah's son over all his other children, choosing him as the one to succeed him as king. ²³Rehoboam ruled prudently by catering his sons throughout Judah and Benjamin in the fortified towns, where he provided them with generous provisions and many wives.

12 ¹As soon as Rehoboam had established his authority as king had become powerful, he and all his people abandoned the Law of Yahweh. ²In the fifth year of Rehoboam, Shishak the king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, since it had been unfaithful to Yahweh. ³With twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horses and countless army of Libyans, Suckim and Ethiopians who came from Egypt with him, he captured the fortified towns of Judah and reached Jerusalem. Rehoboam and the Judean captains, at the advance of Shishak, had gathered near Jerusalem; ⁵to them came Shemaiah the prophet and he said, "Yahweh says this: as you have abandoned me, now I have abandoned you into the hands of Shishak. ⁶Then the Israelite captains and the king humbled themselves and said, "Yahweh is just!" ⁷When Yahweh saw that they had humbled themselves; the word of Yahweh came to Shemaiah. "They have humbled themselves; because of this I will not destroy them. In a little while I will grant them deliverance; my anger shall not fall on Jerusalem through the power of Shishak. ⁸Nevertheless they shall become his slaves, so that they may come to understand the difference between serving me and serving the kings of foreign countries."

⁹Shishak the king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and took all the treasures from the Temple of Yahweh and from the royal palace. He took everything, including the golden shields that Solomon had made; ¹⁰in place of them King Rehoboam had bronze shields made, entrusting them to the care of the officers of the guard who guarded the king's palace gate. ¹¹Whenever the king went to the Temple of Yahweh, the guards would come out carrying them, and return them to the guardroom afterward. ¹²Since he had submitted to Yahweh, the anger of Yahweh did not completely destroy him. There was still something good in Judah.

¹³King Rehoboam was able to strengthen his position in Jerusalem and to govern. Now Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king and he reigned for seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city chosen by Yahweh out of all the tribes of Israel, as the place where his Name would be. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah, the Ammonitess. ¹⁴He did evil, because he had not set his heart on seeking Yahweh.

¹⁵The history of Rehoboam, from first to last, is all recorded in the Annals of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer. There was constant warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. ¹⁶Then Rehoboam rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David; his son Abijah succeeded him.

Abijah

13 ¹In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah became king of Judah ²and reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother was Micaiah, daughter of Uriel, from Gibeah. Abijah and Jeroboam were at war. ³Abijah went into battle with an army of brave fighters, four hundred thousand picked men, while Jeroboam drew up his battle line against him with eight hundred thousand picked men, brave soldiers.

⁴Abijah went up Mount Zemaraim, in the hill country of Ephraim, and cried, "Jeroboam and all Israel, listen to me! ⁵Do you know that Yahweh the God of Israel has given the kingship of Israel to David forever? It is an unbreakable covenant for him and for his sons. ⁶Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon son of David, has rebelled against his king; ⁷worthless men, scoundrels, have rallied to him and opposed Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Rehoboam, then a young man and timid, was unable to resist them. ⁸Now you propose to subdue the Kingdom of Yahweh that he gave to David's descendants. You stand here with a huge army, but you are bringing the golden calves that Jeroboam made you for gods! ⁹Have you not driven out the priests of Yahweh, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, to make priests of your own like the peoples of foreign countries? Anyone who comes with a bull and seven rams can ask to be consecrated and become priest of what is no god at all! ¹⁰As for us, our God is Yahweh, and we have not abandoned him: the sons of Aaron minister to Yahweh, and the Levites as well. ¹¹Every morning, every evening, we burn burnt offerings to Yahweh our God, we have the incense of sweet spices, the loaves set out in rows on the pure table, the golden lampstand with its lamps that burn each evening; for we observe the ritual of Yahweh our God, that you have abandoned. ¹²See how God is with us, at our head; see his priests with the trumpets, which they will sound against you. People of Israel, do not fight against Yahweh, the God of our ancestors, for you will not succeed."

¹³Jeroboam outflanked the Judeans by setting an ambush behind them; the Judeans were facing the Israelites with the ambush at their rear. ¹⁴The Judeans,

turning about, found themselves attacked from the front and the rear. They called on Yahweh and while the priests sounded the trumpets, ¹⁵the men of Judah raised the war cry. And as they raised the war cry, God scattered Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and the people of Judah. ¹⁶The Israelites fled before Judah and God delivered them into the power of the Judeans. ¹⁷Abijah and his army inflicted a crushing defeat on them: five hundred thousand of Israel's chosen men were killed. ¹⁸And so the people of Israel were humbled and the people of Judah were victorious because they relied on Yahweh, the God of their ancestors.

¹⁹Abijah pursued Jeroboam's army and captured towns from him: Bethel with its outlying villages, Jeshanah with its outlying villages and Ephron with its outlying villages. ²⁰So in the lifetime of Abijah, Jeroboam could no longer maintain his power. Yahweh struck him down, and he died. ²¹But Abijah grew in strength; he took fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. ²²The rest of the history of Abijah, his conduct and his deeds, is not all this recorded in the commentary of the prophet Iddo? Then Abijah rested with his fathers and they buried him in the City of David; his son Asa succeeded him.

In his time the country was at peace for ten years.

Asa

14 ¹Asa did what is good and right in the eyes of Yahweh. ²He removed the altars of foreign worship and the High places. He broke down the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah's trunks. ³He commanded the people of Judah to do the will of Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, and to observe the Law and its commands. ⁴He removed the High places and the altars of incense in every town of Judah. The kingdom was at peace under his rule. ⁵He rebuilt the fortified towns of Judah, since the country was at peace, and there was no war during those years, for Yahweh granted him peace.

⁶He told the people of Judah, "Let us rebuild these towns and surround them with walls and towers, with gates and bars while we have control of this land, since we have done the will of Yahweh our God; and he has protected us and given us peace on every side."

⁷They built and prospered. Asa had an army of three hundred thousand Judeans armed with buckler and spear, and two hundred eighty thousand Benjaminites bearing shield and wielding the bow, all of them brave, well-trained men.

⁸Zerah the Cushite, with an army one million strong and three hundred chariots, made an incursion which reached to Mareshah. ⁹Asa marched against him and drew up his battle line in the Valley of Zephathah, at Mareshah. ¹⁰He called on Yahweh, his God, "Yahweh, no one but you can stand up for the powerless against the powerful. Come to our help, Yahweh our God! We rely on you, and fight against this huge army in your name. Yahweh, you are our God. Let no one defeat you."

¹¹Yahweh defeated the Cushites when Asa and the Judean army attacked them. The Cushites fled, ¹²and Asa pursued them with his army as far as Gerar. The Cushites fell even to the last for they had been overpowered by Yahweh and his camp. They collected great amounts of loot. ¹³They conquered all the towns in the area of Gerar, for the terror of Yahweh had fallen on these towns and they plundered them all since they were full of loot. ¹⁴They also attacked the camps of some shepherds and carried off

great numbers of sheep and camels; then they returned to Jerusalem.

15 ¹The spirit of God came on Azariah, son of Obed; ²he went out to meet Asa and said, "Listen to me, Asa, and all you of Judah and of Benjamin. Yahweh is with you so long as you are with him. When you look for him, he lets you find him; when you turn away, he will abandon you. ³For a long time Israel will be without the true God, and without priest to teach the Law, ⁴but when trouble comes, they will turn to Yahweh, the God of Israel. They will look for him and find him. ⁵When that time comes, there will be no peace for anyone, for many troubles will come upon all the inhabitants of the earth. ⁶One nation will oppress another nation, and one city another city, because God will bring trouble and distress on them. ⁷But for your part, take courage, and be strong, for your deeds will be rewarded."

⁸When Asa heard these words and this prophecy, he was encouraged to do away with all the idols throughout the land of Judah and Benjamin, and in the towns he had captured in the highlands of Ephraim; he then repaired the altar of Yahweh that stood in front of the Hall of Yahweh. ⁹He gathered all Judah and Benjamin together, and also the Ephraimites, Manassites and Simeonites who had settled with them, since great numbers of Israelites had gone over to Asa's side when they saw that Yahweh was with him. ¹⁰In the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa they assembled in Jerusalem; ¹¹and they sacrificed to Yahweh that day seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep out of the spoil they had brought back. ¹²They made a covenant in which they agreed to seek Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul; ¹³anyone who would not seek Yahweh the God of Israel was to be put to death, young or old, man or woman. ¹⁴They pledged their oath to Yahweh aloud with shouts to the sound of trumpet and horn; ¹⁵all Judah rejoiced at the oath they had wholeheartedly taken. They sought Yahweh so earnestly that he let them find him, and granted them peace on every side.

¹⁶King Asa took from his grandmother Manahah her title of queen mother, because she had made a hideous idol Asherah. Asa cut down the idol, and burned it in the wadi Kidron. Though the High places were not abolished in Israel, the heart of Asa was blameless all his life. He deposited the offerings dedicated by his father and his own offerings too, in the house of God, silver and gold and furnishings.

16 ¹Up to the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign, there was no war. In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, Baasha king of Israel invaded Judah and fortified Ramah to blockade Asa king of Judah. ²Asa then took the silver and gold from the treasuries of Yahweh's House and the royal palace, and sent it with the following message to Ben-hadad king of Aram: who lived in Damascus, ³"Let there be a covenant between myself and you, as between my father and your father! With this I send you silver and gold. Come break off your alliance with Baasha king of Israel, so that he goes away from me. ⁴Ben-hadad agreed, and sent his generals against the towns of Israel; he conquered Ijon, Dan, Abelmaim and all the garrison towns of Naphtali. ⁵When Baasha heard this he stopped fortifying Ramah, abandoning this work. ⁶King Asa then brought all the people of Judah, who took away the stones and timber with which Baasha had been fortifying Ramah, and the king used them to fortify Geba and Mizpah.

⁷It was then that Nanani, the prophet, came to Asa king of Judah and said, "Since you have relied on the

king of Aram and not on Yahweh your God, the army of the king of Aram will escape from you. ⁸Did not the Cushites and Libyans form a vast army with great numbers of chariots and horses? And were they not delivered into your power because you relied on Yahweh? ⁹Yahweh keeps close watch over the whole world to give strength to those who are devoted to him wholeheartedly. You have acted foolishly in this matter, for from now on you will have wars."

¹⁰Asa was very angry with the prophet and had him put in chains in prison, for he was angry because of these words. At the same time Asa treated some others harshly too.

¹¹The history of Asa, from first to last, is recorded in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ¹²A disease attacked Asa from head to foot in the thirtieth year of his reign; and, what is more, he turned in his sickness, not to Yahweh, but to doctors. ¹³Then Asa rested with his fathers in the forty-first year of his reign. They buried him in the tomb he had ordered to be dug for himself in the City of David. They laid him on a couch entirely covered with spices and varied ointments, products of the perfumer's skill, and lit a huge fire for him.

Jehoshaphat

17 ¹His son Jehoshaphat succeeded him and strengthened his position against Israel. ²He put troops in all the fortified towns in Judah, and appointed governors in the land of Judah and in all the towns of Ephraim captured by his father Asa.

³Yahweh blessed Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of David his father and did not worship Baal: ⁴he served the God of his father, following his commandments and not following the example of Israel. ⁵So Yahweh made the kingship secure in his hands; all the people of Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, and ample riches and honor were his. ⁶He took pride in serving Yahweh and destroyed all the High places and Asherah's trunks in Judah.

⁷In the third year of his reign he sent his officers: Benhai, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nathaniel and Micaiah, to give instruction in the towns of Judah. ⁸With them went the Levites: Shemaiah, Nathaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah and Tobiah, the Levites, together with the priests, Elishama and Jehoram. ⁹They gave instruction in Judah, having with them the book of the Law of Yahweh, and went around all the towns of Judah instructing the people.

¹⁰The fear of Yahweh came upon all the kingdoms surrounding Judah, so that they did not war against Jehoshaphat. ¹¹Some of the Philistines brought him gifts and silver in tribute; the Arabs themselves brought him, in small stock, seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred he-goats. ¹²Jehoshaphat became more and more powerful. Throughout Judah he built fortresses and towns with storage places.

¹³He had many workers in the towns of Judah and a garrison of outstanding officers in Jerusalem.

¹⁴This was their disposition by families: for Judah, commanders of thousands; Adnah, the commanding officer, with three hundred thousand outstanding officers under his command; ¹⁵Jehohanan with two hundred and eighty thousand; ¹⁶Amasiah son of Zichri, who had volunteered for Yahweh's service, with two hundred valiant warriors.

¹⁷From Benjamin: the valiant warrior Eliada with two hundred thousand, armed with bow and shield; ¹⁸under his command, Jehozabad with a hundred and eighty thousand equipped for war.

¹⁹These were the men who served the king, not counting those the king had put in the fortified towns throughout Judah.

Jehoshaphat and Ahab

18 ¹Jehoshaphat, the, enjoyed great wealth and honour and allied himself by marriage to Ahab. ²After some years he went to visit Ahab in Samaria. Ahab slaughtered for him and for his retinue great numbers of sheep and oxen; then urged him to attack Ramoth-gilead. ³And he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you come with me to Ramoth-gilead?" Jehoshaphat answered the king of Israel, "I am with you, my men are yours, and we will fight together."

⁴Jehoshaphat, however, said to the king of Israel, "First, please consult the word of Yahweh." ⁵So the king of Israel called the prophets who were four hundred men, and asked them, "Should we march to attack Ramoth-gilead, or should I refrain?" They replied, "Go, because Yahweh will deliver it into your power." ⁶But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no other prophet of Yahweh here for us to consult?" ⁷The king of Israel answered, "There is one more man through whom we can consult Yahweh, but I hate him because he never tells me good things but only discouraging words. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." Jehoshaphat said, "The king should not say such things." ⁸Accordingly the king of Israel summoned one of his officials and said, "Bring Micaiah son of Imlah immediately."

⁹The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were both sitting on their thrones in royal garments; they sat at the threshing-floor outside the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets raving in front of them. ¹⁰Zedekiah son of Chenaanah had made himself iron horns and said, "Yahweh says this: You will gore the Arameans till you make an end of them." ¹¹And all the prophets prophesied the same saying, "March to Ramoth-gilead, for you will succeed. Yahweh will deliver it into the power of the king."

¹²In the meantime the messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "All the prophets as one man are foretelling victory to the king. Try to speak like one of them and foretell success." ¹³But Micaiah answered, "As Yahweh lives, what my God says, that will I utter!" ¹⁴When he came to the king, the king asked him, "Micaiah, should we go to attack Ramoth-gilead, or should I refrain?" He answered, "Go and you will succeed. They will be delivered into your power." ¹⁵But the king said, "How often must I beg you to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of Yahweh?" ¹⁶Then Micaiah said, "I have seen all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep without a shepherd. And Yahweh said, 'These have no master, let each one go home in peace.'"

¹⁷At this the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he never foretells me good things, but only what is discouraging?" ¹⁸Micaiah went on, "Listen to the word of Yahweh. I have seen Yahweh seated on his throne; all the array of heaven stood to his right and to his left. ¹⁹Yahweh said, 'Who will trick Ahab king of Israel so that he goes and falls at Ramoth-gilead? At which some answered one way, and some another. ²⁰Then a spirit stepped forward, approached Yahweh and said, 'I will trick him.' Yahweh asked, 'How?' ²¹He replied, 'I will go and become a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.' Yahweh said, 'You shall trick him and succeed. Go and do it.' ²²So Yahweh has put a lying spirit into the mouths of your prophets here because he himself wants you to meet with disaster!'"

²³Then Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah came up and

slapped Michaiiah's face, and he asked, "When did the spirit of Yahweh leave me, to talk to you?" ²⁴Michaiiah replied, "This is what you will find out the day you flee from house to house to hide." ²⁵The king of Israel said, "Seize Michaiiah and hand him over to Amon, governor of the city, and to Prince Joash, ²⁶and say: This is the king's order: Put this man in prison and feed him on nothing but bread and water until I come back safe and sound." ²⁷Michaiiah said, "If you come back safe and sound, Yahweh has not spoken through me."

²⁸The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went to attack the city of Ramoth in Gilead. ²⁹The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself as we go into battle, but I want you to wear your royal clothes." The king of Aram had given his chariot commanders the following order: "Do not attack anyone of whatever rank, except the king of Israel." When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought he was the king of Israel. And they wheeled to the attack. But Jehoshaphat gave a shout and Yahweh came to his help. God rescued him and turned the attack away from him. The chariot commanders realized that he was not the king of Israel and called off their pursuit.

By chance, however, one of the soldiers shot an arrow which struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. The king said to his charioteer, "Turn around and get me out of the battle; I have been hurt." But the battle grew fiercer so that they held the king upright in his chariot facing the Aramaeans until evening, and at sunset he died.

19 ¹Jehoshaphat came back safe and sound to Jerusalem. ²Jehu, son of Hanani the prophet, went to meet him and said to king Jehoshaphat, "Should a man give help to the wicked? Should you love those who hate Yahweh? Because of this you have brought his anger on you? ³There is some good in you, however, since you have removed from your land Asherah's trunks and have set your heart on seeking God."

⁴Jehoshaphat stayed for a time in Jerusalem. After that he would again visit his people regularly, from Beersheba to the highlands of Ephraim to bring them back to Yahweh, the God of their ancestors. ⁵He appointed judges in the country in every one of all the fortified towns of Judah. ⁶He said to these judges, "Give due thought to your duties, since you are not judging in the name of men but in the name of Yahweh, who is with you whenever you pronounce sentence. ⁷May the fear of Yahweh now be on you. Keep the Law, apply it, for Yahweh our God does not tolerate fraud or partiality or the taking of bribes."

⁸In addition, Jehoshaphat appointed priests, Levites and heads of Israelite families in Jerusalem as judges in cases involving a violation of the Law or legal disputes between people living in the city. They lived in Jerusalem ⁹and Jehoshaphat gave them the following instructions, "You are to perform these duties in the fear of Yahweh, as upright and honest men. ¹⁰Whatever dispute comes before you from your brothers living in their towns: either about crimes or questions of the Law, you are to teach them the commandments, statutes or ordinances, so that they do not become guilty of sinning against Yahweh, lest his anger come on you and your brothers. Do this and you will not be guilty."

¹¹Amariah, the chief priest, will have final authority over you in all religious matters, and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, governor of Judah in all matters affecting the king. The Levites will serve as your scribes. Be

courageous, carry out these instructions, and Yahweh will be there to bring success."

20 ¹After this the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites started to make war on Jehoshaphat. ²Jehoshaphat received the following message, "A large army is advancing against you from Edom, from the other side of the sea; they are already at Hazaaon-tamar, that is, Engedi." ³Jehoshaphat was frightened and prayed to Yahweh for guidance. Then he ordered that a fast be observed throughout the country. ⁴Judah assembled to seek help from Yahweh; they came seeking Yahweh's guidance from every single town in Judah.

⁵Then Jehoshaphat stood before this assembly of the people of Judah and Jerusalem in Yahweh's House, before the new court ⁶and said, "Yahweh, God of our ancestors, are you not the God who dwells in heaven? Do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the world? Such power and might are in your hands that no one can oppose you. ⁷Are you not our God, you who drove out the people who were living here before your people Israel and gave the land to the descendants of your friend Abraham forever? ⁸They have settled in it and built a sanctuary in it for your name, ⁹saying, 'Should disaster strike us, or war, punishment, epidemic, or famine, then we shall stand before this house and before you, for your Name rests on this house. From the depths of our distress we shall cry to you, and you will hear and save us.'

¹⁰Here now are the Ammonites and Moab and the folk of Seir. When Israel came out of the land of Egypt you would not let Israel invade them; instead, Israel turned away from them and did not destroy them, ¹¹and this is how they reward us, by coming to drive us out of the possessions you have given us as our inheritance. ¹²Will you, our God, not punish them, since we are helpless in the face of this large army that attacks us? We ourselves do not know what to do; but we look to you."

¹³All the men of Judah, even down to their youngest children and their wives, stood there at the House. ¹⁴In the middle of the assembly the spirit of Yahweh came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah the Levite, one of the sons of Asaph. ¹⁵And he cried, "Listen all you men of Judah and you who live in Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Yahweh says this to you: You must not be discouraged or afraid to face this large army; this battle is not yours but God's. ¹⁶March out against them tomorrow; they are coming up by the Slope of Ziz and you will come on them in the Valley of Soph, near the wilderness of Jeruel. ¹⁷You will not need to fight there; but only take up your position, stand firm, and see what salvation Yahweh has in store for you. Judah and Jerusalem, be fearless, be dauntless; go out to battle tomorrow and Yahweh will be with you."

¹⁸Jehoshaphat bent his head, his face to the ground, and all Judah with those who lived in Jerusalem fell down before Yahweh, worshipping him. ¹⁹Then the Levites - Kohathites and Korahites - began praising Yahweh the God of Israel at the top of their voices.

²⁰They rose early in the morning and left for the wilderness of Tekoa. As they were setting out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me Judah and all who live in Jerusalem! Put your trust in Yahweh your God and you will stand your ground; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." ²¹Then, having held a conference with the people, he ordered some musicians to put on the robes they wore on sacred occasions and to march at the head of the army, to sing praises to him. "Give praise to Yahweh, for his love is

everlasting." ²²As they began to sing their joy and their praise, Yahweh threw the invading armies into a panic and completely destroyed them. The Moabites and the Ammonites struck the people of Seir and there was a disaster. ²³For the Ammonites and Moabites turned on the mountain folk of Seir in savage fighting and after they had destroyed them, they began to kill one another.

²⁴When the men of Judah reached the spot that looks out on the wilderness and turned to face the enemy, they found only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. ²⁵Jehoshaphat came with his troops to plunder them, and found quantities of cattle, goods, clothing and valuables; they collected more than they could take away; the loot was so plentiful that they were three days gathering it. ²⁶On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah; and there they did indeed praise Yahweh for all he had done. Because of this, this Valley was named the Valley of Beracah which it is still called. ²⁷Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin, with Jehoshaphat at their head, went back joyfully to Jerusalem, for Yahweh had filled them with joy at the expense of their enemies. ²⁸To the music of harp and lyre and trumpet they came to Jerusalem and to Yahweh's House. ²⁹When the kingdoms of foreign countries heard how Yahweh had defeated Israel's enemies, they were all terrified. ³⁰In the meantime, the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was calm, and God granted him peace on every side.

³¹Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king and he reigned for twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother was Azubah, daughter of Shilhi. ³²He followed the example of his father Asa without wavering, doing what is right in the eyes of Yahweh. ³³The High places however, were not destroyed; the people had still not turned their hearts to the God of their ancestors. ³⁴The rest of the history of Jehoshaphat, from first to last, is recorded in the Annals of Jehu son of Hanani which have been transcribed into the Book of the Kings of Israel.

³⁵After this, Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who led him into evil ways. ³⁶He combined with him to build big ships that would sail to Tarshish. These were built at Ezion-geber. ³⁷Eliezer, son of Dodavahu of Maresah, then made a prophecy against Jehoshaphat, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, Yahweh has destroyed your plans." In fact the ships broke up and were never fit to sail to Tarshish.

Jehoram

21 ¹Jehoshaphat rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. His son Jehoram succeeded him.

²Jehoram had six brothers, sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael and Shephatiah; these were all the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. ³Their father had made them many gifts of silver, gold and jewels, and of fortified towns in Judah, but he made Jehoram his successor since he was the firstborn. ⁴When Jehoram was in firm control of the kingdom, he had all his brothers killed, as well as some Israelite officials.

⁵Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king and he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem. ⁶He followed the wicked example of the kings of Israel and did as the family of Ahab had done, for he had married one of Ahab's daughters; and he did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh. ⁷Yahweh however did

not intend to destroy the descendants of David, because of the covenant he had made with David, when he promised to leave a lamp for him and his sons forever.

⁸In his time Edom revolted against Judah and set up a king for itself. ⁹Jehoram invaded Edom with his commanders and all his chariots. He rose during the night and broke through and escaped from the Edomites encircling him and his chariot commanders. ¹⁰Thus Edom became independent of Judah, and has remained free to the present day. Libnah also revolted against Jehoram at the same time for he had deserted Yahweh, the God of his ancestors. ¹¹He also set up High places in the highlands of Judah and caused the people living in Jerusalem and Judah to sin against Yahweh.

¹²Then something written by the prophet Elijah came into his hand. It ran, "This is the word of Yahweh, the God of David your ancestor. You have not followed the example of your father Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah, ¹³but the wicked example of the kings of Israel, and have caused Judah and the people living in Jerusalem to sin against Yahweh, just as Ahab and his successors did. You have also murdered your brothers, your own family, better men than yourself. ¹⁴Because of this Yahweh will strike you with a great calamity, which will come upon your people, your descendants, your wives and all your property. ¹⁵You yourself will suffer a painful intestinal disease that will grow worse day by day.

¹⁶Yahweh stirred up against Jehoram the Philistines and the Arabs bordering on the Cushites. ¹⁷They attacked Judah and invaded it, carrying off all they found in the king's palace, including his sons and his wives; the only son left him was Ahaziah, the youngest of them. ¹⁸And after all this, Yahweh brought on him a painful disease of the intestines. ¹⁹It lasted for more than one year, and when the two years were over and his last hour had come, he died in great pain. The people did not light a bonfire in mourning for him as they had for his father.

²⁰He was thirty-two years old when he became king and he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem. He passed away with no one to regret him, and they buried him in the City of David, though not in the tombs of the kings.

Ahaziah and his policy

22 ¹The people of Jerusalem proclaimed his youngest son, Ahaziah, king in place of him, since the armed band that had broken into the camp with the Arabs had killed all the elder sons. So Ahaziah son of Jehoram became king of Judah.

²Ahaziah was twenty years old when he became king and he reigned for one year in Jerusalem. His mother was Athaliah, daughter of Omri. ³He too followed the example of Ahab's family, since his mother gave him wicked advice. ⁴He sinned against Yahweh as Ahab's family had done, for they were his advisers after his father's death, and they led him to his downfall. ⁵He also put their policies into practice and went with Jeroham son of Ahab, king of Israel, to fight against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-gilead. But the Arameans wounded Jeroham, ⁶who returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds that he had received at Ramoth, fighting against Hazael king of Aram.

Ahaziah son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to Jezreel to visit Jeroham son of Ahab because he was ill. ⁷Yahweh used this visit to Jeroham to bring about Ahaziah's downfall. On his arrival he went out with Jeroham against Jehu son of Nimshi whom Yahweh

had chosen to destroy the family of Ahab. ⁸ While Jehu was busy carrying out God's sentence against Ahab's family, he came across the officials of Judah and the kinsmen of Ahaziah who were in the king's service and killed them. ⁹ He then went in search of Ahaziah who was captured while he tried to hide in Samaria. He was taken to Jehu who put him to death. But they gave him burial, for they said, "This was a son of Jehoshaphat who sought Yahweh with all his heart."

Athaliah

¹⁰ There was no one left in the royal family of Ahaziah strong enough to reign. As soon as Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, learned that her son was dead, she promptly gave orders for all the members of the royal family of Judah to be killed. ¹¹ But Jehosheba, daughter of king Jehoram, secretly rescued Joash, her brother's son, from among the sons of the king who were being murdered, and put him with his nurse in the nurse in the sleeping quarters; in this way Jehosheba the daughter of King Joram and wife of Jehoiada the priest (a sister, too, of Ahaziah) hid him from Athaliah, and prevented her from killing him. ¹² He stayed with them for six years, hidden in the house of God, while Athaliah governed the country.

23 ¹ After waiting six years Jehoiada the priest decided to take action. He sent for the commanders of hundreds: Azariah son of Jehoram, Ishmael son of Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maasiah son of Adaiah and Elishaphat son of Zichri, and made a pact with them. ² They went through Judah, gathering the Levites from all the towns of Judah, and the heads of the Israelite families. They came to Jerusalem, ³ and this whole assembly made a pact with the king in the house of God. Jehoiada told them, "Here is the son of the king, let him rule as king as Yahweh has promised regarding the descendants of David!" ⁴ This is what you must do: one third of you, priests, Levites and keepers of the gate, must come in for the sabbath, ⁵ one third must be at the royal palace, one third at the Gate of Foundation, and all the people will be in the court of Yahweh's House. ⁶ No one is to enter Yahweh's House except the priests and the Levites on duty, since they are consecrated and may enter. The people must all obey Yahweh's instructions and stay outside. ⁷ The Levites must surround the king, each with his weapons in his hand; anyone who tries to enter the Temple is to be put to death. Stay with the king wherever he goes."

⁸ The Levites and all Judah carried out all the orders of Jehoiada the priest. Every commander summoned both those who went off duty on the Sabbath, and those coming on duty, because Jehoiada did not except anyone. ⁹ Then Jehoiada the priest provided the commanders of hundreds with King David's spears and large and small shields, which were in the house of God. ¹⁰ He stationed the men from the west wing to the east wing, between the House and the altar, each with spear in hand, to protect the king. ¹¹ Then they brought out the king's son, crowned him and put on him the ornaments, and they proclaimed him king. Jehoiada and his sons then anointed him and shouted, "Long live the king!"

¹² Athaliah, on hearing the shouts of the people who were rushing to the king and acclaiming him, went to Yahweh's House where the people were. ¹³ When she saw the king standing there at the entrance beside the pillar, with the captains and trumpeters at his side, and all the people from the countryside rejoicing and sounding trumpets, and the cantors with their musical instruments leading the hymns,

Athaliah tore her clothes in distress and shouted, "Treason, treason!" ¹⁴ Then Jehoiada the priest called out the military officers and ordered them, "Take her outside the Temple, and kill anyone who follows her." And he also said, "You must not put her to death in Yahweh's House." ¹⁵ They seized her, and when she had reached the palace at the entry to the Gate of the Horses, they put her to death there.

¹⁶ Jehoiada made a covenant between the king and all the people, by which they would be the people of Yahweh. ¹⁷ All the people then went to the house of Baal and tore it down: they smashed his altars and his images and killed Mattan, priest of Baal, in front of the altars.

¹⁸ Jehoiada posted sentries to guard Yahweh's House under the authority of the levitical priests. David had appointed them in Yahweh's House to offer the burnt offerings of Yahweh according to the Law of Moses, and to sing joyfully the songs of David. ¹⁹ He stationed gatekeepers at the gates of the Temple of Yahweh so that no one who was in any way unclean might enter. ²⁰ Then taking the commanders of hundreds, the notables, the ranking officials, and all the people from the countryside, he brought the king in procession from the House to the palace. They entered the royal palace through the main gate and seated the king on the royal throne. ²¹ All the people from the countryside were delighted, and the city was quiet. Athaliah was put to death.

Joash

24 ¹ Joash was seven years old when he became King and he reigned for forty years in Jerusalem. His mother was Zibiah of Beersheba. ² Joash did what is pleasing to Yahweh throughout the lifetime of Jehoiada the priest. ³ Jehoiada found him two wives and he had sons and daughters. ⁴ After that Joash decided to repair Yahweh's House.

⁵ Calling the priests and the Levites together, he said, "Go out to the towns of Judah, and collect enough money from all the Israelites to make possible annual repairs on the house of God. Do this quickly." But the Levites were in no hurry, ⁶ so the king called Jehoiada for he was their head, and said, "Why have you not insisted on the Levites collecting from Judah and Jerusalem the tax which Moses, the servant of Yahweh, required the people to pay for the maintenance of the Tent of the Meeting?" ⁷ Athaliah and her sons, whom she perverted, damaged the house of God and even used many of the sacred objects in the worship of Baal. ⁸ So the king ordered them to make a chest and to place it outside the gate of Yahweh's House. ⁹ And they announced throughout Judah and Jerusalem that they had to bring to Yahweh the tax Moses, that servant of God, had required in the wilderness. ¹⁰ All the officials and all the people came joyfully with their contribution, dropping it into the chest until all was paid.

¹¹ The chest was taken to the royal office of control by the Levites whenever they saw that there was a great amount of money in it. The king's secretary then came with representatives of the chief priest to take the chest, empty it of money and later return it to its place. They did this every day, and collected a large sum of money. ¹² The king and Jehoiada gave the money to those who were in charge of repairing the House, and they hired men, masons and carpenters, who set about restoring Yahweh's House; craftsmen in iron and bronze also worked on the repairing of it. ¹³ The supervisors having once made a start, the repairs went ahead; they rebuilt the house of God as it was before:

was solid as ever. ¹⁴When they had finished, they brought the balance of the money to the king and Jehoiada, and from this, furnishings were made for Yahweh's House, vessels for the liturgy and for the burnt offerings, incense boats and objects of gold and silver.

So, for as long as Jehoiada lived they offered sacrifices regularly in Yahweh's house. ¹⁵Then Jehoiada, growing old, had his fill of days and died. He died at the age of a hundred and thirty years, ¹⁶and they buried him with the kings in the City of David because he had served Israel well and also God and his house.

¹⁷After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came to pay court to the king, and the king now turned to them for advice. ¹⁸The Judaeans abandoned the house of Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, for the worship of sacred trunks and idols and God's anger fell on Judah and Jerusalem because of their guilt. ¹⁹He sent them prophets to bring them back to Yahweh, but when the prophets spoke, they would not listen. ²⁰The spirit of God took control of Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood up before the people and said, "God says this: Why are you disobeying the commandments of Yahweh? You cannot prosper. You have abandoned Yahweh and he will abandon you." ²¹They then plotted against him and by order of the king stoned him in the court of Yahweh's House. ²²King Joash, forgot the kindness that Jehoiada, the father of Zechariah, and killed Jehoiada's son who cried out as he died, "Let Yahweh see and do justice!"

²³When a year had gone by, the Aramaean army made war on Joash. They reached Judah and Jerusalem, and killed all the officials among the people, sending back to the king of Damascus all that they had plundered from them. ²⁴Though the Aramaean army was small, Yahweh delivered into its power an army of great size for they had abandoned him, the God of their ancestors.

²⁵The Aramaeans wounded Joash and when they withdrew they left him a very sick man; and his officers, plotting against him to avenge the death of the son of Jehoiada the priest, murdered him in his bed. So he died, and they buried him in the City of David, though not in the tombs of the king. ²⁶These were the conspirators: Zabad son of Shimeath the Ammonite woman, and Jehoabad son of Shimrith the Moabitess. ²⁷As regards his sons, the heavy tribute he demanded, and the restoration of the house of God, this is all recorded in the commentary on the Book of the Kings. His son Amaziah succeeded him.

Amaziah

25 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jehoash of Jerusalem. ²He did what is pleasing to Yahweh, though not steadily. ³As soon as he was firmly in power, he killed those of his officers who had murdered the king his father. ⁴But he did not put their sons to death, in obedience to what is written in the Law, in the book of Moses, where Yahweh has ordered, "Fathers must not be put to death for sons, nor sons for fathers; but everyone will pay for his own crime."

⁵Amaziah called the men of Judah together and organized them in families with commanders of thousands and of hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He counted those who were twenty years old or older, and found there were three hundred thousand of selected warriors fit for military service, and for handling spear and shield. ⁶Next, he enrolled one hundred thousand from Israel as mercenaries, for about four tons of

silver. ⁷A man of God then came to him and said, "O king, don't take these Israelite soldiers with you, for Yahweh is not with Israel or with any of the Ephraimites. ⁸If they come, whatever be the number of your men, God will still bring you down before your enemies, for God's is the power to uphold or to throw down." ⁹Amaziah answered the man of God, "And what about the four tons of silver I have given the Israelite soldiers?" The man of God replied, "Yahweh can give you far more than that." ¹⁰At this, Amaziah dismissed from his army the troops that had come to him from Ephraim and sent them home; these men were furious with Judah and went home in great anger.

¹¹Amaziah led his army to Salt Valley and defeated ten thousand Edomite soldiers. ¹²The men of Judah took ten thousand captives alive and, taking them to the top of the cliff, threw them off the top; they were all dashed to pieces. ¹³Then the Israelite troops which Amaziah had dismissed and not allowed to fight with him raided the towns of Judah, from Samaria as far as Bethhoron, but they were defeated by a troop of three thousand men who recovered great quantities of plunder.

¹⁴On returning from his defeat of the Edomites, Amaziah brought the gods of the Edomites with him and set these up as gods for himself, bowing down before them and burning incense to them. ¹⁵Then Yahweh became angry with Amaziah and he sent him a prophet, who said, "Why have you looked to this people's gods, who could not save their own people from your power?" ¹⁶He was still speaking when Amaziah interrupted him, "Have we appointed you a royal counselor? If you do not want to be hurt, be quiet!" The prophet paused; then he said, "Now I know that God has decided to destroy you, since after having acted like this, you refuse to listen to me."

¹⁷After consulting his advisers, Amaziah king of Judah sent a message to Joash son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, king of Israel, challenging him to fight. ¹⁸Joash king of Israel sent back word to Amaziah king of Judah, "The thornbush of Lebanon sent a message to the cedar of Lebanon, saying, 'Give my son your daughter in marriage'; but the wild animals of Lebanon trampled the thornbush down as they passed. You are very proud because you have defeated the Edomites — Boast on but stay at home. ¹⁹Why stir up trouble that will only bring disaster on you and your people?"

²⁰But Amaziah would not listen. It was God's will for him to be defeated, because he had worshiped the Edomite idols. ²¹And at Bethshemesh Judah, they made their trial of strength, Joash and Amaziah king of Judah. ²²Judah was defeated by Israel, and everyone fled to his tent. ²³The king of Judah, Amaziah son of Joash, son of Ahaziah, was taken prisoner at Bethshemesh by Joash, king of Israel who led him off to Jerusalem, where Joash tore down the city wall from the Gate of Ephraim to the Gate of the Corner, a distance of two hundred yards. ²⁴He took all the gold and silver, all the furnishings to be found with Obed-edom in the House of God, the treasures of the royal palace, and hostages besides, and then returned to Samaria.

²⁵Amaziah son of Joash, king of Judah, lived for fifteen years after the death of Joash son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel.

²⁶The rest of the history of Amaziah, from first to last, is all recorded in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ²⁷After the time when Amaziah rebelled against Yahweh, there had been a plot against him in Jerusalem; he fled to Lachish; but he was followed to

Lachish and put to death there. ²⁸ He was brought back by horse, and buried with his ancestors in the City of David.

Uzziah

26 ¹ All the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in place of his father Amaziah. ² He rebuilt Elath and recovered it for Judah, after the death of Amaziah. ³ Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king and he reigned for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jecoliah, of Jerusalem. ⁴ He did what is pleasing to Yahweh, just as his father Amaziah had done; ⁵ he sought God in the lifetime of Zechariah, who taught him the fear of God. And for as long as he sought Yahweh, God gave him prosperity:

⁶ He went out to fight the Philistines, tore down the walls of Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod, then rebuilt the towns in the area of Ashdod and in Philistine territory. ⁷ God helped him defeat the Philistines, the Arabs, the inhabitants of Gubbaal and the Meunites. ⁸ The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah. His fame spread as far as the border of Egypt, since he had become very powerful indeed.

⁹ Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem, at the Gate of the Corner, at the Gate of the Valley and at the Angle; and he fortified these. ¹⁰ He built towers in the wilderness too, and dug a great many cisterns, for he had large herds in the lowlands and on the tableland; and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and on the fertile lands; he was fond of agriculture.

¹¹ Uzziah had an army ready for battle. They set out for war by turns, according to the census carried out by the scribe Jeiel and the registrar Maaseiah. Their commander was Hananiah, one of the king's officers. ¹² The total number of heads of families among these valiant warriors was two thousand six hundred. ¹³ Under their command was a trained army of three hundred and seven thousand five hundred fighting men, a powerful force to support the king against the enemy. ¹⁴ Uzziah provided them with shields, spears, helmets, coats of armor, bows and sling stones, for each battle. ¹⁵ In Jerusalem he constructed engines, invented by experts, which were mounted on the towers and at the corners to fire arrows and great stones. His fame spread far and wide; for he was extraordinary in getting help until he was strong.

¹⁶ But, as his power increased, he became so proud that he lost what he had gained. He defied Yahweh his God by going into the House to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ Azariah the priest followed King Uzziah in, with eighty brave priests of Yahweh, ¹⁸ to resist him. They said to him, "Uzziah, it is not for you to burn incense to Yahweh, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, consecrated for the purpose. Leave the sanctuary; you have offended Yahweh God and you no longer have his blessing." ¹⁹ Uzziah, censer in hand for the burning incense, became angry with the priests and immediately, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests, in Yahweh's House, there by the altar of incense. ²⁰ Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests turned toward him and saw the leprosy on his forehead. They quickly hurried him out, and he himself was anxious to go, since Yahweh had punished him.

²¹ King Uzziah was a leper till his dying day. He lived in an isolated house, a leper, excluded from Yahweh's House. Jotham, his son, was master of the palace, and ruled the people of the country.

²² The rest of the history of Uzziah, from first to last, has been written by the prophet Isaiah son of

Amoz. ²³ Then Uzziah rested with his ancestors and they buried him in the ground where the tomb of the kings is, for they said, "He is a leper." His son Jotham succeeded him.

Jotham

27 ¹ Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother Jerushah, daughter of Zadok. ² He did what is pleasing to Yahweh, just as his father Uzziah had done. But he did not enter the sanctuary of Yahweh. As for the people, they went on sinning.

³ He built the Upper Gate of Yahweh's House and carried out considerable work on the wall of the Ophel. ⁴ He built towns in the highlands of Judah, and fortified places and towers in the fertile lands.

⁵ He fought against the king of the Ammonites. He defeated them, and that year the Ammonites gave him four tons of silver, fifty thousand bushels of wheat and ten thousand of barley. And they had to pay him the same for the second and third years. ⁶ Jotham became powerful because he faithfully obeyed Yahweh his God.

⁷ The rest of the deeds of Jotham, all his wars and his policy, are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. ⁸ He was twenty-five years old when he became king and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. ⁹ Then Jotham rested with his ancestors and they buried him in the City of David; his son Ahaz succeeded him.

Ahaz

28 ¹ Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what is pleasing to Yahweh, as his ancestor David had done. ² He followed the example of the kings of Israel, and even had Baal's idols made of metal. ³ He offered incense in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom and even sacrificed his own sons as burnt offerings to disgusting idols, copying the shameful practice of the people whom Yahweh had driven out of the land he would give to the Israelites. ⁴ He offered sacrifices and incense at the High places, on the hills and under every spreading tree.

⁵ Yahweh his God let the King of the Aramaeans defeat him and take great numbers of his people captive, carrying them off to Damascus. He was also delivered into the power of the king of Israel, who defeated him. ⁶ In a single day, Pekah son of Remaliah, killed a hundred and twenty thousand in Judah, all brave fighting men; this was because they had abandoned Yahweh, the God of their ancestors. ⁷ Zichri, an Ephraimite champion, killed Maaseiah, son of the king, Azrikam the controller of the place, and Elkanah the king's second-in-command. ⁸ The Israelites took two hundred thousand of their Judean brothers captive, with wives, sons, and daughters; they also took quantities of loot, carrying everything off to Samaria.

⁹ A prophet of Yahweh, named Oded, was there and he went out to meet the troops returning to Samaria and said, "Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, was angry with Judah and so he delivered them into your power, but you have slaughtered with such fury as reaches to heaven. ¹⁰ And you intended to make the men and women of Jerusalem and Judah your slaves. But you yourselves are also guilty before Yahweh your God. ¹¹ Now listen to me: release the prisoners you have taken of your brothers, or Yahweh will punish you in his anger."

¹² Some of the Ephraimite chieftains then stood up in opposition to those who returned from the war: Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berechiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum and Amasa son of Hadlai. ¹³ They said, "You must not bring the captives in here for we are guilty enough before Yahweh. Will you add to our sins and to our guilt? But our guilt is already heavy and the fierce anger of Yahweh is hanging over Israel." ¹⁴ So in the presence of the officials and of the whole assembly, the army gave up the captives and the loot. ¹⁵ Four men were appointed to provide the prisoners with clothing. From the loot they clothed all those who were naked; they gave them clothing and sandals, provided them with food and drink, and washed them. Those who were too weak to walk they put on donkeys and took them back to their kinsmen at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

¹⁶ It was then that King Ahaz sent asking the kings of Assyria to come to his assistance. ¹⁷ For the Edomites once again invaded and defeated Judah, and carried off prisoners. ¹⁸ The Philistines were raiding the towns in the lowlands and in the Negeb of Judah. They took Beithshemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, and Socco with its outlying villages. Timnah with its outlying villages, Gimmzo with its outlying villages, and they settled in them.

¹⁹ Yahweh humbled Judah on account of Ahaz, king of Israel, who let Judah go its own way and was not faithful to Yahweh.

²⁰ Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria attacked and besieged him but could not defeat him. ²¹ Ahaz however had to take part of the goods in Yahweh's House and in the palaces of the king and princes, to hand over to the king of Assyria, yet he received no help from him.

²² During the time Jerusalem was under siege, King Ahaz sinned against Yahweh more than ever, ²³ by offering sacrifices to the gods of Damascus who had defeated him. He said, "Since the gods of the kings of Aram have been of help to them, I will sacrifice to them so that they may be of help to me." But they proved to be his downfall and that of Israel.

²⁴ Ahaz then took implements of the House and broke them in pieces; he closed the doors of Yahweh's House and put up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem: ²⁵ he set up High places in every town of Judah to offer incense to other gods, and so brought on himself the anger of Yahweh, the God of his ancestors.

²⁶ The rest of his history, his whole policy, from first to last, is recorded in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ²⁷ Then Ahaz rested with his ancestors and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, though he was not taken into the tombs of the kings of Israel. His son Hezekiah succeeded him.

Hezekiah

29 ¹ Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old and reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother was Abijah, daughter of Zechariah. ² He did what is pleasing to Yahweh, just as his ancestor David had done.

³ In the first month of the first year of his reign, he reopened the gates of Yahweh's House and repaired them. ⁴ Then he brought the priests and the Levites, assembled them in the eastern square, ⁵ and said to them:

"Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves now and consecrate the house of Yahweh, the God of our ancestors, and remove from the House everything that defiles it. ⁶ Your ancestors have been unfaithful and

done what is displeasing to Yahweh our God. They have abandoned him; they have turned their faces away from the place Yahweh has made his home, they have turned their backs on him. ⁷ They have even closed the doors of the Vestibule, they have put out the lamps and offered neither incense nor burnt offerings to the God of Israel in the Sanctuary. ⁸ So the anger of Yahweh has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; and what he has done to them has shocked and frightened everyone, as you can see for yourselves. ⁹ This is why our ancestors have fallen by the sword, and our sons, our daughters, and our wives have been taken captive.

¹⁰ But now I have decided to make a covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may be turned away from us. ¹¹ My sons, be negligent no longer, for Yahweh has chosen you to stand in his presence and serve him, to worship him, and offer him incense.

¹² The Levites set to work: Mahath son of Amasai and Joel son of Azariah, of the Kohathites; Kish son of Abdi and Azariah son of Jehallelel of the Merarites; Joah son of Zimnah and Eden son of Joah of the Gershonites; ¹³ Shimir and Jeuel of the sons of Elizaphan; Zechariah and Mattaniah of the sons of Asaph; ¹⁴ Jehiel and Shimei of the sons of Heman; and She-maiah and Uzziel of the sons of Jeduthun. ¹⁵ They gathered their fellow Levites together, purified them, and in obedience to the king's order and in accordance with the words of Yahweh, they began consecrating in the Temple of Yahweh.

¹⁶ The priests went inside the house of Yahweh to make it clean. They brought everything unclean they found in the sanctuary of Yahweh, out into the court of Yahweh's House, and the Levites collected it and carried it outside, into the Kidron Valley. ¹⁷ They began this consecration on the first day of the first month, and were able to enter the Hall of Yahweh on the eighth of the month; they then took eight days to consecrate Yahweh's House, and finished on the sixteenth day of the first month.

¹⁸ They then went into the palace of King Hezekiah and said, "We have purified the whole Temple of Yahweh, the altar for burnt offerings with all its furnishings, and the table on which the rows of bread are set with all its furnishings. ¹⁹ All the furnishings King Ahaz took away during those years he was unfaithful to Yahweh we have put back and consecrated; they are now in front of the altar of Yahweh."

²⁰ King Hezekiah lost no time but called the officials of the city together and went up to Yahweh's House. ²¹ They brought seven bulls, seven rams and seven lambs, with seven he-goats as a sacrifice for sin on behalf of the royal house, of the sanctuary, and of Judah. The king then told the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer the burnt offering on the altar of Yahweh. ²² They slaughtered the bulls and the priests took up the blood and poured it on the altar. They then slaughtered the rams and poured their blood on the altar. ²³ Then they brought the he-goats, the sacrifice for sin, before the king and the assembly who laid their hands on them. ²⁴ The priests slaughtered them, and with their blood on the altar offered a sacrifice to take away the sin of all the people - since the king had ordered the burnt offering and the sacrifice for sin on behalf of all Israel.

²⁵ He then ordered the Levites to stand in Yahweh's House with cymbals, harps and lyres, in accordance with the ordinances of David, of Gad the king's prophet and of Nathan the prophet; the order had in fact come from Yahweh through his prophets. ²⁶ When the Levites had taken their places with David's musical instruments, and the priests with their

trumpets, ²⁷Hezekiah ordered the burnt offering to begin, the hymns of Yahweh began too, and the trumpets sounded, to the accompaniment of the instruments of David king of Israel. ²⁸The whole assembly worshipped, cantors singing, trumpets sounding, until the holocaust was over.

²⁹When the offering was at an end, the king and all there with him fell to their knees and worshipped.

³⁰Then King Hezekiah and the officials told the Levites to sing praise to Yahweh in the words of David and of Asaph the prophet; they sang praises till their joy was full and then they fell down and worshipped.

³¹Hezekiah spoke again, "Now you are dedicated to the service of Yahweh. Come forward, bring sacrifices and thanksgiving offerings into Yahweh's House." The assembly brought sacrifices and thanksgiving offerings: all the generous people brought burnt offerings. ³²The number of victims for these burnt offerings was seventy bulls, a hundred rams and two hundred lambs, all as burnt offerings for Yahweh; ³³six hundred bulls and three hundred sheep were sacrificed. ³⁴The priests were too few, however, and could not slaughter all these animals, so the Levites helped them until the work was done and the other priests were sanctified; for the Levites were more educated than the priests regarding the requirements of purification. ³⁵There were indeed many burnt offerings besides the fat of the peace offerings which was to be burnt together with the drink offerings. So was completed the consecration of Yahweh's House. Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had helped the people to act so promptly.

The great Passover

30 ¹Hezekiah sent messengers to all Judah and Israel (for he also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh), inviting them to come to Yahweh's House in Jerusalem to celebrate a Passover in honor of Yahweh, the God of Israel. ²The king and his officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to celebrate it in the second month, ³being unable to celebrate it at the proper time, since the priests had not purified themselves in sufficient numbers, and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem. ⁴The king and all the assembly were pleased with their plan. ⁵They issued a decree to be proclaimed throughout Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, calling all the people to come to Jerusalem and celebrate a Passover in honor of Yahweh, the God of Israel, for they had not celebrated it for a long time. ⁶Messengers went out with letters from the hands of the king and his officials for every part of Israel and Judah. They had orders from the king to say, "People of Israel, come back to Yahweh the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Israel, and he will come back to those of you who are left and have escaped the grasp of the kings of Assyria. ⁷Do not be like your fathers and brothers who were unfaithful to Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, and whom he punished severely as you can see. ⁸Do not harden your hearts as your ancestors did, but reconcile with Yahweh and come to his house which he has consecrated forever. Serve Yahweh your God and he will turn his fierce anger from you. ⁹If you come back sincerely to Yahweh, your brothers and your sons will win the mercy of their conquerors and return to this land, for Yahweh your God is gracious and merciful. If you come back to him, he will not turn his face from you."

¹⁰The messengers went from town to town through the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, but the

people laughed at them and made fun of them, ¹¹though a few men from Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun were humble enough to come to Jerusalem. ¹²But in Judah, the hand of God was upon the people and made them of one mind to obey the order of the king and the officials according to the word of Yahweh. ¹³A great number of people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month. A very great assembly ¹⁴set to work removing the altars that had been used in Jerusalem and all the altars for burning incense, and throwing them into the wadi Kidron.

¹⁵They killed the lambs for the passover sacrifice on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites felt ashamed; so they sanctified themselves and were able to bring burnt offerings into Yahweh's House. ¹⁶Then they took up their places in the House according to the instructions in the Law of Moses, the man of God. The priests poured out their blood handed to them by the Levites, ¹⁷since there were many people in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; so the Levites were to slaughter the Passover lambs on behalf of those who lacked the requisite purity in order to consecrate them to Yahweh. ¹⁸For many people, especially from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves and so had eaten the Passover without observing the regulations.

But Hezekiah interceded for them, saying, ¹⁹"Yahweh, God of our ancestors, in your goodness forgive those who seek you with all their heart, even though they are not clean." ²⁰Yahweh heard Hezekiah and left the people unharmed.

²¹For seven days the Israelites rejoiced and celebrated in Jerusalem the feast of Unleavened Bread; while each day the Levites and the priests praised Yahweh with all their might. ²²At the end Hezekiah encouraged the Levites who had shown themselves skilled in the worship of Yahweh. ²³Then all the assembly agreed to continue the celebrations for a further seven days which they made seven days of rejoicing. ²⁴Hezekiah king of Judah had provided ten thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep for the assembly, and the officials another thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep, and now the priests were ready in great numbers. ²⁵So the whole assembly of Judah rejoiced, the priests too, and the Levites, and all who had come from Israel, the refugees of Israel living in Judah and the people of Judah. ²⁶There was great rejoicing in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon's son of David, king of Israel, nothing like this had happened in Jerusalem. ²⁷The levitical priests began to bless the people. Their voices were heard and their prayer received in heaven, His holy dwelling place.

31 ¹When all this was over, all the Israelites who were there set off for the towns of Judah to smash the pillars, cut down the sacred trunks and wreck the High places and the altars. So they did throughout Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh and did away with them. Then all the Israelites returned to their towns, each man to his home.

²Hezekiah reestablished the priestly and levitical orders, each man in his proper order according to his duties, whether priest or Levite, whether for burnt offering, peace offering, liturgical service, thanksgiving or praise, within the gates of the camp of Yahweh. ³The king set aside a portion of his own possessions for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings of sabbath, New Moon and solemn feast, as laid down in the Law of Yahweh. ⁴He then told the people of Jerusalem to give the

priests and the Levites their share so that they might devote themselves to the Law of Yahweh.

⁵As soon as the order had been published, the Israelites gathered in the first fruits of corn, wine, oil, honey, and all agricultural produce, and brought in a generous gift of everything. ⁶The Israelites and Judaeans living in the towns of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the holy things dedicated to Yahweh their God, piling them up, heap after heap. ⁷They began making these heaps in the third month and finished them in the seventh.

⁸When Hezekiah and his officials saw how much had been given, they praised Yahweh and praised his people Israel. ⁹Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps. ¹⁰and Azariah, the chief priest, of the family of Zadok, answered him, "Since the contributions were first brought to Yahweh's House, we have had enough to eat and still have plenty left over, for Yahweh has blessed his people; this huge pile is what is left." ¹¹Hezekiah then ordered them to have storerooms prepared in Yahweh's House. They did this, ¹²and then brought in the contributions, tithes and consecrated things, to keep them in a safe place. Conaniah the Levite was officer-in-charge of them, with Shimei his brother as his assistant.

¹³Jehiel, Azariah, Nahai, Asahel, Jeremoth, Joazabab, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahat, and Benaiah were appointed supervisors under the command of Conaniah and his brother Shimei, by order of King Hezekiah and of Azariah the High Priest. ¹⁴Kore, son of Imnah the Levite, keeper of the eastern gate, was made responsible for the voluntary offerings to God; he provided the portion set aside for Yahweh and the most holy offerings. ¹⁵Under his command he had Eden, Minianin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah, who resided permanently in the towns of the priests to distribute these gifts to their kinsmen great or small according to their orders.

¹⁶In addition to this, there was the organization by related groups of all those men thirty years old or older who went to Yahweh's House, by daily rotation, to perform the ritual duties appropriate to their orders. ¹⁷There was also the organization of priests by families; as also that of Levites twenty years old or older, by duties and orders. ¹⁸There was also the organization of all their families for the whole assembly, since they were busy with the holy ministry. ¹⁹As regards the priests, the sons of Aaron, who lived in the pasture lands belonging to their towns, or in the towns themselves, appointed men, distributed the food to very male among the priests and also to the inscribed Levites who were enrolled.

²⁰Hezekiah enforced these arrangements throughout Judah. He did what is good and right and loyal before Yahweh his God. ²¹He was successful, because everything he did for the Temple or in observance of the Law, he did as one seeking God with all his heart.

Invation of Sennacherib

32 ¹After Hezekiah had faithfully done all this, Sennacherib king of Assyria invaded Judah. He pitched camp before the fortified towns and gave orders for his army to break their way through the walls. ²Hezekiah realized that Sennacherib intended to attack Jerusalem also, ³so he summoned his officers and champions and they decided to cut off the water supply from the springs situated outside the city. ⁴So a large number of people banded together to block all the springs and cut off the watercourse flowing through the fields. They said, "Why should the king of

Assyria find plenty of water when he arrives?"

⁵Hezekiah strengthened his defenses: he had the broken parts of the wall repaired, built towers on it, constructed a second wall on the outer side, strengthened the Millo of the City of David and made quantities of spears and shields. ⁶He then appointed generals to command the people, had them assemble in the square by the city gate and spoke as follows to encourage them, ⁷"Be strong and stand firm; be fearless, be confident when you face the king of Assyria and the whole army he brings with him, since he that is with us is stronger than he that is with him. ⁸He has only an arm of flesh, but we have Yahweh our God to help us and fight our battles." The people were encouraged by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

⁹Next, Sennacherib king of Assyria, who was then outside Lachish with all his army, sent his servants to Jerusalem, to Hezekiah king of Judah, and to all the Judaeans who were in Jerusalem. They said, ¹⁰"Hear the message from Sennacherib king of Assyria, 'What gives you the confidence to stay in Jerusalem under siege? ¹¹Is not Hezekiah deceiving you? Is he not condemning you to die of hunger and thirst when he says: 'Yahweh our God will save us from the king of Assyria? ¹²Is not Hezekiah the very man who has destroyed the High places and the altars of Yahweh, and given the order to Judah and to Jerusalem: 'Before one altar only are you to worship, and on that alone offer incense? ¹³Do you not know what I have done, I and my ancestors, to all the peoples of other countries? Have the gods of any nation in those countries ever been able to save them from me? ¹⁴Who among all the gods of those nations was able to save his people from me? ¹⁵Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. Do not let him mislead you like this. Do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to save his people from me or from my ancestors. No more will your god be able to save you from me.'"

¹⁶His officials were still speaking against Yahweh God, and his servant Hezekiah, ¹⁷when Sennacherib wrote a letter insulting Yahweh the God of Israel. This is what he said about him, "Just as the gods of the nations in other countries have failed to save their peoples from me, so will the god of Hezekiah fail to save his people." ¹⁸They shouted this out in the language of Judah, to the people of Jerusalem who were on the city wall, to confuse and frighten them, and so that they might capture the city. ¹⁹They spoke of the God of Jerusalem in the same way they talked of the gods of the peoples of the world, the work of human hands.

²⁰Then King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz prayed and cried out to heaven. ²¹And Yahweh sent an angel who made all the mighty warriors, commanders and officers die in the camp of the king of Assyria. So the emperor went back to Assyria very ashamed. And as he came into the temple of his god, some of his own sons struck him with their swords. ²²So Yahweh saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem from the power of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from everyone else, and he gave them peace on every side. ²³Many people brought grain offerings to Yahweh in Jerusalem and gifts for Hezekiah king of Judah; since then all the nations held Hezekiah in honor.

²⁴In those days, Hezekiah fell ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to Yahweh, who heard him and granted him a sign. ²⁵But Hezekiah did not show gratitude for what Yahweh had done for him; his heart grew proud and Judah and Jerusalem suffered for it. ²⁶Finally, however, Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem humbled themselves, and so Yahweh did not

punish the people until after Hezekiah's death. ²⁷Hezekiah enjoyed immense riches and honor. He built himself storerooms for gold, silver, precious stones, spices, gems and every sort of valuable. ²⁸He had storehouses for his returns of corn, wine and oil, buildings for his different sorts of cattle, and sheep runs for his sheep, ²⁹and, further, acquired donkeys and enormous herds and flocks. God had indeed given him very great riches.

³⁰It was Hezekiah who stopped the upper outlet of Gihon Spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. Hezekiah succeeded in all he undertook. ³¹However, when the authorities in Babylon sent to him to inquire about the extraordinary thing that had taken place in the country, God abandoned him only to test him, and to discover the secrets of his heart.

³²The rest of the history of Hezekiah, and his deed of piety, are recorded in the Vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz and in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ³³Then Hezekiah rested with his fathers and they buried him on the slope going up to the tombs of the sons of David. At his death, all of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor. His son Manasseh succeeded him.

Manasseh

33 ¹Manasseh was twelve years old when he came to the throne and he reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. ²He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and followed the disgusting practices of the nations that Yahweh had removed from the land before giving it to Israel. ³He rebuilt the High places his father Hezekiah had wrecked; he set up altars to the Baals and made sacred trunks. He worshipped the whole array of heaven and served it. ⁴He built altars in Yahweh's House of which Yahweh had said, 'In Jerusalem shall my Name be forever.'

⁵He built altars to the whole array of heaven in the two courts of Yahweh's House. ⁶He caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of Benhinnom. He practised soothsaying, magic and witchcraft, and introduced necromancers and wizards. He did many things displeasing to Yahweh, thus provoking his anger. ⁷He placed the idol he had made in the house of which God had said to David and to his son Solomon, 'In this house and in Jerusalem, the city I chose out of all the tribes of Israel, I will give my Name a home forever. ⁸I will no longer turn Israel's footsteps away from the land I assigned to their fathers, provided they observe all I have ordered them in accordance with the whole Law, the statutes and the ordinances, given through Moses.' ⁹Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than those nations Yahweh had destroyed before the sons of Israel. ¹⁰Yahweh spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.

¹¹Then Yahweh sent the generals of the king of Assyria against them, who captured Manasseh with hooks, put him in chains and led him away to Babylon. ¹²In his distress he sought to appease Yahweh his God. Humbling himself deeply before the God of his ancestors, he prayed to him, ¹³and God changed his mind. Hearing his plea he allowed him to come back to Jerusalem and reign again. Manasseh realised then that Yahweh is God. ¹⁴After that he rebuilt the outer wall of the Citadel of David, west of Gihon in the wadi, as far as the Fish Gate; it encircled the Ophel, and he increased its height very considerably. He stationed military governors in all the fortified towns of Judah.

¹⁵He removed the alien gods and the idol from Yahweh's House and all the altars he had built on the mountain of Yahweh's House and in Jerusalem, and threw them out of the city. ¹⁶He rebuilt the altar of Yahweh and offered peace offerings and praise offerings on it, and ordered Judah to serve Yahweh the God of Israel; ¹⁷however, the people continued to sacrifice on the High places, although only to Yahweh their God.

The rest of the history of Manasseh, his prayer to God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of Yahweh the God of Israel, can be found in the Annals of the Kings of Israel. His prayer and how God heard his prayer, all his sins, his unfaithfulness, the sites where he built High places and set up sacred trunks and idols before he humbled himself are recorded in the Annals of Hozai. Then Manasseh rested with his palace. His son Amon succeeded him.

²¹Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king and he reigned for two years in Jerusalem. ²²He did what was displeasing to Yahweh, as Manasseh his father had done. Amon offered sacrifice and worship to all the idols Manasseh his father had made, ²³but he did not humble himself before Yahweh like Manasseh his father had done; instead he made the guilt of Judah worse. ²⁴His officers plotted against him and killed him in his palace. But the people of the nation struck down all those who had plotted against King Amon and proclaimed his son Josiah as his successor.

Josiah

34 ¹Josiah was eight years old when he became king and he reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ²He did what was pleasing to Yahweh, and walked in the ways of his father David, without turning aside.

³In the eighth year of his reign, when he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David. In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the High places, the sacred trunks and the molten idols. ⁴He looked on while they smashed the altars of Baal, and he himself tore down the incense altars near them. He reduced to dust the symbols of Asherah and the other idols and then threw the dust over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵He burned the bones of their priests on their altars, and so purified Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶He did the same in the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, and in the devastated areas around them. ⁷There too he destroyed the altars and symbols of the goddess, smashed the sacred trunks and the idols and ground them to powder, and tore down all the altars of incense throughout the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

⁸In the eighteenth year of his reign, with the object of purifying land and Temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah governor of the city and the herald Joah son of Joahaz, to repair the house of Yahweh his God. ⁹These men went to the high priest Hilkiah and handed over to him the money that had been brought to the house of God. The Levite gatekeepers had collected this money from Manasseh, Ephraim and all the rest of Israel, and from all the Judeans and Benjaminites and from the people living in Jerusalem. ¹⁰They handed it over to the masters of works of Yahweh's House and these men used it for the repair and restoration of the House. ¹¹They gave it to the carpenters and builders for buying the stones and timber for the beams and framework of the buildings which the kings of Judah had let go to ruin.

¹²The men worked conscientiously. Over them were set Jahath and Obadiah, Levites of the sons of Merari; together with Zechariah and Meshullam of the sons of Kohath, as supervisors. These Levites were all skilled liturgical musicians; ¹³but they also directed the carriers and the masters of works of the various jobs. Other Levites were scribes, clerks and gatekeepers.

The book of the law discovered

¹⁴When they were taking out the money that had been brought to Yahweh's House, Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the Law given through Moses. ¹⁵At once Hilkiah told Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the Law in Yahweh's House." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. ¹⁶Shaphan took the book to the king, and reported to him, "Your servants are carrying out the commands you gave them; ¹⁷they have melted down the silver which was in Yahweh's house and have handed it over to the supervisors and masters of works." ¹⁸After which Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book"; and Shaphan read from it in the king's presence.

¹⁹When the king heard the book being read, he tore his garments, ²⁰and gave the following order to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's minister, ²¹"Go and consult Yahweh, for me and for the people who still remain in Israel and Judah, about the words of the book that has been found. Great indeed must be my anger of Yahweh to be poured down on us because our ancestors did not observe the word of Yahweh nor to according to what is written in this book."

²²Hilkiah and the king's men went to Huldah the prophetess, wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, son of Asaph, the keeper of the Temple robes; she lived in Jerusalem in the new town. They spoke to her about this, ²³and she answered, "This is the word of Yahweh for the man who sent you to me: ²⁴I am going to punish Jerusalem and all its people, carrying out all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah, ²⁵because they have handed me and have burned incense to other gods, stirring up my anger by everything they have done, because of this my anger is aroused against Jerusalem, and it will not die again."

²⁶And you will tell the king of Judah who sent you to consult Yahweh, that thus answers Yahweh, the God of Israel, regarding the words you have heard: ²⁷Since your heart has been touched and you have humbled yourself before God on hearing what he has threatened against Jerusalem and those who live in it, since you have humbled yourself before me and torn your garments and wept before me, I for my part have heard - this is Yahweh's word. ²⁸The punishment which I am going to bring on Jerusalem will not come until after your death. I will let you die in peace." They took this answer to the king.

²⁹The king then had all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem summoned, ³⁰and the king went up to Yahweh's House, with all the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, priests, Levites and all the people, great and small alike. In their hearing he read out everything that was said in the book of the covenant found in Yahweh's House. ³¹The king stood beside the pillar, and in the presence of Yahweh he made a covenant to follow Yahweh and to keep his laws and commands with all his heart and soul, as written in that book. ³²He committed everyone there in Jerusalem or in Benjamin to obey the requirements of

the covenant of God, the God of their ancestors. ³³Josiah removed all the disgusting idols throughout the territories belonging to the people of Israel. His whole life long he made sure that every member of Israel served their God. They did not fail to follow Yahweh, the God of their ancestors.

The Passover of Josiah

35 ¹Josiah then celebrated a Passover in honor of Yahweh in Jerusalem and they killed the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. ²He appointed certain functions to the priests and let them discharge the duties of Yahweh's House. ³Then he said to the Levites, who were to instruct all Israel and who were consecrated to Yahweh, "The holy ark has been put in the house built by Solomon son of David, king of Israel, and it is no longer a burden for your shoulders. So you shall serve Yahweh your God and Israel your people in this way. ⁴Stand in the holy place by families and orders, according to the written decree of David king of Israel and his son Solomon, ⁵and let some be available to help each family of the people of Israel; for the Levites are to have a portion in each family. ⁶Kill the animals for the festival, sanctify yourselves, and be at the disposal of your brothers in acting in accordance with the word of Yahweh which was spoken through Moses."

⁷Josiah then provided for the use of the people, lambs and kids from the flocks to the number of thirty thousand, all as Passover offerings for all who were present, and three thousand bulls as well; all these animals came from the king's possessions. ⁸His officials, for their part, made provision for what the people, the priests and the Levites would use. The senior officials of the house of God, Hilkiah, Zechariah and Jehiel, also gave the priests two thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three hundred bulls as Passover victims. ⁹The heads of the Levites, Conaniah, She-maiah and his brothers Nathanel, Hashabiah, Jeiel and Jozabad, provided five thousand lambs and kids and five hundred bulls as Passover victims for the Levites.

¹⁰When everything for the Passover had been prepared, the priests took their posts, and the Levites also in their orders as commanded by the king. ¹¹They killed the lambs and goats, and while the priests sprinkled the blood they received, the Levites cut up the victims. ¹²They put aside the animals for the burnt offering and distributed to family groupings of the lay people, giving to each his offering to Yahweh, as is written in the Book of Moses; they did the same with the bulls. ¹³They roasted the passover, as ordained, and boiled the sacred foods in pots, dishes, and pans, carrying them speedily to the people. ¹⁴Afterward they prepared the passover for themselves and for the priests. Because the priests, the sons of Aaron, had been busy till nightfall offering the burnt offering and the fatty parts, the Levites prepared the passover for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. ¹⁵The musicians, the sons of Asaph, were at their places, in accordance with the ordinances of David; neither Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun the king's prophet, nor the keepers of each gate had to leave their duties, since their brothers the Levites made all the preparations for them.

¹⁶So the whole service of Yahweh was prepared that day to celebrate the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of Yahweh, in accordance with the ordinances of King Josiah.

¹⁷The Israelites who were present celebrated the Passover and, for seven days, the feast of Unleavened

Bread. ¹⁸No Passover like this one had ever been celebrated in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; no king of Israel had ever celebrated a Passover like the one celebrated by Josiah with the priests, the Levites, all of Judah and of Israel who were present, and the people of Jerusalem.

The tragic end of the reign

¹⁹This Passover was celebrated in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah. ²⁰After all this, when Josiah had already repaired the House, Neco king of Egypt came up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates and Josiah marched out to stop him. ²¹Neco sent him messengers to say, "There is no quarrel between me and you, king of Judah. I have not come today to attack you, but to fight my enemies, and God has told me to hurry. Do not oppose God who is with me, lest he destroy you."

²²But Josiah continued to challenge him for he was determined to fight him, and would not listen to what God was saying through Neco. So he went out to fight in the plain of Megiddo. ²³Egyptian arrows struck King Josiah, and the king said to his followers, "Take me away; I am badly wounded." ²⁴His servants lifted him out of his own chariot, transferred him to another one and took him back to Jerusalem, where he died. He was buried in the tombs of his ancestors. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. ²⁵Jeremiah composed a lament for Josiah which all the women singers use when speaking of Josiah in their laments to this day; this has become a custom in Israel; the song is found in the collection of laments.

²⁶The rest of the history of Josiah and all his good deeds according to the Law, and his acts from the first to last, are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

The last Kings

36 ¹The people of the nation took Jehoahaz, son of Josiah and made him king in Jerusalem in succession to his father. ²Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king and he reigned for three months in Jerusalem. ³The king of Egypt took him prisoner and made the people of Judah pay 7,500 pounds of silver and 75 pounds of gold as tribute. ⁴The king of Egypt then made Eliakim, brother of Jehoahaz, king of Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Neco took his brother Jehoahaz to Egypt.

⁵Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king and he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh his God. ⁶Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked him, put him in chains and carried him off to Babylon. ⁷Nebuchadnezzar also carried off to Babylon some of the treasures of the House and put them in his palace at Babylon. ⁸The rest of the history of Jehoiakim, the disgusting things he did and those discovered to his

discredit, these are recorded in the Book of Kings of Israel and Judah. His son Jehoiachin succeeded him.

⁹Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became King and he reigned for three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh. ¹⁰When spring came, King Nebuchadnezzar sent for him and had him taken to Babylon as a prisoner, with the treasures of the temple and made Zedekiah, his brother, king of Judah and Jerusalem in his place.

¹¹Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king and he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹²He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh his God. He did not listen humbly to the prophet Jeremiah, accredited by Yahweh himself. ¹³He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had forced him to swear in God's name that he would be loyal. He became stubborn, and obstinately refused to return to Yahweh the God of Israel.

Conclusion

¹⁴Furthermore, all the heads of the priesthood, and the people, too, were exceedingly unfaithful, following the disgusting example of the nations around them, and so they defiled the house which Yahweh himself had made holy. ¹⁵Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, continued to send prophets to warn his people, since he had compassion on them and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶But they mocked the messengers of God, ignored his words, and laughed at his prophets, until at last the anger of Yahweh rose so high against his people that there was no further remedy.

¹⁷Then he brought against them the king of the Chaldeans who killed with the sword the young men of Judah even in the House; he spared neither youth nor virgin, neither old man nor aged cripple: God handed them all over to him. ¹⁸All the furnishings of the house of God, large and small, the treasures of Yahweh's House, the treasures of the king and his officials, he carried off to Babylon.

¹⁹They burned down the house of God, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, set fire to all its palaces, and destroyed everything of value in it. ²⁰The survivors were deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon; they were to serve him and his descendants as slaves until the kingdom of Persia came to power. ²¹This is how the work of Yahweh was fulfilled that he spoke through Jeremiah, "The land will lie desolate for seventy years, to make up for its Sabbath rests that have not been observed."

²²And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, to fulfill what he had said through the prophet Jeremiah, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his kingdom: ²³"Thus speaks Cyrus king of Persia: Yahweh, the God of heaven, who has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, has ordered me to build him a house in Jerusalem, in Judah. Now, all of you who belong to his people, go there and may Yahweh your God be with you."



HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The books of Samuel and Kings related five centuries of Israel's history without interruption, from David to the Babylonian Exile.

Then came the seventy years of "Captivity," or Exile. Not all the people were deported. Most of the people were small farmers who remained in the land. But, they had neither leaders nor spiritual people in charge and then did nothing to put the nation back on its feet. The nation revived, thanks to the exiles who came back to the land with Zerubbabel and who, after difficult beginnings, reorganized under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

IEZRA's REFORM

Not all the Jews returned to their land. Many of them had emigrated abroad before the Exile and they remained in the countries where they were living: Egypt, Assyria, Persia. Others, who had been deported, did not come back from Babylon, for they had succeeded in overcoming their miserable situation with one another's help, and now held good positions there. But those who returned arrived as families and organized groups; they were the Jews who had best assimilated the prophets' message, urging them to rebuild a purified and holy Israel.

For them, a first danger was that by settling in their homeland among foreigners and Jews not too attuned to their mission, they might lose their enthusiasm. That is why the work of Ezra and Nehemiah was very important in keeping the Jews united among themselves and apart from everyone else. See especially the problem of the mixed marriages (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 9:2 and 13:10-30).

Later, in his *biblical work* Ezra played a decisive role in collecting the books and putting together for the first time, and then in making the Sacred Book the basis of their religion. Until that time, the existing books of the Bible were only kept in palaces or in the hands of the priests; and it was enough for the people to attend the traditional Temple ceremonies. It was Ezra who started a new form of worship through which the *communal reading of the Bible* would become the basis of the people's religious life, bringing them to a more grounded faith. See Nehemiah 8. Ezra's role in the formation of the Bible is remembered in 2 Mac 2:13-14.

Ezra's reform gave the Jewish community of the post-Babylonian exile its unique features. The people of God became a holy people, namely, consecrated to God and separated from others by the many barriers of their Law. Their reason for being was to maintain the worship of the only God and, since they did not have national independence, in the name of God their priests held both civil and religious power.

THE BOOK OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

At first, these two books formed only one book. They provide us with some information concerning the work accomplished by these two men. The following steps toward the restoration of the Jewish community can be seen:

- Beginning with the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. several groups of exiles come back to Jerusalem where Zerubbabel rebuilds THE TEMPLE (See Ezra 1:1 to 4:5 and 4:24 to 6:2).
- Then, the enemies of the Jews try to prevent the reconstruction of THE CITY (See Ezra 4:7-23).
- In 458 perhaps, Ezra comes to organize the community, imposing the Law of Moses as a rule (See Ezra 7 to 10).

- In 445 Nehemiah comes from Persia and he rebuilds THE WALLS. Then he administers Jerusalem for twelve years (See Nehemiah 1 to 7).
- Finally, there is Nehemiah's second mission in 425: (See Nehemiah 13,.

Cyrus helps the Jews return to Jerusalem

1 In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, Yahweh willed to fulfill the word he had said through the prophet Jeremiah, so he moved the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his kingdom, ² "Thus speaks Cyrus, king of Persia: Yahweh, the God of heavens, who has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, has ordered me to build him a Temple in Jerusalem, in the land of Judah. ³ To everyone belonging to his people, may his God be with him! Let them go up to Jerusalem with the help of their God and there build the House of Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴ In every place where the rest of the people of Yahweh live, let the people of those places help them for their journey with silver, gold and all kinds of goods and livestock. Let them also give them voluntary offerings for the House of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem."

⁵ Then they rose up – the heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and the Levites, and all those whose spirit God had stirred up

– and they decided to go and build the House of Yahweh. ⁶ And all their neighbours gave them all kinds of help: gold, silver, livestock and precious objects in great quantity, besides every kind of voluntary offering.

⁷ King Cyrus also brought out the vessels of the House of Yahweh which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. ⁸ Cyrus, the king, gave them into the hands of Mithredath, the treasurer, who counted them and turned them over to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

⁹ This is the list: golden cups for the offering, 30; silver cups 1,029; other cups of gold, ¹⁰ 30; of silver, 410; other vessels, 1,000.

¹¹ Total number of golden and silver vessels: 5,400. All this was brought out by Sheshbazzar when the exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem from Babylon.

The list of the returning exiles

2 ¹ These were the people of the province who returned from captivity and exile. After being deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, they returned to Jerusalem and to Judah, each to his own town. ² They arrived with Zurubabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah.

The list of the clans of the people of Israel:

1. Jer 25, 11; 29, 10; Is 44, 28
7. 2 K 25, 13

1. Ne 7

2. Is 45, 1

3. Is 10, 20

4. Ezr 2, 68; Ne 7, 69

o The Persian emperor, Cyrus, takes the initiative of sending the Jews who had been exiled in Babylon back home.

Although Cyrus does not worship the true God, he is a good example of religious tolerance and the Bible presents him as the liberator of the people oppressed by his predecessors.

We note that only those who accept "being liberated" will be sent home. There can be no liberation or external help for the indifferent.

Those who return are those whose spirit had been aroused by God.

To understand the book of Ezra, it might be helpful to know that, from an administrative viewpoint, Jerusalem remained under the rule of Samaria, in spite of Cyrus' decree. And so there would be difficulties since the Samaritan aristocracy did not want to be surpassed by the eminent people of Judah who were coming back home after fifty years in exile.

¹ the clan of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; ⁴ the clan of Sephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; ⁵ the clan of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five; ⁶ the clan of Pahathmoab, that is to say the sons of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve; ⁷ the clan of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; ⁸ the clan of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five; ⁹ the clan of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty; ¹⁰ the clan of Bani, six hundred and forty-two; ¹¹ the clan of Jebai, six hundred and twenty-three; ¹² the clan of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two; ¹³ the clan of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six; ¹⁴ the clan of Bigvai, two hundred and fifty-six; ¹⁵ the clan of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four; ¹⁶ the clan of Ater, that is to say of Hezekiah, ninety-eight; ¹⁷ the clan of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three; ¹⁸ the clan of Jorah, one hundred and twelve; ¹⁹ the clan of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three; ²⁰ the clan of Gibbar, ninety-five; ²¹ people of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three; ²² people of Netophah, fifty-six; ²³ people of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight; ²⁴ people of Beth-azmaveth, eighty-two; ²⁵ people of Kiriath-jearim, Jephthah and Beeroth, seven hundred and eighty-three; ²⁶ people of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one; ²⁷ people of Michnas, one hundred and twenty-two; ²⁸ people of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty-three; ²⁹ people of Nebo, fifty-two; ³⁰ people of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six; ³¹ people of another Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; ³² people of Harim, three hundred and twenty; ³³ people of Lod, Hadid and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five; ³⁴ people of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five; ³⁵ people of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty.

³⁶ The priests: the clan of Jedaiah, that is to say the House of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; ³⁷ the clan of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; ³⁸ the clan of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; ³⁹ the clan of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.

⁴⁰ The Levites: descendants of Jeshua, that is to say Kadmiel, Binnui, Hodaviah, seventy-four.

⁴¹ The Temple musicians: the clan of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight.

⁴² The gatekeepers: the clan of Shallum, the clan of Ater, the clan of Talmon, the clan of Ukkub, the clan of Hatita, the clan of Shobai: all, one hundred and thirty-nine.

⁴³ The helpers: the clans of Ziha, Hasupha, Abbath, Keros, Siaha, Padon, ⁴⁴ Lebanah,

Hagabah, Akkub, ⁴⁵ Hagab, Shamlai, Hanan, ⁴⁶ Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, ⁴⁸ Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, ⁴⁹ Uzza, Paseah, Besai, ⁵⁰ Asnah, the Meunites, the Nephisites, ⁵¹ Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, ⁵² Bazluth, Nehida, Harsha, ⁵³ Barkos, Sisera, Temah, ⁵⁴ Nehiah, Hatipha.

⁵⁵ The clans of Solomon's slaves: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, ⁵⁶ Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, ⁵⁷ Shephatiah, Hattai, Pochereth-hazzebaim, Ami. ⁵⁸ The total of the helpers and the sons of Solomon's slaves: three hundred and ninety-two.

⁵⁹ The following who came from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer, could not prove that their families and ancestry were of Israelite origin: ⁶⁰ the clans of Delaiah, Tobiah, Nekoda: six hundred and fifty-two. ⁶¹ And among the priests: the clans of Habaiah, Hakkoz, Barzillai, who had married one of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, whose name he adopted. ⁶² These people searched in their ancestral registers but could not be located in them, so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean ⁶³ and His Excellency forbade them to eat the sacred foods until a priest could be found for the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁴ The whole assembly numbered forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty people, ⁶⁵ not counting their slaves and maidservants to the number of seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven. They also had two hundred male and female singers. ⁶⁶ Their horses numbered seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, ⁶⁷ their camels four hundred and thirty-five and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

⁶⁸ When they arrived at the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, some of the leaders of the clans made voluntary offerings for the Temple of God, for its rebuilding on its old site. ⁶⁹ In accordance with their means they gave 1,030 pounds of gold; 5,740 pounds of silver; and one hundred priestly robes to the sacred funds.

⁷⁰ The priests, Levites and part of the people settled in Jerusalem; the gatekeepers, Temple musicians, workmen and all the other Israelites, in their own towns.

Rebuilding the altar

3 ¹ After six months, the Israelites were already settled in their cities. Then all the people gathered in Jerusalem.

² Joshua, son of Jozadak, with his fellow-priests, and Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, with his brothers, began rebuilding the altar of the



God of Israel, to offer the sacrifices upon it, as it is written in the Law of Moses, the man of God.

³ They built the altar in the same place, in spite of the fear they had of the people of the land, and they offered burnt offerings upon it, and the morning and evening sacrifice. ⁴ They celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles as it is written, and offered burnt offerings daily according to the established ritual. ⁵ Then they continued offering the perpetual sacrifice and the sacrifices on the sabbaths, the new moon and all the solemnities of Yahweh, besides what everyone would offer voluntarily to Yahweh.

⁶ They began offering burnt offerings on the first day of the seventh month, although the foundation of the House of Yahweh had not yet been laid.

⁷ They gave money to those who were working in stone, the masons and the carpenters. They also gave food, wine and oil to the Tyrians to bring cedar lumber from Lebanon to Joppa by sea, according to the authorization of Cyrus, king of Persia. ⁸ In the second year, after their arrival at the House of God in Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, son of Jozadak, with the rest of their brothers, the priests, the Levites and all who had returned to Jerusalem from exile, began the work: they appointed the Levites who were twenty years old and upward to supervise the work in the House of Yahweh.

⁹ Joshua, his sons and his brothers, Kadmiel and his sons, and the sons of Henadad, all together agreed to supervise those who worked in the House of God. ¹⁰ When the workers had laid the foundation for the sanctuary of Yahweh, the priests, clothed in fine

linen, came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, sons of Asaph, with cymbals, and they sang to Yahweh the psalms of David, king of Israel.

¹¹ They gave thanks to Yahweh, singing and praising: "For he is good, for his love for Israel is eternal."

All the people shouted aloud the praises of Yahweh for the foundation of the House of Yahweh had now been laid. Many of the priests, Levites and older heads of the families who had known the first house wept with great lamentation as the foundation was laid. ¹² But others raised their voices with shouts of joy, ¹³ and the people could not distinguish the shouts of rejoicing from the cries of weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the noise was heard afar.

The rebuilding is interrupted

■ 4 ¹ When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin learned that those who had returned from exile were building the sanctuary of Yahweh, the God of Israel, ² they approached Zerubbabel, Joshua and the heads of the families, and said to them, "Allow us to help you in the work of reconstruction for we are also concerned about your God. We have offered him sacrifices from the time of Esar Haddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here."

³ Zerubbabel, Joshua and the heads of the Israelite families answered them, "We cannot let you join us in rebuilding it, as Cyrus, king of Persia, has commanded."

⁴ Then the people of the land set about discouraging the workers of Judah and frightened them to keep them from building. ⁵ They hired some counsellors of the royal court to

3. 9, 1; 10, 2
12. Ag 2, 3

4. Ex 29, 38; Num 28, 6; Dt 16, 13
2. 2 K 17, 24 4. Ag 1, 2

11. Ps 100, 5; 106, 1; Lev 23, 4; Num 29, 1

+ For the Jews, the restoration of the Temple became an opportunity to rediscover how they were different from all the other nations in that they were serving the only God. It also allowed them to affirm their identity as Jews among the people of the country, since working together strengthens unity.

We will also note that, when they first arrived from exile, they generously offered to provide all that was needed to build the Temple (2:68). Yet, twenty years will go by and the intervention of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah will be needed to implement the projects agreed upon in the enthusiasm of their return.

■ With the support of the prophet Haggai (see Haggai 2:10) the Jews refuse Samaritan cooperation in rebuilding the Temple. They do not

want to mix anything unclean in this religious endeavor. To put it differently, they are determined to build a community based on the practice of the Law and they cannot accept that unconverted people should have any claim on the Temple.

The same thing happens now as well. Even though we might wish to welcome everyone, we cannot surrender holy things nor the leadership of the communities to unconverted people. Neither can the Church accept political support which would compromise its freedom.

The story begun in 4:1-5 continues in chapters 5 and 6. The Jews remain steadfast, and Providence helps them. They are assisted by Tattenai, the Persian governor of the province West-of-Euphrates, including all of Palestine with Samaria as the capital.



make the project fail, and they did this all through the time of Cyrus, king of Persia, until the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

An unrelated document

◆ In the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged a complaint against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. ⁷ Again in the time of King Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes. The letter was written in Aramaic and translated. So it began this way:

⁸ From Rehum, the governor, and Shimshai, the secretary, ⁹ and from the rest of their colleagues, the judges and the legates, and all Persian officials, the people of Erech, Babylon and Susa, that is, the Elamites, ¹⁰ and from the rest of the nations whom the great Assurbanipal deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province at the other side of the River . . .

¹¹ This is a copy of the letter they sent to King Artaxerxes:

"Your servants, the people beyond the River, send greetings.

¹² It should be made known to the king that the Jews who came up from your side to ours and have gone to Jerusalem are now building this rebellious and wicked city. They are now rebuilding the walls and have laid the foundation. ¹³ Be it known, then, to the king, that if this city is rebuilt and its walls finished, they will no longer pay taxes, tributes or toll duties, and in the end, this city shall bring harm to the kings. ¹⁴ Now, as we eat the salt of the palace and we do not wish to see the king dishonoured, we are sending this information to the king. ¹⁵ If you look into the records of your fathers, you will find that this city is a rebellious city. It has disturbed the kings and the provinces, and has fostered sedition from of old. It is precisely because of this that it was destroyed. ¹⁶ We make known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls restored, you will soon lose your territories on that side of the River."

¹⁷ The king wrote this in reply:

"To Rehum, the governor; to Shimshai, the secretary; and to the rest of their colleagues who are in Samaria and in the other places at the other side of the River: greetings.

¹⁸ The letter you sent to me has been read word for word in my presence. ¹⁹ I have given orders to inquire into these things, and it has

been found that from ancient times that city has rebelled against the kings, and that sedition and rebellions have happened there.

²⁰ There were powerful kings in Jerusalem, masters of all the land at the other side of the River, to whom tribute, taxes and toll duties were paid.

²¹ Therefore, order the people to stop work; they shall not rebuild that city without my authorization. ²² Do not neglect this grave concern, lest further harm be done to the kingdom."

²³ When the copy of this letter of King Artaxerxes was read before Rehum, the governor, Shimshai, the secretary, and their colleagues, they went hurriedly to Jerusalem and they used force and violence to make the Jews suspend their work.

²⁴ So the work on the House of God in Jerusalem was interrupted and not begun until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

Work resumes

5 ¹ The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, son of Iddo, addressed the Jews who lived in Judea and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was with them. ² Upon hearing them, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, son of Jozadak, decided to rebuild the House of God in Jerusalem. The prophets of God were with them, supporting them. ³ Then Tattenai, the governor of the province at the other side of the River, and Shethar Bozenai came with their counsellors and said to them, "Who has ordered you to build this House and its walls?" ⁴ And they also asked, "Who are the men working on the construction of this building?"

⁵ But the favor of God was with the leaders of the Jews, for these people did not oblige the Jews to stop the work while the matter was being referred to King Darius and they were waiting for his answer.

⁶ This is a copy of the joint letter to King Darius from Tattenai, governor of the province of the other side of the River, Shethar Bozenai and his counsellors, the Persians at the other bank of the River:

⁷ "To King Darius, peace.

⁸ We wish to inform the king that we went to the province of Judea, to the House of the Great God. They are now building the Temple with hewn stones and timber to reinforce the walls; the work is being done with great

19. 2 K 18, 7; 24, 1

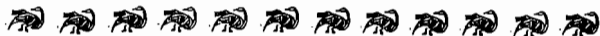
21. Ne 1, 3

1. Ag 1, 14; Zac 4, 9

2. Ag 2, 23

◆ The letter found in 4:6-23 corresponds to a later intervention on the part of the Samari-

tan notables when, a few years later, the Jews try to build the Jerusalem walls.



care and progresses quickly at their hands. ⁹ We questioned the Elders, and asked them: Who has ordered you to build this House and finish this Sanctuary? ¹⁰ We also asked them their names and wrote down the names of their leaders for your information.

¹¹ They gave us this answer: We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the House that was built many years ago. A great king of Israel built and furnished it. ¹² But then, our fathers angered the God of heaven, so he gave the children into the hands of the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed this house and exiled them.

¹³ However, in the first year of his reign Cyrus, king of Babylon, issued a decree that the House of God should be rebuilt. ¹⁴ The gold and silver vessels of the House of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple of Jerusalem, and placed in the temple of Babylon, were taken from there by Cyrus and turned over to Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor. ¹⁵ He said to him: Take these vessels, and bring them to the temple of Jerusalem, and let the House of God be rebuilt in the same place. ¹⁶ From that time until now, it is gradually being rebuilt but is still not finished.

¹⁷ Now, if it seems good to the king that inquiries be made into the royal archives there in Babylon, to verify whether a decree was indeed issued by King Cyrus for the rebuilding of the House of God in Jerusalem, then may the king inform us of his will in this matter."

Darius helps build the Temple

6 ¹ Then King Darius commanded that inquiries be made in the house of the archives in Babylon, where the records were kept. ² And in Ecbatana, a fortress in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which the following was written:

³ "In the first year of his reign, King Cyrus has issued this decree concerning the House of God in Jerusalem: Let the foundation of that House be laid and the House be rebuilt in order that sacrifices be offered in it. The said House shall be thirty meters high and thirty meters wide, ⁴ with three layers of hewn stones and one of wood. The expenses shall be paid for by the king. ⁵ Moreover, the vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple of Jerusalem, to the place where these used to be kept in the House of Yahweh.

⁶ Now therefore, I say this to you: Tattenai, governor of the province at the other side of the River, Shethar, Bozenai, and their Persian

counselors living at the other side of the River do not interfere in this matter. ⁷ Let the governor of the Jews together with their leaders build the House of God on its former site.

⁸ This is the command I give as to what you should do to help those Jewish leaders rebuild the House of God: pay the expenses in full and without delay, with the income from taxes of the province at the other side of the River which is allotted to the king. ⁹ Then, upon the request of the priests of Jerusalem, give them daily and without fail what is needed for the sacrifices to the God of Heaven: young bulls, rams, lambs, wheat, salt, wine and oil. ¹⁰ With these, they shall offer sacrifices acceptable to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons. ¹¹ Moreover, I command the following: if anyone opposes these ordinances, a beam shall be pulled out of his house and he shall be hung on it, and his house reduced to a heap of ruin as punishment for his rebellion. ¹² And may the God who makes his Name dwell there crush every rebel, king or people, who goes against this and tries to destroy the House of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, give this command. Let it be carried out at once."

¹³ Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar Bozenai, and his counselors acted in conformity with the order of King Darius. ¹⁴ And the leaders of the Jews continued to make progress in building, encouraged by what Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, had said; and they finished the work according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus and Darius.

¹⁵ The House was finished on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year of the reign of Darius.

¹⁶ The children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of those who had returned from exile celebrated the consecration of this House of God with rejoicing, ¹⁷ offering on this solemnity one hundred young bulls, two hundred rams and four hundred lambs; and twelve he-goats as a sin-offering for all Israel, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁸ Then they installed the priests according to their ranks, and the Levites according to their classes, for the service of the house of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

¹⁹ Those who had returned from exile celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, ²⁰ for the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together, and all of them were clean. So, they slaughtered the



Passover lamb for all who had returned from exile, for their fellow-priests and for themselves.

²¹ The Israelites who had returned from exile ate the Passover lamb with all those who had separated themselves from the people of the land and joined the returned exiles to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel. ²² They celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread joyfully for seven days; the reason for their joy was that Yahweh had turned the king of Assyria to look favorably on them so that they had been allowed to continue the work of re-building the House of the God of Israel.

Ezra comes to Jerusalem

7 ¹ After this, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra, the son of Seraiah, came from Babylon. He was a descendant of Azariah, Hilkiah, ² Shallum, Zadik, Ahitub, ³ Amariah, Azariah, Meraioth, ⁴ Zerachiah, Uzzi, Bukki, ⁵ Abishua, Phinehas, Eleazar, and Aaron, the high priest.

⁶ This teacher, well-educated in the law given to Moses by Yahweh, the God of Israel, went up from Babylon, and as the hand of Yahweh, his God, was upon him, the king granted him all he asked. ⁷ Many children of Israel, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants, also came to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

⁸ Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. ⁹ He had left Babylon on the first day of the first month, and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the good hand of his God was upon him. ¹⁰ Ezra had indeed dedicated himself with all his heart to put into action the Law of Yahweh and teach his commandments and precepts to Israel.

¹¹ Here is the copy of the letter given by King Artaxerxes to Ezra, priest and scribe, learned in the commandments and laws Yahweh has given to Israel.

¹² "Artaxerxes, King of kings, to Ezra, priest and teacher, learned in the Law of the God of heaven, peace.

¹³ I have given orders so that all the Israelites who are in my kingdom and are ready to go with you to Jerusalem may leave with their priests and Levites. ¹⁴ As for you, you shall go as the representative of the king and of his seven counselors to see to it that the Law of God which is in your hands is observed in Judah and Jerusalem, ¹⁵ and to bring there the gold and silver which the king and his counselors have generously offered to the God of Israel, whose House is in Jerusalem. ¹⁶ You shall also bring all the silver and gold you can gather in Babylon with the voluntary offerings of the people and the priests for the House of God in Jerusalem.

¹⁷ With this money, take care to buy young bulls, rams, lambs, and everything needed for the grain offerings and the libations, which you shall offer upon the altar of the House of your God in Jerusalem. ¹⁸ Do whatever seems best to you and your brothers with the rest of the silver and gold, according to the will of your God.

¹⁹ Place before God in Jerusalem the vessels given to you for the service of the House of your God, ²⁰ and take from the treasuries of the king whatever is needed to pay for other expenses for the House of your God.

²¹ I, King Artaxerxes, command all the treasurers in the region at the other side of the River to do exactly all that Ezra, priest and scribe, learned in the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of them, ²² giving him up to a

22. Ex 12, 15; Lev 23, 6

14. Est 1, 14

o Almost sixty years passed between what is related in chapter 6, the Passover of 515 and Ezra's mission. Ezra may have come in 458. But he may also have come in 427 after Nehemiah's first mission. Then, these chapters 7-10 should be read after Chapter 6 of Nehemiah.

Ezra was in the Persian province of Babylon as the person responsible for Jewish religious affairs. He was a priest and belonged to the groups who had meditated on the Law of Moses under the influence of Ezekiel. They had gathered the different texts and may even have edited the biblical books forming "the Law" – from Genesis to Deuteronomy – in their final version. These priests understand that Israel is beginning a new phase of its history. The Jews who had returned from the Exile must be guided by God's Law.

This law, which separates Jews from non-Jews and regulates all the details of life will become the foundation of a religious community – and later also of a political community – making them a united people.

Upon coming to Jerusalem with an official mission, Ezra wants to impose the Mosaic Law edited in its final form; the Jewish people are reborn as the people of the Law.

The Law will transform the Jewish people into a more faithful and responsible people, serving God in every detail. But this will also entail the risk of confusing authentic faith with external practices. A people who only equate serving God with Temple worship and religious practices can become indifferent to what is most important in life.

hundred talents of silver, a hundred sacks of wheat, a hundred measures of wine and a hundred measures of oil; salt shall be given him without measure. ²³ Everything commanded by the God of heaven should be done with great care for the House of the God of heaven in order that his wrath may not come upon the kingdom, the king and his sons.

²⁴ We also make it known that taxes, contributions or toll duties cannot be collected from any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, ministers and servants of this House of God.

²⁵ And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God, appoint judges and magistrates to administer justice to all the people at the other side of the River, to all who know the Law of your God; and teach it to those who do not know it.

²⁶ Whoever will not fulfill the Law of your God and the law of the king shall be severely punished with death, banishment, fine or imprisonment."

²⁷ Blessed be Yahweh, the God of our fathers, who inspired the King with this will to exalt and glorify the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem, ²⁸ and who let me win the favour of the King, of his counselors and of all his important officers. For my part, I took courage, since the hand of my God was with me, and I gathered together the leaders of Israel to go up with me.

List of the Jews returning with Ezra

8 ¹ These are the heads of clans who set out from Babylon with me in the reign of King Artaxerxes: — their ascendants are named

² Of the clan of Phinehas: Gershom; of the clan of Ithamar: Daniel; of the clan of David: Hattush ³ son of Secaniah; of the clan of Parosh: Zechariah, with whom one hundred and fifty males were registered; ⁴ of the clan of Pahath-moab: Eliehoenai, son of Zerariah, and with him two hundred males; ⁵ of the clan of Zattu: Shecaniah, son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males; ⁶ of the clan of Adin: Ebed, son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males; ⁷ of the clan of Elam: Jeshaiah, son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males; ⁸ of the clan of Shephatiah: Zebadiah, son of Michael, and with him eighty males; ⁹ of the clan of Joab: Obadiah, son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males; ¹⁰ of the clan of Bani: Shelomith, son of Josiphiah, and with him a hundred and sixty males; ¹¹ of the clan of Bebai: Zechariah, son of Bebai, and with him

twenty-eight males; ¹² of the clan of Azgad: Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him a hundred and ten males; ¹³ of the clan of Adonikam: the younger sons, whose names are: Eliphelet, Jeiel and Shemaiah, and with them sixty males; ¹⁴ and of the clan of Bigvai: Uthai, son of Zabud, and with him seventy males.

¹⁵ I gathered them by the river that runs to Ahava, and there we encamped for three days; and having searched among these people, I did not find anyone from the tribe of Levi. ¹⁶ So I called for the leaders — Eliezer, Ariel, She-maiah, Jarib, Elnathan, Zechariah and Meshullam — Joarib and Elnathan. ¹⁷ I gave them orders concerning Iddo, the leader who was in Casiphia; I gave them the message they ought to relay to Iddo and his brothers, the helpers, in Casiphia, to send us ministers for the House of our God.

¹⁸ As the good hand of God was with us, they brought us Sherebiah, a very sensible man, of the sons of Mahli, son of Levi, son of Israel, and with him were his sons and his brothers, numbering eighteen; ¹⁹ Hashabiah and with him Isaiah of the sons of Merari, their brothers and their sons, twenty; ²⁰ and of the helpers whom David and the leaders had placed at the service of the Levites, two hundred twenty-two men, all written down by name.

■ ²¹ There at the banks of the river Ahava, I proclaimed a fast to humble ourselves before our God, to implore him for a safe journey for ourselves, our children and our goods. ²² I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on the way; and we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is for good, upon all who seek him; and the power of his wrath upon all who abandon him." ²³ So we fasted and prayed to our God for this intention, and he listened to us.

²⁴ I chose twelve of the leaders of the priests, besides Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten of their brothers. ²⁵ I weighed out before them the silver and gold, the consecrated vessels given by the king, his counselors and his leaders, and by all the Israelites who were there, for the House of our God. ²⁶ And I entrusted into their hands six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver vessels worth a hundred talents, ²⁷ twenty bowls of gold worth a thousand darics, and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as vessels of gold. ²⁸ Then I said to them, "You are consecrated to Yahweh, these vessels are sacred objects, and that

silver and this gold are voluntary offerings made to Yahweh, the God of our fathers. ²⁹ Take care of them and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests, the Levites and the families of Israel in Jerusalem, in the dwelling places of the House of Yahweh."

³⁰ Then, the priests and the Levites received all that we had weighed: the silver and gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem to the House of our God.

³¹ We left the banks of the river Ahava to go to Jerusalem on the twelfth day of the first month. The hand of God was with us and he kept us from all attacks and ambushes from our enemies throughout our journey. ³² We arrived in Jerusalem where we rested for three days.

³³ On the fourth day, we weighed in the House of our God, the silver, the gold and the vessels, turning over everything to the priest Meremoth, son of Uriah, and to Eleazar, son of Phinehas, with the Levites Jozabad, son of Joshua, and Hoadaiah, son of Binnui. ³⁴ After counting and weighing everything again, the total weight was written down.

³⁵ The Jews who had returned from exile offered sacrifices to the God of Israel: twelve young bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin-offering, twelve he-goats. All these were burnt offerings to Yahweh. ³⁶ And the decrees of the king were delivered to his governors and officials of the province beyond the River, who helped the people and the House of God.

About intermarriages

9 ¹ After all this was finished, the leaders approached me and said, "The people of Israel, the priests and the Levites have not departed from the pagan peoples and are now serving the idols of the Canaanites, the Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. ² For they took women from among these people for themselves and for their sons, and mixed their holy race with that of the pagan people. Even the leaders and magistrates were the first in committing this sin."

³ When I heard this, I tore my garments and my mantle, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down very much grieved. ⁴ All who remembered the words of the God of Israel gathered around me; they were afraid because of this sin committed by the men who had returned from exile. ⁵ I remained seated and dismayed until the evening sacrifice; and then, at the time for the evening offering, I rose from my prostration, and with my clothes and mantle torn, I knelt down, spreading out my hands to Yahweh, my God.

⁶ I said, "my God! I am ashamed and confused, my God, I do not dare raise my eyes to you for our sins have increased over our heads and our crimes reach up to the heavens.

⁷ From the days of our fathers to this day, we have been in great guilt. We, our kings and priests have been given into the hands of foreign kings because of our crimes; we have been delivered to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and put to shame as at this day.

⁸ However, for a brief moment, the mercy of Yahweh, our God, has been shown to us. He made a remnant of our people survive, and allowed the survivor to settle once again in his Holy Place; he has given us joy and life, though we are slaves. ⁹ We are no more than slaves, but in the midst of our slavery, God has not abandoned us, he has extended a merciful hand over us to support us before the kings of Persia. He has revived our life, enabled us to rebuild the House of our God, and to have walls in Jerusalem and in the other cities of Judah.

¹⁰ But now, our God, what shall we say when, in spite of all this, we have abandoned your commandments? ¹¹ You have said through your servants, the prophets: The land you are entering to take possession of was defiled by the impurities of its inhabitants; they made it entirely unclean from one end to the other with their idolatry. ¹² Therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters as wives for your sons. Do not work with them for their prosperity and well-being. Be strong, eat the best fruits of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.

1. Mal 2, 10 2. Ne, 9, 2 4. Is 66, 2; Ex 34, 15; Dt 7, 1 11. Lev 18, 15; Dt 18, 9

♦ The Jews were intermingled with people who did not share their religion and suffered the danger of losing their identity. Ezra thinks that the Jewish community will succeed in being stronger and more conscious of their unique identity if they avoid any kind of sharing with the rest of the people. And so, to avoid the influence of other religions, marriages with non-Hebrews are forbidden.

But, without realizing it, Ezra promotes racism in spite of the teachings of the prophets who, in the previous century, had proclaimed that all the nations would enter into the people of God. The strict observance of the Law is, at first, a safeguard against the pagans; but with time, it becomes a wall that isolates the Jews from the rest of the people.

The barriers built by Ezra proved very effective.

¹³ After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our sins, you, our God, have pardoned our wickedness, since you allowed all who are here to survive. ¹⁴ How could we despise your commandments once more and intermarry with these wretched peoples? Will you not be angry with us and destroy us without leaving any remnant or survivors?

¹⁵ Yahweh, God of Israel, you are just; see that we are a remnant of survivors. We are here in your presence with our sins, but we cannot remain so in your presence."

The foreign wives are cast out

10 ¹ While Ezra bowed before the House of God, weeping, praying and making this confession, a great crowd of men, women and children of Israel were gathered around him; and these people wept bitterly.

² Then Shecaniah, son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have treated our God badly, by marrying foreign women away from the peoples of this land, but Israel is not without hope because of this. ³ Let us make a covenant with our God, and send these women away with their children according to the statement of my Lord and all of us who respect the commandment of our God, ⁴ let the Law be obeyed. We are with you. Have courage and command."

⁵ So Ezra arose and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites and of all Israel swear that they would do what had just been said, and so they swore. ⁶ Then, Ezra withdrew from the House of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan, son of Eliashib, but he did not eat bread or drink water there, for he was much afflicted by the sin of those who had returned from exile. ⁷ A proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem that all who had returned from exile should assemble in Jerusalem, ⁸ and if anyone would not come within three days, according to the decision of the leaders and of the local elders, all his property would be confiscated and he himself banned from the assembly of those who had returned from exile.

⁹ All the men of Judah and Benjamin as-

sembled in Jerusalem within the three days. It was the twentieth day of the ninth month, and all the people were in the open square of the House of God, trembling because of this matter and because it was raining.

¹⁰ Then the priest Ezra stood up and said, "You have been rebels in marrying foreign women, and have increased the offence of Israel. ¹¹ Now then, acknowledge your sin before Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and carry out his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of this land and from your foreign wives." ¹² The whole assembly answered with a loud voice, "Yes, we shall do as you say. ¹³ But the people are so numerous and we are now in the rainy season; we cannot endure the inclement weather, and besides, this matter cannot be settled in a day or two, for we are many who have committed this sin. ¹⁴ Our leaders can represent the whole assembly: those in our cities who have married foreign women shall come at appointed times, accompanied by the local leaders and judges of every city, until we have turned aside from us the anger of our God because of this matter."

¹⁵ The only ones who opposed this option were Jonathan, son of Asahel, and Jahzeiah, son of Tikvah, who were supported by the Levites Meshullam and Shabbethai. ¹⁶ But those who had returned from exile complied. In accordance with what the priest Ezra ordered, they selected a family head for every family group, each of them designated in a personal way, and they sat down to resolve the matter on the first day of the tenth month.

¹⁷ On the first day of the first month, they finished attending to all the cases of Jews who had been married to foreign women.

The list of the guilty

¹⁸ Among the members of the priestly clans, these are the names of those who were found to have married foreign women: among the clan of Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and among his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah; ¹⁹ they pledged their word to put their wives away and, for their sin, offered a ram as a sacrifice of reparation;

tive and we may see the will of God in that. The Jewish people resisted very harsh persecutions (see Maccabees). Then, after the coming of Christ, they were dispersed and they had to live for almost twenty centuries among officially Christian countries that usually persecuted them or tried to convert them to the Christian faith through all kinds of means. And yet, the Jewish people have remained something unique in

history – in part, thanks to their faithfulness to the Law. We have to think that Christians can also draw a lesson from all of this. If we are called to be yeast for the masses, co-existing without prejudices with people of different creeds, we also need demands and external practices, accepted by all who join this community.

See what is said to the effect in Nehemiah 13!

Gen 41, 45; Num 12, 1; Rut 1, 4; Dt 23, 4

11. Jos 7, 19; Jer 13, 16; Mal 2, 2

²⁰ Among the clan of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah;

²¹ Among the clan of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel and Uziah;

²² Among the clan of Pashhur: Elieonai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasah.

²³ Among the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah – that is, Kelita – Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

²⁴ Among the Temple musicians: Eliashib and Zaccur.

Among the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem and Uri.

²⁵ And among the Israelites: of the clan of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah and Benarai;

²⁶ of the clan of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah;

²⁷ of the clan of Zattu: Elieonai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad and Aziza;

²⁸ of the clan of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, Athlai;

²⁹ of the clan of Bigvai: Meshullam, Maluch, Jedaiah, Jashub, Sheal, Jeremoth;

³⁰ of the clan of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh;

³¹ of the clan of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, ³² Benjamin, Malluch, Shemariah;

³³ of the clan of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattatah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, Shimei;

³⁴ of the clan of Bani: Maadai, Amran, Uel, ³⁵ Benaiah, Bediah, Cheluhi, ³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷ Mattaniah, Matenai and Jasau;

³⁸ of the clan of Binnui: Shimei, ³⁹ Shelemiah, Nathan and Adaiah;

⁴⁰ of the clan of Zaccai: Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹ Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴² Shallum, Amariah, Joseph;

⁴³ of the clan of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, Benaiah.

⁴⁴ All these had married foreign wives; they put them away, both women and children.



How Nehemiah felt called

1 The words of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah.

In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, I was in the citadel of Susa when ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came with some men from Judah. I asked them about the Jewish survivors who had returned from exile and about Jerusalem.

³ They answered me, "The people now live there in the province, in the

midst of great poverty and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates burned."

⁴ When I heard these words, I sat down and began to weep. I mourned for days, keeping watch and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said,

"O Yahweh, God of heaven, you are fearsome and great. You keep your covenant and your fidelity towards those who love you and fulfill your commandments. ⁶ May your ears be attentive and your eyes open to listen to the prayer of your servant!

I am now in your presence day and night, for your servants, the children of Israel. I confess to you the sins we children of Israel have committed against you. I myself and the family of my father have sinned. ⁷ We have acted very badly. We did not fulfill your commandments, laws and instructions which you gave to your servant Moses.

⁸ But remember, too, what you said to Moses: If you are not faithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ But if you fulfill my commandments and put them into practice, I shall again lead you back to the place where I have chosen to dwell. I shall gather you, though you be dispersed to the ends of the world."

¹⁰ So then, Lord, do not forget that they are your servants; they are your people, whom you have saved with your great power and strong hand.

¹¹ Listen to my prayer and to the prayer of those who only wish to honour your Name. I ask you to help me now. May I be well received by the king."

I was then in charge of preparing the drinks of the king.

Nehemiah gives up everything to go to Jerusalem

+2 ¹ In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, I was doing my duty as cupbearer. I took up the wine and gave it

to the king. I had never been sad before the king in the past. ² So, the king said to me, "Why do you look sad? You don't look sick. Is there something that bothers you?"

I became hesitant. ³ And I said, "May the king live forever! How could I afford not to be sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins and its gates burned?" ⁴ The king said to me, "What do you want, then?" I asked help from heaven and ⁵ said to the king, "If it seems good to the king and if he is pleased with my work, then may he send me to the land of Judah, to the city where my fathers are buried, that I may rebuild it."

⁶ The queen was sitting beside the king, and the king asked me, "How long will you be gone? When will you be back?" I told him the date and he allowed me to leave. ⁷ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, may you give me letters for the governors of the province at the other side of the River to make it easy for me to travel to Judah, ⁸ and also a letter to Asaph, the caretaker of the king's forest, for I would need wood for the gates of the citadel near the Temple, for the walls of the city and for the house where I shall live."

The good hand of God was supporting me, so that the king gave me what I asked. ⁹ I went to the governors at the other side of the River, and

6. 5, 4; 13, 6

o Nehemiah served in the palace of King Artaxerxes as cupbearer, a high position at a time when kings were afraid of being poisoned.

He is a man whose future is assured: yet, he is going to leave everything to serve God.

Nehemiah's vocation comes from:

- His great trust in God's promises.
- An understanding of history which only a believer can have: Israel must not blame anyone else for their difficult situation. Their own sins are the cause of their misfortunes. And so, they must not expect their national restoration to come from the kindness of more powerful countries, but from their own conversion.

Nehemiah is the example of all those who are able to recognize the voice of the Lord through events and who do not wait for a special call to get to work. There is no doubt that every Christian, if he trusts in God, is called to discover and achieve what God expects of him for the salvation of the world, just as Nehemiah did.

+ Nehemiah asks and receives because he is not a nuisance, and his years of loyal service have earned him affection and esteem. His discretion and initiative are underscored and his fervent words encourage the skeptics whom he persuades.

Was it necessary to build the walls of Jerusa-

delivered to them the letters of the king. The king had ordered that I be accompanied by officers of the army and horsemen.¹⁰ But in Jerusalem, Sanballat, the Horonite and Tobiah, the Ammonite servant came to know of my arrival and it displeased them that someone had come to help the Israelites.

¹¹ I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days.¹² Then I arose in the night, accompanied by a few men, without telling anyone what I planned to do in Jerusalem according to what my God had inspired me to do.

Bringing along only the horse on which I rode,¹³ I went out by night by the Gate of the Garbage Dump, I inspected the ruined wall of Jerusalem and the burned gates.

¹⁴ I went on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Reservoir, but my horse could not pass through anywhere.¹⁵ So I went up, in the night, by the ravine. I inspected the wall and turned back entering by the Valley Gate.

So I returned to the house.¹⁶ The counselors did not know where I had been or what I was doing. Until that time I had not yet told any of the Jews or the counselors, or the priests or the nobles, or any of those in public office.

¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You yourselves see the misery we are in because Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and put an end to this humiliating situation."¹⁸ And I recounted to them how the good hand of God had helped me, and what the king had told me. Everyone said, "Let us begin the work." And they encour-

aged one another to make this good work a reality.

¹⁹ Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab heard of this. They laughed at us and came to tell us, "What are you doing? You are rebelling against the king!"²⁰ I answered them, "The God of heaven shall grant us success. We, his servants, are now going to work. But as for you, you have neither right nor inheritance nor anything to do with Jerusalem."

They begin to build the wall

3¹ The high priest Eliashib and his brothers, the priests, were entrusted with the building of the Sheep Gate. They built it, set its doors and continued as far as the Tower of Hananel.² The people of Jericho worked at their side, and farther on, Zaccur, son of Imri.³ The Fish Gate was assigned to the sons of Hassenaah. They set up and fixed its doors, bolts and bars.

⁴ Next to them, Meremoth, son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz, and Meshullam, son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel built the next section and at their side, Zadok, son of Baana, repaired another section.⁵ At their side, the inhabitants of Tekoa worked, but the nobles would not cooperate in the undertaking in the service of their Lord.

⁶ The Old Gate was repaired by Joiada, son of Paseah, and Meshullam, son of Besodeiah. They set up and fixed the gate with its bolts and bars.

⁷ Next to them worked Malatiah of Gibeon and Yadan of Meronot with the people of Gibeon and Mizpah, beside the house of the provincial governor.⁸ Next to them worked

1. Jer 31, 38

3. 13, 16

lem? In fact, more than the restoration, the Bible stresses the way it was achieved: in calling for

everyone's cooperation. Nehemiah builds up the spirit of the Jerusalem community.

Uzziel, of the jeweller's guild workshop. Next were Hananiah, of the perfumers' guild: they strengthened Jerusalem as far as the Wall of the Square. ⁹ Next to them repairs were carried out by Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph worked opposite his own house; next to him repairs were carried out by Hattush son of Hashabneiah. ¹¹ Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired the next section as far as the Tower of the Furnaces. ¹² Next to them worked Shallum son of Halloheh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. ¹³ Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they restored it, constructed its framework and set its doors, bolts and bars in place, and repaired a thousand cubits of wall up to the Dung Gate. ¹⁴ Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Bethhaccherem, repaired the Dung Gate, he and his sons: he set its doors, bolts and bars in place. ¹⁵ Shallum, son of Colhozeb, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he restored it, covered it, and set its doors, bolts and bars in place. He also rebuilt the wall of the conduit cistern, adjoining the king's garden, as far as the steps coming down from the Citadel of David. ¹⁶ Next to him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Bethzur, worked up to a point opposite the tombs of David, the artificial pool and the House of Heroes. ¹⁷ Next to him worked the Levites: Rehun son of Bani and next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, for his own district. ¹⁸ Next to them worked their brothers: Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah; ¹⁹ next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, opposite the slope up to the Armoury, towards the Angle.

²⁰ Next to him Baruch son of Zabbai worked from the Angle as far as the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹ Next to him Meremoth son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz from the door of Eliashib's house to its farther end. ²² Next to him worked the priests who lived there. ²³ Next to them worked Benjamin and Hasshub, opposite their own houses. Next to them Azariah son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, beside his own house. ²⁴ Next to him Binnui son of Henadad from the house Azar-

iah as far as the Angle. ²⁵ Next to him Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the corner of the tower jutting out over the upper palace of the king near the prison courtyard. Next to him Pedaiah son of Parosh worked ²⁶ as far as the Water Gate, in an easterly direction and up to a point opposite the projecting tower. ²⁷ Next to him the men of Tekoah worked opposite the great tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ From the Horse Gate onwards repairs were carried out by the priests, each opposite his own house. ²⁹ Next to them worked Zadok son of Immer opposite his own house. Next to him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, keeper of the East Gate. ³⁰ Next to him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun sixth son of Zalaph. Next to him son of Berechiah worked opposite where he lived. ³¹ Next to him Malchijah, of the goldsmiths' guild, repaired as far as the quarters of the helpers and the merchants, opposite the Watch Gate as far as the high chamber of the corner. ³² And between the high chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate repairs were carried out by the goldsmiths and the merchants.

The enemies try to discourage Nehemiah

■ ³³ When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry. He ridiculed the Jews ³⁴ and said before his brothers and the lords of Samaria, "What are those miserable Jews trying to do? Are they perhaps going to rebuild, finish and celebrate the inauguration in a single day? Do they think they can make stones out of heaps of ruins?"

³⁵ Tobiah the Ammonite who was by him said, "Let them build, for if any fox goes up on their wall it will surely collapse."

³⁶ Listen, O our God, for we are despised! May their insult fall back upon their own heads; give them up to contempt in a land where they shall be exiled! ³⁷ Do not cover their guilt nor

36. Jer 18, 23

■ Later, Nehemiah's work arouses jealousy and suspicion. Nothing unusual in that. The firmness of this man alone was enough to inspire everyone. At that very moment, building the Jerusalem walls was the specific task without which sacred history would stop. Had the Jewish people given in and delayed, they would have

lost the means to their independence and the meaning of their mission. Similarly today, although the mission of the Church is mostly spiritual, our fidelity to the Lord depends upon our attitude in the face of violations and betrayals of the truth in very specific things of social life.

let their sin be blotted out in your presence, for they have offended those who built.

¹⁸ The people worked with all their hearts and we finished half the wall's height.

4¹ Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the residents of Azotus saw that the repair of the wall was advancing, and that we had begun covering the holes.² They were greatly enraged, and all of them agreed to attack Jerusalem and humiliate me.

³ So we prayed to our God, and set a guard day and night.⁴ The people of Judah said, "The strength of the leaders is already failing, and much debris still remains: we can never rebuild the wall."⁵ And our enemies said, "We will take them by surprise before they know it. We will kill them and their project will be spoken of no more."

But some Jews who lived with them came to notify us about this. Ten times they said to us, "From all the places where they live, they shall set out against us."

⁷ So I ordered that people be stationed behind the wall, there in the lowest part. I stationed them by families, with their swords, spears, and bows.⁸ They were afraid, but I stood up and said to the nobles, the counselors and the rest of the people, "Remember the Lord, great and magnificent, and fight for your brothers, sons and daughters, wives and homes."

⁹ When our enemies learned that we had been notified, that God would that their plans be thwarted, we all returned to the wall, each one to his work.

¹⁰ But from that day on, only half of my men worked while the other half, with bows, spears, shields and armour, stood behind all the people of Judah¹¹ building the wall. The leaders picked up their loads with one hand because they held a weapon with the other hand.¹² Each of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he worked.

Beside me was the man assigned to sound the trumpet.¹³ I told the nobles, the counselors and the rest of the people, "The extent of the work is great and we are scattered along the wall, far from one another,¹⁴ so when you hear the sound of the horn, come to our aid at once and our God shall fight for us."

¹⁵ So we scheduled the work from daybreak till the stars came out, half of us with weapons in hand.¹⁶ I also said to the people, "Everyone shall spend the night within Jerusalem, with his servants. So we may keep guard by night and work by day."

¹⁷ Yet my brothers, my men, the men of the guard who followed me, and I did not take off our clothes when we slept. Everyone kept his weapon with him.

The rich must share the sacrifices of the poor

5¹ The common people and their wives presented very serious complaints against their Jewish brothers.

² Some of them said, "We have big families and we need wheat to eat for strength to live."³ Others cried out, "We have to mortgage our fields, vineyards and houses to get grain because of this famine."⁴ Others said,

◆ *We belong to the same race as our brothers. The rulers keep saying that the reconstruction requires sacrifice. But the Jewish people demand that the sacrifices be really shared by all.*

Those who have enough for today must cancel the debts of those who have nothing.

And now are you buying your brothers back? Nehemiah defends the most humble, and



"We have borrowed money on account of our fields and vineyards in order to pay the tax to the king.⁵ Though we are of the same race as our brothers and our children are not different from their children, we have to give our children as slaves; even many of our daughters are not regarded as concubines. And we do not have any other solution, inasmuch as our fields and vineyards have passed on to others."

⁶ Those complaints and accusations filled me with indignation. ⁷ After reflecting on the matter, I brought this to the attention of the nobles and the counselors,⁸ saying to them, "Why do you not have compassion on your brothers?"

Because of this, I held a great assembly and said to them, "We have rescued, according to our resources, our Jewish brothers who were slaves. But are you now buying your own brothers?"

They remained silent. They could not answer.⁹ And I continued, "What you do is not good. Should you not live in obedience to our God lest we be put to shame by our pagan enemies?¹⁰ My brothers, my relatives and I have also lent money and wheat. Now then, let us forget everything they owe us,¹¹ returning to them at once their fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and cancelling their debts in money, wheat, wine and oil."¹² They answered me, "We will return these

and demand nothing from them. We will do as you have said."

So I called the priests, and before them, made all of them swear an oath that they would fulfill their promise.¹³ Then I shook out the folds of my mantle, saying, "So may God shake out of his house and his inheritance all who do not fulfill this word, and may he be so shaken that nothing is left of him." The whole assembly answered, "Amen" and praised Yahweh. And the people fulfilled their promise.

¹⁴ King Artaxerxes had appointed me governor of the land of Judah in the twentieth year of his reign. Until the thirty-second year, or rather, for twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ever demanded to be given the governor's bread.¹⁵ But the former governors had collected forty pieces of silver per day from the people. This pay was a burden to the people, besides the abuses their servants had committed.

¹⁶ As I dedicated myself to rebuilding the wall, I did not buy fields; and all my men were there helping.¹⁷ At my table a hundred and fifty men, leaders and counselors were seated, besides those who came to us from neighbouring nations.¹⁸ A male calf, six choice rams and fowls were slaughtered daily, and every ten days a great quantity of wine was brought. But though all these were charged to my account, I never asked for the governor's bread, because the people

denounces the sin the rich have committed without realizing it: driven by the logic of debt and credit, they have come to submit their brothers to slavery.

Do you want to imitate our enemies' customs? We rightfully seek a liberation from exploitative and from anti-social governments. Finally the exploitative spirit in each one of us is the last thing to be uprooted.

• Sanballat uses every means to discourage Nehemiah:

3:33 – mockery and insults.

4:2 – threat of attack.

6:2 – psychological warfare.

6:6 – accusations.

6:14 – bribing the false prophets.

There will always be people who take advantage of God's word to support governments or to deceive the people.

Note the expression in 6:13: *to frighten me and lead me to sin*. Quite often, fear is a slippery way leading to sin.



were already burdened enough with the task of reconstruction.

¹⁹ Remember for my good, my God, all that I have done for this people!

Further opposition to rebuilding

6 ¹ Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies learned that I had rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem. There was no hole left in it, although the doors had not been set up yet. ² Then Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message saying, "Come and let us talk in Keriphim, in the lowland of Ono."

They intended to do me harm; ³ but I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am much occupied in a very important work. I cannot come down to meet you, for the work would stop if I left it." ⁴ They invited me again four times, but I gave them the same answer every time.

⁵ Then Sanballat invited me for the fifth time. His servant brought an open letter which said the following, ⁶ "Do you know the news that circulates among those who are not Jews? Gashmu says that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are rebuilding the wall. ⁷ And you also wish to become their king, and have already chosen prophets to proclaim you king of Jerusalem. The king shall know of this, so come that the two of us may talk."

⁸ But I sent to him, saying, "There's nothing true in what you say; all are the inventions of your own mind."

⁹ For they all wanted to frighten us, saying: "Let us discourage them that they may not finish the work."

But I, on the contrary, worked with greater strength. ¹⁰ Then I went to Shemaiah, son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, since he could not leave

his house. He said to me, "Let us meet together in the House of God, within the sanctuary, and then close its doors, for they are coming to kill you, and strike you this very night."

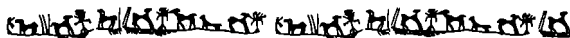
¹¹ But I answered him, "Should a man like me flee? Why should a man like me seek sanctuary to save my life? I will not go." ¹² I understood then that Semaiah had not been sent by God but that Tobiah and Sanballat had brought him ¹³ to frighten me. In hiding in the sanctuary, I would have committed an offence, and this would have damaged my reputation and put me to shame.

¹⁴ O my God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, for what they have done; and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who tried to frighten me.

¹⁵ The wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ When our enemies and the neighbouring nations knew about it, they were afraid and lost courage. They had to recognize the work of God in this.

¹⁷ During that time, several distinguished Jews often wrote to and received letters from Tobiah. ¹⁸ Tobiah had many friends in Judah for he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah, son of Arah, and because his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berechiah. ¹⁹ They even came to speak well of Tobiah in my presence, and recounted to him all my words as well. And it was he – Tobiah – who sent letters to frighten me.

7 ¹ When the wall was finished and the doors were in place, gatekeepers were designated to keep watch. ² Then I set my brother Hanani as governor of Jerusalem, and Hananiah as head of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and true servant of



God.³ Then I said to them, "Open the gates of Jerusalem only when the sun begins to get hot, but while it is still day, close and bar the doors while the guards are still at their posts.

And during the night, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall come out to keep guard, some in their places and others in front of their houses."

The new population of Jerusalem

⁴ The city was spacious and wide, but it had few inhabitants and many houses had not been rebuilt. ⁵ God inspired in me the idea to assemble the leaders, the counselors and the people to take a census. I found the registry book of the census of those who had returned from exile in the beginning. I found the following written in it:

⁶ These are the people of the province who returned from exile whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had deported, but returned to Jerusalem and Judea, each to his city:

⁷ These are the Israelites who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Ramiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereith, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah; here are the numbers:

⁸ The sons of Parosh, 2,172; ⁹ those of Shephatiah, 372; ¹⁰ those of Arah, 652; ¹¹ those of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818; ¹² the sons of Elam 1,254; ¹³ those of Zattu, 845; ¹⁴ those of Zaccai, 760; ¹⁵ those of Binnui, 648; ¹⁶ those of Bebai, 628; ¹⁷ those of Azgad, 2,322; ¹⁸ those of Adonimkan, 667; ¹⁹ those of Bigvai, 2,067; ²⁰ those of Adin, 655; ²¹ those of Ater, of Hezekiah, 98; ²² those of Hashum, 328; ²³ those of Bezai, 324; ²⁴ those of Hariph, 112; ²⁵ those of Gibeon, 95.

²⁶ The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188; ²⁷ those of Anathoth, 128; ²⁸ those of Bethazmaveth, 42; ²⁹ those of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743; ³⁰ those of Ramah and Geba, 621; ³¹ those of Michmas, 122; ³² those of Bethel and Ai, 123; ³³ those of the other Nebo, 52.

³⁴ The sons of the other Elam, 1,254; ³⁵ those of Harim, 320; ³⁶ those of Jericho, 345; ³⁷ those of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 721; ³⁸ those of Senaah, 3,930.

³⁹ The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973; ⁴⁰ those of Immer, 1,052; ⁴¹ those of Pashhur, 1,247; ⁴² those of Harim, 1,017.

⁴³ The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodevah, 74.

⁴⁴ The singers: the sons of Asaph, 148.

⁴⁵ The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, of Ater, of Talmon, of Akkub, of Hatita, of Shobai, 138.

⁴⁶ The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, of Hasupha, of Tabbaath, ⁴⁷ of Keros, of Sia, of Padon, ⁴⁸ of Lebana, of Hagaba, of Shalmai, ⁴⁹ of Hanan, of Giddel, of Gahar, ⁵⁰ of Reaiah, of Rezin, of Nekoda, ⁵¹ of Gazzam, of Uzza, of Paseah, ⁵² of Besai, of Meunim, of Nephushesim, ⁵³ of Bakbuk, of Hakupha, of Harhur, ⁵⁴ of Bazlith, of Mehida, of Harsha, ⁵⁵ of Barkos, of Sisera, of Temah, ⁵⁶ of Nezia, of Hatipha.

⁵⁷ The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, of Sophereth, of Perida, ⁵⁸ of Jaala, of Darkon, of Giddel, ⁵⁹ of Shephatiah, of Hattil, of Pochereth-hazzenaim, of Amon. ⁶⁰ All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

⁶¹ And these were they who came up from Telmelah, Telharsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses or their descendants, whether they were of Israel: ⁶² the sons of Delaiah, of Tobiah, of Nekoda, 642. ⁶³ And of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, of Hakkoz, of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them. ⁶⁴ These people searched for their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood. ⁶⁵ And the governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest would make a decision through the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁶ The whole assembly together was 42,360, ⁶⁷ besides their male and their female servants: 7,337; and they had 245 male and female singers.

⁶⁸ They had 736 horses, 245 mules: ⁶⁹ 435 camels; 6,720 donkeys. ⁷⁰ Some of the heads of families gave offerings for the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments. ⁷¹ The heads of families gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas, and 2,200 silver minas and 67 priests' garments.

⁷² The rest of the people gave 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas, and 67 priests' garments.

⁷³ The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their cities.

And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.



Ezra reads the law

+8 ¹ In the seventh month, all the people gathered as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which Yahweh had given to Israel. ² Ezra brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all the children who could understand what was being read. It was the first day of the seventh month. ³ Ezra read the book before all of them from early morning until midday in the square facing the Water Gate; and all who heard were attentive to the Book of the Law.

⁴ Ezra, the teacher of the Law, stood on a wooden platform built for that occasion and to his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaijah, Jriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hasbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

⁵ Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was in a higher place; and when he opened it, all the people stood. ⁶ Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God; and all the people lifted up their hands and answered, "Amen! Amen!" And they bowed their heads to the ground.

⁷ The Levites Joshua, Bani and the rest of their brothers explained the Law to the people who were stand-

ing. ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, clarifying and interpreting the meaning, so that everyone might understand what they were hearing.

⁹ Then Ezra, the teacher of the Law, said to the people, "This day is dedicated to Yahweh, your God, so do not be sad or weep." He said this because all wept when they heard the reading of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go and eat rich foods, drink sweet wine and share with him who has nothing prepared.

This day is dedicated to the Lord, so do not be sad. The joy of Yahweh is our strength."

¹¹ The Levites also calmed the people down, saying, "Do not weep. This day is a festival day. Do not be sad."

¹² And the people went their way to eat, drink and share, and they had a great feast, because they had understood the words that had been proclaimed to them.

¹³ On the second day, the heads of the families, the priests and the Levites came together to Ezra, the teacher of the Law, in order to learn the Law. ¹⁴ There they read that Yahweh had commanded the children of Israel that they should dwell in huts during the feast of the seventh month. ¹⁵ Then they proclaimed in all the cities and in Jerusalem: "Go to the mountains and bring branches of olive, pine, myrtle,

14. Lev 23, 33

+ This first public reading of the Law marks a very important date of sacred history. Until that time, the people of Israel lived their faith through praying and taking part in the Temple ceremonies. Decisions and preaching came to them through priests and prophets. They did not feel the need to read a Bible.

Several books of our Bible were already in existence but they were kept in the Temple or the kings' palace: they were not within the reach of the people nor were they the foundation of their faith. Now, however, new demands are made and they no longer have prophets as before. Ezra understands that in the future, the Jewish community will grow through the reading, meditation and interpretation of the sacred book. Ezra himself tries to gather and complete the sacred books, and a new age is beginning

wherein the Bible will be everyone's book and the basis of their faith.

This religious and cultural transition is similar to what affected the Church in recent years. People were going to church; they were praying and they were being taught, but the Bible was foreign to them. However, now the Christian faith can only become strong through the word of God read and heard in the community. Indeed we are behind time: this renewal should have started four centuries ago when Protestantism began.

The assembly gathered by Ezra will serve as the model for the religious life of the Jewish community. The solemn worship of the Jerusalem Temple is not suppressed, but, from then on, in every city the Jews will have a synagogue, that is, a meeting place where they will gather on the Sabbath to hear God's word and to sing psalms.



palm and of any leafy tree to build huts according to what is commanded."

¹⁶ The people went out and brought branches and built huts for themselves on the roofs of their houses, or in their yards, or in the courtyards of the House of Yahweh, or in the square at the Water Gate or in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

¹⁷ The whole assembly of those who had returned from exile built huts and dwelt in them, a thing the Israelites had not done since the days of Joshua, son of Nun. And there was great rejoicing.

¹⁸ They read the Book of the Law of God daily, from the first day to the last day of the feast. The feast lasted for seven days and ended on the eighth day with an assembly.

The Israelites confess their sins

9 ¹ On the twenty-fourth day of that same month, the Israelites assembled to fast. They put on sackcloth and sprinkled dust upon their heads. ² The race of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners; they stood and confessed their sins and those of their fathers.

³ They stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of Yahweh, their God, for three hours. For another three hours, they confessed their sins and bowed before Yahweh, their God.

⁴ Joshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani stood on the platform of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to Yahweh, their God. ⁵ Then the Levites: Joshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodia, Shebaniah and Pethaliah said, "Arise, bless Yahweh, our God, forever and ever. Blessed be your glorious Name which is beyond all blessing and praise."

Prayer of Ezra

⁶ Then Ezra said, "You, Yahweh, you alone made the heavens, the heaven of heavens, and all their army,

the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all, and all the angels of heaven adore you.

⁷ You, Yahweh, are the God who chose Abram; you brought him out of Ur of Chaldea, and gave him the name Abraham.

⁸ You found him faithful to you and made with him the Covenant to give to him and his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite. And you have fulfilled your word, for you are just.

⁹ You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and listened to their cry by the Red Sea.

¹⁰ You worked signs and wonders against Pharaoh, his ministers and all his people, for you knew that they had treated us harshly, and you have received fame to this day.

¹¹ You divided the sea before our fathers who passed through the midst of the sea without their feet getting wet. You cast their pursuers into the depths of the sea, as stones fall into the deep waters.

¹² You guided them by day with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to light before them the way they should follow.

¹³ You came down upon Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven; you gave them just laws, norms that express truth, excellent precepts and commandments.

7. Gen 12-17

10. Ex 7-11

11. Ex 14-15

13. Ex 19

■ We must relate this penance ceremony with chapters 9 and 10 of Ezra. It deals with asking forgiveness for the sins which separate people from God's law and are harmful to the race of Israel. They insist especially on the sin of marrying women of another race and a different religion: the Bible knows that marrying someone of another religion often brings a person to move away from his own religious community. This was Solomon's sin.

After publicly confessing the faults of the community, they remember God's mercy: it is

useless to know the sins if feelings of inner repentance are not aroused in remembering how God always forgives generously. Following, we have a summary of sacred history showing God's mercy with his people.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, several commitments are made: these are necessary to help the weakness of the will, and to struggle against laxity. But it is not all a question of rules; the risk consists in paying more attention to external observance than to the spirit of the Law.



¹⁴ You taught them to consecrate the sabbath to you; you gave them commandments, precepts and the Law, through the hand of Moses, your servant.

¹⁵ You sent them bread from heaven to satisfy their hunger; you made water gush forth from the rock to quench their thirst, and commanded them to go and take possession of the land which you had sworn to give them.

¹⁶ But our fathers became proud and hard-headed, and they did not listen to your commands.

¹⁷ They refused to listen or to remember all the marvels you did for them. They hardened their hearts rebelliously and wanted to go back to their slavery in Egypt. But you, God of forgiveness, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in kindness, did not abandon them.

¹⁸ They even made for themselves a molten calf and said: 'This is your god, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt, and had terribly insulted and blasphemed you.

¹⁹ But you, in your great kindness, did not abandon them in the desert; the pillar of cloud did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, by which you showed them the way they should take.

²⁰ You gave them your good Spirit to instruct them; you gave them manna so they could eat, and water to quench their thirst.

²¹ Forty years you cared for them in the desert and they lacked nothing, neither did their clothes wear out or their feet swell.

²² You gave them kingdoms and lands; you allotted to them the frontier lands. They took possession of the

land of Sihon, king of Heshbon, and the land of Og, king of Bashan.

²³ And you multiplied their sons as the stars of heaven, bringing them to the land you promised their fathers.

²⁴ Their sons entered and took possession of the land. Before them you crushed the land's inhabitants, the Canaanites whom you gave into their hands with their kings and all the inhabitants, doing to them what they pleased.

²⁵ They conquered fortified cities and a fertile land, took possession of houses well-stocked, wells ready-hewn, vineyards and olive groves, and fruit trees of every kind and in great abundance. They ate, were satisfied and grew fat, and they lived comfortably by your great kindness.

²⁶ But then, they were disobedient and they rebelled against you. They threw your Law behind their backs, killed the prophets who admonished them to return to you, and committed grave sins against you

²⁷ You handed them over to their enemies who oppressed them. In their oppression they cried to you, and you listened to them from heaven, so by your immense kindness, you sent them saviours who freed them from their oppressors.

²⁸ But when they were at peace, they did evil against you, and again you gave them over to the hands of the enemies who oppressed them. Once more they cried to you, and you listened to them from heaven, and by your great kindness you saved them many times.

²⁹ Insistently, you asked them to return to your Law, but they were very proud, so they did not listen to your commands and ordinances. They did

15. Ex 16-17 17. Num 14, 4 18. Ex 32 20. Num 11, 3; Is 63, 12 22. Num 21 25. Dt 6, 10 27. Jdg 2



not observe what a man should fulfill to have life. They turned their backs and did not listen to you for they were hard-headed.

³⁰ You were patient with them for many years. You admonished them by your Spirit through the mouth of the prophets; but they did not listen.

³¹ Then you gave them over to the power of other peoples. But because of your great kindness, you did not let them be destroyed, nor did you abandon them, for you are a God of kindness and mercy.

³² Now then, our God, great, powerful and fearsome God, who keeps your covenant and your love, take into account this misery which has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people since the time of the kings of Assyria to the present day.

³³ You have shown yourself just in all that has happened, for you have faithfully fulfilled your promises, but we have sinned.

³⁴ Our kings and leaders, our priests and our fathers did not keep your Law, they did not follow your commandments or the norms you gave them.

³⁵ While they were in their kingdoms, enjoying the prosperity that came from you and the very fertile and wide land you had prepared for them, they did not serve you nor did they repent from their sins.

³⁶ See, we are now slaves, enslaved in the land you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruits and its goodness.

³⁷ The abundant fruits of the land go to the kings you have set over us because of our sins. They do what they please with us and our livestock,

and because of this we live in great distress.

Promises made by the community

10 ¹ In accordance with all this, we make a firm commitment in writing. The document has been signed by our leaders, our Levites and our priests.

² Nehemiah son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, ³ Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ⁴ Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁵ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁶ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁷ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁸ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁹ Maaziah, Bilgai, She-maiah: these are the priests.

¹⁰ Then the Levites: Jeshua son of Azariah, Binnui of clan of Henadad, Kadmiel, ¹¹ and their kinsmen Shebaniah, Hodaviah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹² Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹³ Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹⁴ Hodiah, Bani, Chenani.

¹⁵ The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pathmoab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁶ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁷ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁸ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁹ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ²⁰ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²¹ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²² Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, ²³ Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²⁴ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁵ Halloheshe, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁶ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁷ Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁸ Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

²⁹ And the rest of the people, the priests and the Levites, the gatekeepers, singers and helpers and all who have separated themselves from the inhabitants of the land to follow the Law of God together with their wives and their children who are old enough to understand all these, ³⁰ with their leaders and their brothers have sworn to walk according to the Law of God promulgated through Moses, the servant of God, and to keep and fulfill all the precepts of Yahweh, our God, and his norms and laws.

³¹ We decided not to give our daughters in marriage to the men of the land nor take their daughters as wives for our sons. ³² If the people of the land bring goods or any foodstuff whatsoever to sell on the sabbath day, we will not buy anything from them on the sabbath day or on any other sacred feast day. We will leave our fields uncultivated in the seventh year, and cancel all debts owed to us.

³³ We consider it our obligation to give one-third of a shekel yearly for the service of the

o The following chapters combine various documents. Among them, note the text refer-

ring to Nehemiah's first mission: 12:27-43. It complements chapters 1 through 7.



House of Yahweh, ³⁴ for the bread presented as a perpetual offering and holocaust, for the sacrifices on the sabbath, on the new moon, on feasts for other sacrifices, for the expiation of the sin of Israel and for everything necessary in the House of God.

³⁵ Among the priests, Levites and people of the town, we have drawn lots for the offering of firewood that each family shall bring by turn to the House of Yahweh every year to keep the fire burning at the altar of Yahweh, our God, as it is written in the Law.

³⁶ We will bring the first fruits of our fields and of our fruit trees to the House of Yahweh through all the years. ³⁷ Our firstborn sons and the firstborn of our animals, as it is written in the Law, the firstborn of our cattle and sheep we will set aside for the House of Yahweh and for the priests who serve in the House of our God. ³⁸ We will bring the best of our cereals, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil to the priests to be kept in the chambers of the House of our God; we will also bring the tent from our fields for the Levites. The Levites themselves will collect the tithes from all the agricultural towns. ³⁹ A priest, a son of Aaron, will go with them when they collect the tithes. The Levites will bring the tenth part of the tithes into the storage rooms of the House of God where the treasures are kept, ⁴⁰ since the Israelites and the Levites bring to these storage rooms what they owe in wheat, wine and oil. In these rooms are also found the supplies for the Sanctuary, for the priests who are on duty, and for the gatekeepers and the singers.

So we will no longer neglect the House of our God.

11 ¹ The leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people drew lots so that for every ten men, one would live in Jerusalem, the Holy City, with the remaining nine settling in other cities. ² The people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

³ These are the provincial leaders who resided in Jerusalem. And in the cities of Judah, everyone settled on his property, in the city of this family: the people of Israel and their priests and Levites, ministers and the sons of the servants of Solomon.

The Jewish population in Jerusalem

⁴ In Jerusalem there lived some of the tribe of Judah and some of the tribe of Benjamin.

Of the tribe of Judah: Athaiah son of Uz-ziah, grandson of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Sephatiah, son of Mehalalel, of the de-

scendants of Perez; ⁵ Maaseiah son of Baruch, grandson of Colhozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Joiarib, son of Zechariah, descendant of Shelah. ⁶ The total number of the descendants of Perez living in Jerusalem was four hundred and sixty-eight adult men.

⁷ These belonged to the tribe of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshullam, grandson of Joad, son of Pedaiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiiah, ⁸ and his kinsmen, adult men: nine hundred and twenty-eight.

⁹ Joel son of Zichri was their leader, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in command of the city.

¹⁰ Of the priests: Jedaiah son of Joiakin, son of Seraiah, son of Hilkiah, ¹¹ grandson of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, who was the High Priest, ¹² and his kinsmen who were responsible for the Temple liturgy: eight hundred and twenty-two; Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, ¹³ and his kinsmen, heads of families: two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai son of Azarel, grandson of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer, ¹⁴ and his kinsmen, adult men: one hundred and twenty-eight.

Zabdiel son of Haggadol was in charge of them.

¹⁵ Of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hashshub, grandson of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni. ¹⁶ Shabbethai and Jozabad, the levitical leaders responsible for the outside work of the Temple of God; ¹⁷ Mattaniah son of Mica, grandson of Zabdi, son of Asaph, who directed the hymns and, at prayer, intoned the thanksgiving; Bakbukiah, the second in rank among his kinsmen; Obaidah son of Shammua, grandson of Galai, son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸ The total number of Levites in the holy city: two hundred and eighty-four.

¹⁹ The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon and their kinsmen, who kept watch at the gates: one hundred and seventy-two.

²¹ The workmen lived at Ophel; Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of the workmen. ²² The head of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, grandson of Hashbiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica, he belonged to the clan of Asaph who were responsible for the chanted parts of the liturgy in the Temple of God; ²³ there were royal regulations stating how the clans should take turns in leading the Temple music each day. ²⁴ Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, belonging to the clan of Zerach and the tribe of Judah, was the king's commissioner



for all such matters as concerned the people.

²⁰ The rest of the Israelites, priests and Levites made their homes throughout the towns of Judah, each man in his own inheritance, ²⁵ and in the villages situated in rural districts of their own.

Some of the tribe of Judah made their homes in Kiriatharba and its outlying villages, in Dibon and its outlying villages, in Jekabzeel and its outlying villages, ²⁶ in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth-pelet, ²⁷ Hazar-shual, in Beer-sheba and its villages, ²⁸ in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages, ²⁹ in Enrimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, ³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam and their villages: thus, they settled from Beersheba as far as the Valley of Hinnom.

³¹ Some of the tribe of Benjamin made their homes in Geba, Michmash, Aija, in Bethel and its villages, ³² Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, ³³ Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, ³⁴ Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, ³⁵ Lod and Ono, and the Valley of the Craftsmen.

³⁶ Some groups of Levites settled in Judah as well as in Benjamin.

12 ¹ These are the priests and the Levites who came back with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and with the High Priest Jeshua:

² Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, ³ Amariah, Maluch, Hattush, Shecaniah, Harim, Meremoth, ⁴ Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijai, ⁵ Mijamin, Madaiah, Bilgah, ⁶ Shemaiah; also: Joiarib, Jedaiah, ^{7a} Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah.

⁸ And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, Mattaniah – the latter with his kinsmen, directed the hymns of thanksgiving ⁹ while Bakbukiah, Unno and their kinsmen in their respective groups formed an alternate choir.

^{7b} These were the heads of the priests and of their kinsmen in the days of Jeshua.

¹⁰ Jeshua was the father of Joiakim father of Eliashib, Eliashib father of Joiada, ¹¹ Joiada father of Hohanani, and Johanan father of Jaddua.

¹² In the days when Joiakim was High Priest the heads of the priestly clans were: clan of ¹³ Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; ¹⁴ of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; ¹⁵ of Harim, Adna; of Meremoth, Helkai; ¹⁶ of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; ¹⁷ of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin,...; of Moadiah, Piltai; ¹⁸ of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; ¹⁹ also: of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; ²⁰ of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; ²¹ of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

²² In the days of the High Priests Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua, the heads of the

priestly families were recorded in the Book of the Chronicles up to the reign of Darius the Persian.

²³ The sons of Levi.

²⁴ The heads of the Levite families were recorded in the Book of the Chronicles, but only up to the time of Johanan, grandson of Eliashib.

The heads of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel; and their kinsmen forming an alternate choir for the hymns of praise and thanksgiving, in accordance with the instructions of David the man of God, in alternating groups. ²⁵ Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers and stood guard at the storehouses near the gates.

²⁶ These lived in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, grandson of Jozadak and in the days of Nehemiah, the governor and of Ezra, priest and scholar of the Law.

Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem

²⁷ When the wall of Jerusalem was inaugurated, the Levites were summoned from all the places where they lived and they came to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with joy, with songs of thanksgiving, with the music of cymbals and zithers. ²⁸ The singers from the neighbouring regions and from the villages of Netophath, ²⁹ Beth-gilgal and the districts of Bega and Azmaveth gathered together in Jerusalem, because the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰ The priests and the Levites purified themselves, and then purified the people, the gates and the wall.

³¹ I then ordered the leaders of Judah to stand on top of the wall and I organized two grand choirs. The first advanced on top of the wall in the southern part, facing the Gate of the Garbage Dump; ³² behind them went Hoshaiah and half the leaders of the Jews, ³³ and also Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴ Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah and Jeremiah. ³⁵ Then the priests and the musicians with the trumpets came: Zechariah, son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph, ³⁶ with his brothers, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, Hanani, carrying the musical instruments of David, the man of God, Ezra, the teacher of the Law, went in from of them.

³⁷ They went straight on up to the Fountain Gate, near the steps of the City of David, along the top of the wall of the house of David, as far as the Water Gate, on the east.

³⁸ The second choir marched to the left: I followed it with half the leaders of the people



long the top of the wall, passing through the tower of the Furnaces and as far as the Wide Wall.³⁹ over the Gate of Ephraim, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, as far as the Sheep Gate, and we stopped at the Watch Gate.

⁴⁰ Then the two choirs took their places in the House of God. Half of the counselors⁴¹ and the priests Eliakim,⁴² Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micahiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, who were carrying the trumpets, were at my side, together with Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Azzer. The singers chanted their songs under the direction of Jezrahiah.

⁴³ Great sacrifices were offered that day and the people rejoiced, for God had bestowed great joy on them: the women and the children also participated in the feast. And the shouts of joy of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

⁴⁴ At that time, I appointed supervisors to guard the storage rooms where the contributions, the firstfruits and the tithes were kept. They were to store in them the portions from the different cities of the territory required by the Law for the priests and Levites. For the people of Judah rejoiced to see the priests and Levites doing their duty.

⁴⁵ They performed the liturgy of their God and the ceremonies of purification with the singers and the gatekeepers, as commanded by David and his son Solomon.⁴⁶ For from the beginning, from the days of David and Asaph, there had been song leaders and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.

⁴⁷ The whole of Israel, in the time of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, gave the singers and the gatekeepers what was necessary for each day. The sacred objects were entrusted to the Levites, and what was for the sons of Aaron was given to them.

13 ¹ At that time, the book of the Law of Moses was read in the presence of the people, and they found this written in it: "The Ammonite and Moabite will never enter the assembly of God,² for they did not welcome the sons of Israel with bread and water.

They gave money to Balaam to curse them, but our God turned their curse into a blessing."

³ When they heard this Law, they excluded from Israel all those of foreign descent.

Second mission of Nehemiah

⁴ Before this, the priest Eliashib had been caretaker of the chambers of the House of God. Since he was related to Tobiah,⁵ he had allotted to him a spacious chamber which used to be the storage room for the offerings, incense, utensils, tithes of the wheat, wine and oil, that is, for what belonged to the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

⁶ I was not in Jerusalem when this happened, because in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had gone to see the king. Then after some time, the king allowed me to return.⁷ I returned to Jerusalem and I was informed of the evil Eliashib had done just to please Tobiah, allotting to him a chamber inside the court to the House of God.⁸ This made me very angry. So I threw all of Tobiah's furniture out of the chamber and⁹ ordered the chamber to be purified, and had the utensils of the House of God, the offerings and the incense put back in place.

Nehemiah opposes several abuses

¹⁰ I also learned that the portions were not given to the Levites. And because of this, the Levites and the singers in charge of the ceremonies had gone back to their fields.¹¹ I was angry with the counselors and said to them, "Why is the House of God abandoned?" Then I gathered together the Levites and the singers, and sent them back to work according to their respective duties.

¹² With this, all the Jews turned over to the storehouses the tenth part of their wheat, wine and oil.¹³ I entrusted the administration of the storehouses to the priest Shelemiah, to the teacher of the Law Zadok, to the Levite Pedaiah, and to Hanan, son of Zaccur, as assistant. I appointed them since they were regarded as

1. Dt 23, 3

2. Num 22-24

o In this last chapter Nehemiah intervenes so that the law adopted by Ezra will be respected, and thus he takes new and more drastic measures (observance of the Sabbath, racial and religious purification, etc.). This attitude had great advantages; thanks to their organization and the solidarity among Jewish brothers, the people of God were able to survive and not wander away from their faith.

However, we can also see the problems against which the Gospel will stumble: attach-

ment to the past, fanaticism for sacred places, and aggressiveness against non-conformists. It is a fact that in the following centuries, the religious consciousness of the Jews developed more through contacts with the Greek culture than through their efforts at inner organization.

If we want to be faithful to the biblical message, Christian communities and the Church at large will have to seek growth by opening up to and facing the world.



responsible men. Their work consisted in distributing the food to their brothers.

¹⁴ My God, remember the things I have done. Do not forget the good works I did for your House and its ceremonies.

¹⁵ In those days, I found men of Judah working in the winepress on the sabbath. Others took sheaves of wheat and loaded them on their asses together with wine, grapes, figs and every kind of produce they wanted to bring into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. I reprimanded them as they were selling their produce.

¹⁶ Some Tyrians who had settled in Jerusalem brought in fish and every sort of merchandise to sell to the Jews on the Sabbath day. ¹⁷ So I reprimanded the leaders of Judah, saying to them, "You have done great evil by not respecting the sabbath day.

¹⁸ When your fathers did not observe the sabbath, our God brought all those misfortunes on us and on this city. You increase the wrath of God against Israel by not respecting his sabbaths.

¹⁹ So I ordered that as the shadows were falling on the gates of Jerusalem in the evening before the sabbath, the gates were to be closed and not to be opened until after the sabbath was over. Moreover, I also stationed some of my men by the gates so that no goods would be brought in on the sabbath day.

²⁰ Once or twice, some merchants who sold every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem, ²¹ but I warned them, saying, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? Do this again, and I shall send you to prison."

From then on, they did not return any more on the sabbath day. ²² I also ordered the Levites to purify themselves and come to guard the gates in order to sanctify the sabbath. For this, too, remember me, my God, and have pity on me according to your great mercy.

²³ In those days, I also saw that some Jews had remarried Ashdodite, Ammonite and Moabite women, ²⁴ and half of their children spoke Ashdodite and did not know our own language. ²⁵ I reprimanded them and cursed them: I had some of them flogged and tore out their hair, and made them swear in the name of Yahweh, saying to them: "You shall not marry your daughters to the sons of those people, nor take any of their daughters as wife, neither you nor your sons. ²⁶ Did Solomon, king of Israel, not sin in this? Among the many nations, there had not been a king like him. He was loved by God, and God made him king of all Israel. But foreign women also made him sin. ²⁷ Will it also be said of you that you committed the same grave crime by rebelling against our God in marrying foreign women?"

²⁸ I also sent away from my side one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, who was the son-in-law of Sanballat, the Horonite. ²⁹ Remember this people, my God, for they defiled the priesthood and your covenant with the priests and Levites.

³⁰ So I purified them from everything foreign. And I established regulations for the priests and the Levites defining the tasks of everyone. ³¹ I also fixed the time for the wood offering and for the firstfruits.

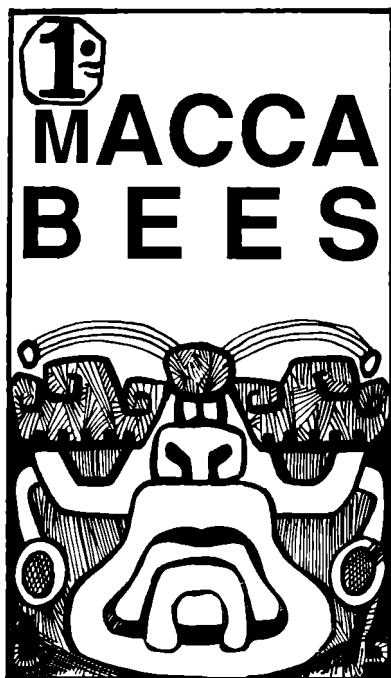
Remember me, my God, for my good!

INTRODUCTION

After Ezra and Nehemiah, the Judean province, at the extreme end of the Persian empire, lived on the fringe of history for three centuries. Those with greater initiative dedicated themselves to trading and they left their country to settle in all the urban centres round the Mediterranean. Yet, one hundred years after Nehemiah, in 333 B.C., Alexander the Great was beginning to go through the middle East countries, defeating all the enemy armies and overthrowing the kings. Although he died when he was thirty years old, his triumphs opened the way for Greek culture with its longing for growth, its confidence in men's potential and an open spirit which surpassed national individualism.

Alexander's generals parceled out his age empire among themselves. The Ptolemies, who dominated Egypt and Palestine, were understanding and did not disturb the Jews because of their religion and customs. But when the Antiochians of Syria defeated the Egyptians in 197 and took Palestine away from them, they began to force their pagan religion on the Jews.

This fierce persecution caused the uprising of the Jews headed by the Maccabean family. The first book of Maccabees – acknowledged as one of the most perfect books of ancient history – relates the events in the war and the deeds of the five Maccabean brothers, from the year 170 to 130 B.C.



HOLY WAR, LIBERATION WAR

The book of Maccabees shows us a people who want to live and for whom faith is more valuable than life itself. When all had grown used to living without conflicts, persecution begins. Many convince themselves they can do nothing against such a great power and that the risks are too great. But the Spirit of God makes new heroes appear and, thanks to them, the people recover their sense of dignity, fighting for those rights without which there are neither men nor believers.

The Jewish people found themselves alone against their oppressors and their Roman allies did not help much. They relied on their own strength and God helped them.

The Maccabean wars were models of holy wars. But they also showed that the holy war did not solve everything. Caught up in military problems, and so in political games, the Maccabees' descendants soon became materialistic to the point of governing without faith or morals.



Alexander

o ¹ Everything began with the conquests of Alexander the first, son of Philip, the Macedonian. Setting out from Greece, he defeated Darius, king of the Persians and the Medes, and ruled in his place. He became the first ruler of the Greek world. ² After fighting many battles, conquering strongholds and putting to death the kings of those nations, ³ he reached the ends of the earth and plundered several nations. And when the world became quiet and subject to his power, he became proud. ⁴ He gathered a strong army, ruled over provinces and nations, and rulers paid him taxes. ⁵ But he fell sick, and knowing he was going to die, ⁶ he summoned his generals and the noblemen who had been brought up with him from his youth; and while still alive, he divided his kingdom among them. ⁷ Alexander had reigned for twelve years when he died.

⁸ His generals assumed power, each one in the region assigned to him. ⁹ And immediately after Alexander's death, they made themselves kings and their sons after them, filling the earth with evil for years to come. ¹⁰ From their descendants there came a godless offshoot, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus, who had been held as hostage in Rome. He became king in the one hundred and thirty-seventh year of the Greek era, (175 B.C.).

¹¹ It was then that some rebels emerged from Israel, who succeeded in winning over many people. They said, "Let us renew contact with the peoples around us for we have had to endure many misfortunes since we separated from them."

¹² This proposal was well-received ¹³ and some eagerly went to the king. The king authorized them to adopt the customs of the pagan nations. ¹⁴ With his permission, they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem in the pagan style. ¹⁵ And as they wanted to be like the pagans in everything, they made artificial foreskins for themselves and abandoned the Holy Covenant, sinning as they pleased.

10. 2 Mac 4: 7, 17
23. 2 Mac 5, 21

11. 1, 34; 10, 61
29. 2 Mac 5, 24

15. 1 Cor 7, 18
41. 2 Mac 6

16. Dn 11, 25; 2 Mac 5, 11
43. Dn 11, 38; 2 Mac 6, 2

o This first paragraph summarizes the period of history from Alexander until Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria. Note the passage 1:11-15 where the beginning of the moral crisis in Judah is emphasized.

Two things characterize the Greek civilization of the Syrians:

- Art and the multiplicity of statues which,

Antiochus despoils the Temple

¹⁶ When Antiochus felt confident of his power, he decided to seize Egypt and rule over the two nations. ¹⁷ He entered Egypt with a strong army, with chariots of war, elephants, horses and a great fleet ¹⁸ and attacked Ptolemy, king of Egypt. Ptolemy had to retreat and was defeated, and many of his men died. ¹⁹ The victors seized the fortified cities of Egypt and plundered the land. ²⁰ In the year one hundred and forty-three (169 B.C.), when Antiochus returned after defeating Egypt, he passed through Israel and went up to Jerusalem with a strong army.

²¹ He arrogantly broke into the sanctuary and removed the golden altar, the lampstand for the light with all its accessories, ²² the table for the bread of offering, the libation vessels, the cups, the golden censers, the curtains and the crowns, and stripped away all the decorations, the golden mouldings that used to cover the Temple entrance. ²³ He also took possession of the silver, gold, valuable objects and all the hidden treasures he could find. ²⁴ He took everything with him and left for his country, after shedding much blood and making arrogant statements.

²⁵ There was great mourning throughout the land of Israel: ²⁶ *The leaders and the elders groaned, young men and maidens lost courage, and women grew pale;* ²⁷ *bridegrooms sang lamentations, and the young bride wept in her marriage-bed.* ²⁸ *The earth quaked, in sorrow for its inhabitants, and all the people of Jacob were humiliated.*

²⁹ After two years, the king sent to the cities of Judah the chief tax collector and he came to Jerusalem with a strong army. ³⁰ He spoke to the people with words of peace in order to deceive them. But when he had gained their confidence, he suddenly fell on the city and dealt it a terrible blow, killing many Israelites. ³¹ He plundered the city, burning and destroying the palaces and the surrounding walls.

³² He took women and children captive and seized the livestock. ³³ Then they rebuilt the city of David with a high and solid wall pro-

however beautiful they may have been were used in pagan worship.

- Physical education: stadiums, sports, swimming pools. Sports were practiced in the nude, which scandalized the Jews. This explains the fact that those who were ashamed to appear as Jews had to have their missing foreskins - after circumcision - replaced through a surgical procedure.



ected by strong towers, and this became their fortress. ³⁴ There they set evil men and apostates who defended it. ³⁵ They stored up weapons and provisions, and everything they looted in the city, posing a constant threat. ³⁶ It became an ambush for the sanctuary, a grave and constant threat to Israel. ³⁷ They shed innocent blood around the sanctuary and defiled the sanctuary itself.

³⁸ The inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them. She became a colony of strangers, and was a stranger to her children who abandoned her. ³⁹ Her sanctuary became empty as the desert, her feasts became days of mourning, her Sabbaths were ridiculed, and her fame became an object of contempt. ⁴⁰ As her glory had been great, so now was her dishonour, for her greatness was turned into grief.

Religious persecution

+ ⁴¹ Antiochus issued a decree to his whole kingdom. ⁴² All the peoples of his empire had to renounce their particular customs and become one people. ⁴³ All the pagan nations obeyed and respected the king's decree, and even in Israel many accepted the imposed cult. They offered sacrifices to idols and no longer respected the Sabbath. ⁴⁴ The decree which imposed strange customs reached Jerusalem and the whole of Judea. ⁴⁵ In accordance with it, burnt offerings, sacrifices and other offerings in the sanctuary were sup-

pressed. It also ordered that Sabbaths and sacred feasts be like ordinary days. ⁴⁶ The sanctuary and its ministers were no longer to be regarded sacred, ⁴⁷ instead, altars, sacred enclosures and temples were to be dedicated to idols. They were to offer pigs and unclean animals in sacrifice, ⁴⁸ and not perform on their sons the rite of circumcision. To sum up, they were to defile themselves by all kinds of impurity and profanity ⁴⁹ in order to forget the Law and change all their customs. ⁵⁰ The decree finally declared: "Anyone who does not fulfill the king's order shall die."

⁵¹ The king published this obligation throughout the province and inspectors appointed by him went around the land of Judea. They saw to it that sacrifices were offered in all cities. ⁵² Many Israelites joined them, abandoned the Law and committed countless evils ⁵³ obliging the true Israelites to find places of refuge to hide themselves.

⁵⁴ On the fifteenth day of the month of Chislev, in the year one hundred and forty-five, Antiochus erected the "abominable idol of the invaders" on the altar of the temple. Pagan altars were built throughout the whole land

52. Dn 11, 30; 12, 4

54. Dn 9, 27; 11, 31; 12, 11; Mt 24, 15

+ This chapter presents two aspects of the crisis:

1) A moral crisis. The Jews were in contact with a more advanced, though pagan, civilization. Could one adapt to and take advantage of his culture without giving up one's faith?

At that time the Jews were about to pay for the error they had made in keeping apart from the cultural progress of neighbouring nations. For three centuries they had emphasized that all the laws and customs of Israel came directly from God and that they could not be revised. And so, when modern currents emerged, the most open among them went through a conscience crisis: could they perhaps change the customs without betraying God? But it was so difficult to open up to Greek civilization without being seen as a renegade, that those who wanted to be modern, not only changed their life-styles, but also abandoned their religion. Think about what happens

today when young people, educated in super-conservative colleges or parishes, discover revolutionary currents which inspire them.

2) Then comes organized persecution. The powerful kings want to unite all the groups within their empire. They say that religion is divisive. And free men's consciences seem dangerous to them. This is why the kings struggle against those who want to serve God and to follow their consciences.

The people are worried: up to what point can one endure the undermining and making fun of one's religious practices?

In 1:54, there is mention of the "abominable idol of the invaders," also mentioned in Daniel 9:27. This is the way they refer to a pagan altar built on the site of the ancient altar of the Temple. Jesus will give a new meaning to this expression in Mk 13:14.



of Judea; ⁵⁵ incense was offered at the doors of their houses and in the squares. ⁵⁶ There wicked men tore up the books of the Law they found and burned them. ⁵⁷ They killed anyone they caught in possession of the book of the Covenant and who fulfilled the precepts of the Law, as the royal decree had ordered. ⁵⁸ And being men in power, they pursued the Israelite rebels they found month after month in the cities. ⁵⁹ On the twenty-fifth day of every month, they offered their sacrifices on the new altar they had built upon the altar of the Temple.

⁶⁰ The women who, in defiance of the decree, had the rite of circumcision performed on their children, were put to death with their babies hung around their necks. ⁶¹ Their families and all who had taken part in the circumcision were also put to death.

⁶² But in spite of all this, many Israelites still remained firm and determined not to eat unclean food. ⁶³ They preferred to die rather than to make themselves unclean with those foods (prohibited by the Law) that violated the Holy Covenant. ⁶⁴ And Israel suffered a very great trial.

Mattathias unleashes the Holy War

■ ¹ In those days Mattathias, son of Simon, a priest of the family of Yoarib, left Jerusalem and went to settle in Modein. ² He had five sons: John, known as Gaddi, ³ Simon called Thassi, ⁴ Judas called Maccabeus, ⁵ Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus.

⁶ Mattathias saw the blasphemies committed in Judah and Jerusalem, ⁷ so he said: "Alas! Was I born just to witness the ruin of my people and the destruction of the holy city? Shall I sit by while she is in the hands of her enemies and her sanctuary in the power of foreigners?"

⁸ Her temple has become like a dishonoured man, ⁹ the precious objects that were her glory have been carried off as booty, her babies have been murdered in the squares, and her young men killed by the sword of the enemy. ¹⁰ What nation has not received part of her treasures and taken possession of her spoils? ¹¹ She has been stripped of all her adornments and from freedom that was hers, she has gone into slavery. ¹² Our beautiful sanctuary that was our pride has been laid waste and profaned by pagans. ¹³ What is there to live for?"

¹⁴ Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth and observed deep mourning. ¹⁵ In the meantime, the king's representatives who forced the Jews to give up their religion came to Modein to organize a sacred gathering.

¹⁶ While many Israelites went to them, Mattathias and his sons drew apart.

¹⁷ The representatives of the king addressed Mattathias, and said to him: "You are one of the leaders of this city, an important and well-known man, and your many children and relatives follow you. ¹⁸ Come now and be the first to fulfill the king's order, as the men of Judah have already done, and the survivors in

■ The entire book will deal with the war under the leadership of the Maccabean family, namely, Mattathias' sons. Here we have the story of the rebellion of Mattathias, the priest who suddenly becomes the leader of the persecuted.

My sons, my brothers and I will remain faithful to the Covenant. Their motive is reli-

gious and national at the same time: Mattathias risks everything against a totalitarian power. Once again, God shows his kindness toward his people, by making the needed leader emerge, a man who, like Moses, sides totally with the people, when he could have easily obtained the favour of the powerful.



Jerusalem as well. You and your sons will be named Friends of the King and the king will send you gold, silver and many more gifts."

¹⁹ But Mattathias answered in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations included in the kingdom should abandon the religion of their fathers and submit to the order of King Antiochus, ²⁰ I, my sons and my family will remain faithful to the Covenant of our fathers. ²¹ May God preserve us from abandoning the Law and its precepts. ²² We will not obey the orders of the king nor turn aside from our religion either to the right or to the left."

²³ When he finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of everyone to offer incense on the altar that was built in Modein according to the king's decree.

²⁴ When Mattathias saw him, he was fired with zeal, his heart was stirred, and giving vent to his righteous anger, he threw himself on the Jew and cut the man's throat on the altar. ²⁵ At the same time, he killed the king's representative who was forcing the people to offer sacrifice, and then tore down the altar. ²⁶ In doing this he showed his zeal for the Law, as Phinehas had done with Zimri, son of Salu.

²⁷ Mattathias then began to proclaim loudly in the city: "Everyone who is zealous for the Law and supports the Covenant, come out and follow me!" ²⁸ Immediately he and his sons fled to the mountains and left behind all they had in the city.

◆ ²⁹ Many Jews who looked for justice and wanted to be faithful to the Law went into the desert; ³⁰ they took with them their children, wives and livestock because life had become unbearable for them.

³¹ Then the king's representatives and the authority in the city of David, in Jerusalem, were informed that some men had disobeyed the king's order and had gone to hide in the caves in the desert.

³² A strong force of the king pursued and overtook them. They surrounded them and prepared themselves for an attack. It was the day of the Sabbath. ³³ And they said to the Jews: "Enough of this! Come out and obey the king's order if you wish to save your lives." ³⁴ But they answered: "We will neither come out nor obey the king's order to violate the day of the Sabbath."

³⁵ So they attacked them at once, ³⁶ but the Jews did not defend themselves, nor did they try to close the entrance of their place of refuge. ³⁷ They said: "We shall die with a clear conscience but heaven and earth will remember that we were murdered." ³⁸ The king's men attacked them on that Sabbath, and they all died – men, women and children – a total of more than a thousand, not counting the livestock.

³⁹ When Mattathias and his friends came to know what happened, they went into deep mourning. ⁴⁰ They said to one another: "We cannot do as our

26. Num 25, 6

28. Lk 1, 65; Mk 13, 14

◆ Two opposite attitudes on the part of believers are seen in this text.

Some decide only on the basis of God's Law, or rather, the interpretation of the Sabbath law; it was forbidden to fight on that day dedicated to God. They let themselves be killed heroically. Others use their heads and their consciences and choose to defend themselves.

The book does not condemn anyone. However, it becomes obvious that believers cannot

act only by looking at books and the past. We always find ourselves in new situations which demand new reflection: "Man was not made for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). In verse 42, we hear of the *Hasideans*. This movement for spiritual renewal, from which the Pharisees and the Essenes will later emerge, existed before Mattathias' rebellion. They joined him, but later they separated when Mattathias' sons, the Maccabees, got lost in politics.

brothers have done; we shall fight against the pagans to defend our life and our customs; otherwise, they will quickly destroy us." ⁴¹On that day, they resolved to defend themselves against anyone who attacked them on the day of the Sabbath, and not let themselves be killed, as had happened with their people in the hiding place.

⁴²At that time, a group of Hasi-deans (the Devout), valiant Israelites who devoted themselves sincerely to the Law, joined them. ⁴³All those who wanted to escape from oppression joined them, and in this way they grew strong. ⁴⁴They succeeded in forming an army; then they began to do justice to the sinners and renegades. These men had to flee to other lands for safety. ⁴⁵Mattathias and his friends made expeditions during which they destroyed the altars, ⁴⁶imposed the rite of circumcision on the children they found uncircumcised, ⁴⁷and pursued all the arrogant. The undertaking prospered in their hands. ⁴⁸They defended the Law against foreigners and their kings, and subdued the renegades.

Mattathias' death

⁴⁹When Mattathias neared his death, he said to his sons: "Now the insolent and the violent are in power; it is a time of upheaval in which God releases his anger. ⁵⁰So, my sons, be zealous for the Law and risk your lives defending the Covenant of our fathers. ⁵¹Remember the deeds our fathers fulfilled in their time, that you too may have fame and glory.

⁵²Remember Abraham who proved himself faithful in the hour of trial, and how God

held him to be a righteous man. ⁵³Joseph, at the time of his misfortune observed the commandment of God and so became the lord of Egypt. ⁵⁴Phinehas, our father, because of his great zeal received the priesthood for himself and for his sons forever. ⁵⁵Joshua became head of Israel because he carried out God's command. ⁵⁶Caleb received his inheritance in this land because he had proclaimed the truth before the assembly. ⁵⁷And David was given a lasting kingdom because of his devotion. ⁵⁸Elijah because of his zeal for the Law was taken up into heaven. ⁵⁹Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael were saved from the flames because of their faith. ⁶⁰Daniel was rescued from the lion's mouth because of his righteousness. ⁶¹Consider, then, how throughout the centuries those who trust in God are never disappointed.

⁶²Do not fear the threats of an impious man, for his glory shall end in dung and worms. ⁶³Today he is exalted, but tomorrow he shall perish; he shall return to dust from where he came, and nothing shall remain of his plans. ⁶⁴Have courage, my sons, and remain steadfast in the Law for in this you will receive glory.

⁶⁵I know that among you, Simon is a man of sound judgment; listen to him and he shall take your father's place. ⁶⁶Judas Maccabeus has been valiant from his youth: let him be your general and conduct the war against foreigners.

⁶⁷Now, call all those who fulfill the Law to join you and defend our people. ⁶⁸Retaliate against the pagans and fulfill the ordinance of the Law."

⁶⁹Mattathias blessed them and then went to join his fathers. ⁷⁰He died in the year one hundred and forty-six and they buried him in the tomb of his fathers at Modein; and all Israel mourned him deeply.

Judas Maccabeus

3 ¹Mattathias' son, Judas Maccabeus, succeeded him. ²His brothers and all who had followed his father gave him their support and they continued the war with determination.

³*Judas made the name of his people more*

43. 7, 13; 2 Mac 14, 6

61. Dn 6

61. 6

o After the death of Mattathias, his son Judas heads the resistance.

For three centuries the attention of the believers had been exclusively focused on worship activities. Priests and Levites appeared as the only models of faith. Now, because of circumstances, there is a change. Suddenly the Jewish people are looking at the days of the Judges or of David. For many of them, the model believer

becomes the armed fighter who risks his life to liberate his people.

Actually the brutal persecution brought them to such a point where refraining from fighting meant renouncing everything which had made the Jewish people different from all others.

Before the unequal struggle, we have Judas' profession of faith: God can give victory to a few fighting a multitude. This is the way David spoke when he faced Goliath (1 Sam 14:6 and 17:47).

famous. He put on his breastplate and girded himself with the armor of war like a giant; he fought many battles and protected his camp with his sword.

⁴ He was like a lion when he attacked, like a lion's whelp roaring over its prey.

⁵ He pursued the renegades in their secret places and consigned to the flames those who troubled his people.

⁶ All the renegades feared him, all evil-doers were confounded, and liberation was his intent.

⁷ Many kings feared him, while the people of Israel rejoiced in his deeds.

His memory shall be blessed forever. ⁸ He went through the cities of Judah utterly destroying the impious.

⁹ He freed Israel from their oppressors and saved those about to perish. For this, his fame resounded to the ends of the earth.

First successes

+ ¹⁰Apollonius also gathered together men from the pagans and a good number of Samaritans to fight Israel. ¹¹ When Judas learned of this, he went out to meet him in battle; he defeated and killed him. Many of the enemy fell and the rest fled. ¹² They seized the plunder and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and from then on, he always used it in battle.

¹³ Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, learned that Judas had gathered many men and that the whole community of believers was at his side. ¹⁴ He thought: "This is now the opportunity for me to make myself famous and be an important man in the kingdom. I will go to fight Judas and his men who do not obey the

king's order." ¹⁵ So he did, and a strong army of pagans went up with him to help him take vengeance on the children of Israel.

¹⁶ As Seron approached the slope of Beth-horon, Judas went out to confront him with a small company of warriors. ¹⁷ But on seeing the enemy advancing against them, Judas' men said to him, "How can we, few as we are, fight against so many? And besides, we feel weak for we have not eaten anything today."

¹⁸ But Judas declared: "A multitude shall easily fall into the hands of a few, for Heaven can equally win over with the help of many or few."

¹⁹ Victory does not depend on the number of those who fight, but on Heaven which gives us strength. ²⁰ They come against us moved by their pride and lawlessness to seize us and take possession of our wives and children and to take everything away from us. ²¹ But we are fighting for our lives and our laws. ²² God will crush them before us; so do not be afraid."

²³ As soon as he finished speaking, he suddenly rushed against the enemies. Seron and his army were defeated. ²⁴ They pursued them down the slope of Beth-horon to the plain. And about eight hundred of Seron's men fell and the rest escaped to the land of the Philistines.

²⁵ With this, fright and fear of Judas and his brothers seized the pagans who lived around them. ²⁶ The fame of his name reached the

16. Jos 10, 10

18. 1 S 14, 6

+ The books of Maccabees repeatedly stress that the Jews fought, above all, to defend their Holy Place. This Temple was the symbol of the whole Law, that is, of their whole religion.

We must all fight for the things that give meaning to our lives and without which a secure future would be meaningless. For the Jews of those days, to give up their customs and their worship was like renouncing their faith, since they were the only ones entrusted with the divine promises. Though the Temple itself was no more than stones and wood, with some pre-

cious metal, they could not abandon it without losing their human dignity and their vocation as believers.

The Maccabees were not very different from those who, today, dare to remind us of the rights of the poor and to demand the participation of all in modern societies founded on injustice. They are arrested, tortured and they die to demand political change, but in so doing, they defend their own faith, because if they kept quiet, they would lose their human dignity and they would renounce the spirit of justice and freedom (Gal 5:11-12).



king, and the pagan nations recounted his battles.

Antiochus prepares for war

²⁷ When this news reached King Antiochus, he was furious, so he ordered all the forces of his kingdom to assemble for he had a powerful army. ²⁸ He opened his treasury and paid the troops a year's salary, ordering them to be prepared for any eventuality. ²⁹ But he found that the money in the treasury had run short, for the taxes of the provinces had decreased due to dissension and disaster which he himself had caused in the land by changing the laws that were in force from the earliest days. ³⁰ He feared that as before, he would not have enough funds for the expenses and gifts he used to give more lavishly than preceding kings. ³¹ So great was his need that he decided to go to Persia to collect the taxes from those provinces and raise considerable funds.

³² Then he left Lysias, a nobleman from the royal family, in charge of the affairs of government from the river Euphrates to the Egyptian frontier ³³ and with the responsibility of educating the king's son, Antiochus, until his return. ³⁴ And he turned over to Lysias half of his troops with the elephants and gave him instructions about his policies. On matters dealing with the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem, ³⁵ Lysias was to send an army to destroy and crush the defenders of Israel and all who remained in Jerusalem and to wipe out even the memory of them. ³⁶ Then, he was to have foreigners settle throughout the Jewish territory and distribute the land to them by lot.

³⁷ The king took with him the remaining half of the army and set out from Antioch, the capital of the kingdom, in the year one hundred and forty-seven. He crossed the river Euphrates and went through the upper provinces.

³⁸ Lysias chose from among the Friends of the King, Ptolemy the son of Dorymenes, Nicanor and Gorgias — all influential men.

³⁹ With them, he dispatched forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to the Judean province to destroy it as the king had ordered. ⁴⁰ They marched out with their troops and encamped on the plain near Emmaus.

⁴¹ The merchants of the region heard of their arrival, so they went to the camp with large amounts of silver, gold and fetters, proposing to buy the Israelites as slaves. The Syrian army and those from the province of the Philistines also joined the troops.

⁴² Judas and his brothers understood that

the situation was becoming worse, because the enemy had encamped in their territory. So when they learned of the king's order to destroy and crush the people, ⁴³ they said, "Let us raise our people from their miserable situation and fight for them and for the Holy Place!"

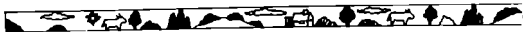
⁴⁴ The whole community assembled to prepare for war, and they prayed and asked God for mercy and compassion.

⁴⁵ *Like a desert, Jerusalem was left without inhabitants. None of her children went in or out. The temple was profaned, and foreigners lived in the city which had become a dwelling-place for the pagans. There was no more rejoicing for Jacob, no flute or zither was heard.*

The Jews gather at Mizpah

⁴⁶ So they gathered and went to Mizpah opposite Jerusalem because Mizpah had been a place of prayer for Israel. ⁴⁷ They fasted that day, put on sackcloth, sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their garments. ⁴⁸ They opened the Book of the Law to look for an answer to their questions, in the same way as the pagans consult the images of their idols. ⁴⁹ They brought the vestments of the priests, the first-fruits and the tithes, and they brought in the Nazirites who had completed the days of their consecration; ⁵⁰ they cried aloud to Heaven and said: "What shall we do with this people, and where shall we take them?" ⁵¹ For your sanctuary has been trampled and profaned, your priests are in mourning and are humiliated. ⁵² And now the pagans have gathered together to destroy us. You know what they are plotting against us. ⁵³ How can we resist them, if you do not come to help us?" ⁵⁴ Then they sounded the trumpets and made a great outcry.

⁵⁵ After this, Judas appointed officials to lead his people: leaders of a thousand men, leaders of a hundred, of fifty, and of ten. ⁵⁶ Then he said to those who were building houses, those about to marry, those who were planting vineyards, and those who were afraid, to return to their homes, as the Law allowed. ⁵⁷ Next the army marched out and encamped to the south of Emmaus. ⁵⁸ Judas told them: "Prepare your weapons; be valiant and be ready to fight in the morning against those foreigners who have joined forces to crush us and remove our Holy Place from this land. ⁵⁹ It is better to die fighting than to live and see the misery of our nation and of the Holy Place. ⁶⁰ May Heaven's will be done in everything."



Battle of Emmaus

4 ¹ Gorgias took with him five thousand infantry and a thousand picked cavalry, and moved out by night ² to fall upon the Jews and take them by surprise. He had asked men from the Citadel to guide his troops. ³ But Judas learned of this, so he went out with his men to attack the king's army in Emmaus ⁴ while the enemy troops were still dispersed outside the camp. ⁵ Gorgias arrived at the camp of the Jews by night but found no one there. He then began to search for them in the mountains, for he thought: "They are running away from us."

⁶ Yet at daybreak, Judas appeared on the plain with three thousand men who had not the armour or swords they would have liked. ⁷ They saw the camp of the pagans with its strong fortifications and the calvary surrounding it – all trained men in war. ⁸ Judas said to his men: "Do not fear the number of the enemy or be afraid of their attack. ⁹ Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea when Pharaoh's army pursued them. ¹⁰ Cry out to God, for if he so wishes he will remember his Covenant and destroy that army before us this very day. ¹¹ And all the nations will know that Someone saves and liberates Israel."

¹² The pagans looked up and saw the Jews coming down against them, ¹³ so they came out of their camp to face them in battle. Judas had the trumpets sounded ¹⁴ and his men attacked. The pagans were defeated and

fled to the plain, ¹⁵ but all the rear-guard fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, to the plains of Idu-mea, of Azot and Jamnia and killed about three thousand of the enemy.

¹⁶ When Judas and his army stopped chasing them, ¹⁷ he said to the men with him: "Do not think of the booty now, for another battle awaits us. ¹⁸ Gorgias with his army is in the hills close by. Remain ready to fight them, and afterwards you can gather the plunder with nothing to worry about." ¹⁹ He had barely finished speaking when an army detachment appeared on the hillside. ²⁰ These men saw that their own troops had fled and their camp had been destroyed, for the smoke that rose up from the camp was enough to tell them this. ²¹ So they were terrified. And when they saw the army of Judas drawn up on the plain ready for battle, ²² they fled to the land of the Philistines.

²³ So Judas and his men returned to plunder the camp. They carried off valuable booty. ²⁴ And on their return, they sang and praised heaven: *For he is good, and his mercy is eternal.*

²⁵ That day was a great victory for Israel. ²⁶ The pagans who had escaped went to Lysias and told him what had happened. ²⁷ When he heard this, he was dismayed and depressed because things in Israel had not gone as expected, and he had not carried out the king's command.

²⁸ The following year, he organized an army of sixty thousand men and five thousand cavalry to confront

1. 2 Mac 8, 23

24. Ps 118, 1

28. 2 Mac 11, 1

♦ They sent Apollonius, a colonel, against Judas: Judas killed him. They sent a general, Seron: Judas defeated the general. This time, king Antiochus sends a tremendous army with two generals against the Jews. Judas is victorious at Emmaus.

Note Judas' words: *God is faithful.*

For three centuries, the Jews had been taught

their own history as a series of God's marvellous interventions (see the books of Chronicles). They insisted so much on God's help that men's courage seemed useless. Judas knows that they must act without waiting for a miracle or a revelation. After the victory, everyone will realize that God is the one who saved them. To ask God for peace, food, justice, without removing oppressive structures, would be a lie.

the Jews. ²⁹ They advanced into Idu-mea and encamped at Bethzur. On that place, Judas came out with ten thousand men to meet them in battle. ³⁰ When he saw their military strength, he prayed, "Blessed are you, Saviour of Israel, who broke the warrior's strength by the hand of your servant David, and handed over the camp of the Philistines to the power of Jonathan, son of Saul, and to his armour-bearer.

³¹ So in the same way, give this army into the hands of your people Israel, and let the confidence they place in their power and in their horses be destroyed. ³² Fill them with fear; shatter their confidence in their own strength. May they be defeated and recover no more. ³³ Deliver them to the sword of your faithful people that all who know you may praise your name."

³⁴ Both sides attacked, and five thousand men from the army of Lysias fell dead. ³⁵ Lysias saw that his army was disheartened while Judas and his men grew bolder and were ready to live or to die nobly. So he retreated to Antioch, where he recruited mercenaries to strengthen his army, for he planned to return to Judea.

Judas purifies the temple

o ³⁶ Then Judas and his brothers said: "Our enemies are defeated, so let us go up and purify the Holy Place and consecrate it again." ³⁷ And all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. ³⁸ There they found the

sanctuary abandoned, the altar profaned, the gates burned, bushes growing in the courtyard as in a forest or on a mountain, and the rooms destroyed. ³⁹ They tore their garments and wept bitterly. Some sprinkled ashes on their heads ⁴⁰ while others prostrated themselves on the ground. They sounded the trumpets and cried aloud to Heaven.

⁴¹ Then Judas chose men to fight against the defenders of the Citadel until he had purified the temple. ⁴² He chose blameless priests who showed great zeal for the Law ⁴³ and had them purify the temple and bring the stones of the abominable altar of the pagans to an unclean place.

⁴⁴ They held a council to decide on what should be done with the altar of the holocausts which had been defiled. ⁴⁵ And they decided to destroy it, so that shame brought about by the pagans might not remain with it. ⁴⁶ They deposited the stones of the said altar in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should appear to settle the matter.

⁴⁷ Then they took uncut stones as the Law prescribed, and built a new altar like the former one. ⁴⁸ They repaired the sanctuary, and the interior of the house, and consecrated the courts.

⁴⁹ They made new sacred vessels and brought in the lampstand, the altar of incense and the table. ⁵⁰ They burned incense on the altar, lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these began to shine in the temple. ⁵¹ They placed the bread on the table and hung

30. 1 S 17, 23

31. 1 S 14, 1

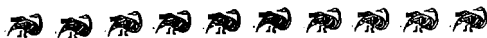
46. 9, 27; 14, 41

47. Ex 20, 25

o Because of Judas' victories, Antiochus Epiphanes IV signs a treaty by which he grants autonomy to the Jewish province (April 164 B.C.). The Jews are triumphant and their first concern is to purify the Temple which had been profaned by the pagans (December 167).

The Jews are aware of being different from other people. It is God who decides the future.

In a given opportunity, they solve what is most urgent while waiting for a prophet to indicate to them what they must do as we see in verse 46. Yet, the situation is paradoxical. There were prophets at other times when the Israelites refused to listen to them. But now that they want to hear a message, there are no prophets, and there will be no prophet until John the Baptist.



up the curtains – bringing to completion all that had been decided.

⁵² On the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislew, in the year one hundred and forty-eight (164 B.C.) ⁵³ they arose at dawn and offered the sacrifice prescribed by the Law on the new altar of holocausts which they had built. ⁵⁴ It was precisely at that same time and date that the pagans had profaned it before; but now they consecrated it with songs accompanied by zithers, harps and cymbals. ⁵⁵ All the people fell prostrate and blessed Heaven that had given them happiness and success.

⁵⁶ They celebrated the consecration of the altar for eight days, joyfully offering holocausts and celebrating sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise. ⁵⁷ The front of the temple was adorned with crowns of gold and shields; the gates and the rooms had been restored and fitted with doors.

⁵⁸ There was no end to the celebration among the people, and so the profanation of the temple by the pagans was forgotten. ⁵⁹ Finally, Judas, his brothers and the whole assembly of Israel agreed to celebrate the anniversary of the consecration of the altar annually for eight days, from the twenty-fifth of the month of Chislew in high festivity.

⁶⁰ At that time, they built around Mount Zion high walls and strong towers to prevent the pagans from coming in to occupy it as they had done before. ⁶¹ Judas stationed a garrison there to defend it. He also fortified Bethzur so that the people might have a fortress against Idumea.

Judas goes to rescue the scattered Jews

◆ ⁵ When the pagans who lived around them learned that the altar had been rebuilt and the temple restored as before, they became very angry. ² They determined to destroy the descendants of Jacob who lived among them; so they began killing and driving away the Jews.

³ This is why Judas declared war on the sons of Esau in Idumea and in the province of Akkrabattene, for they surrounded Israel. He

dealt them a mortal blow – he humbled them and looted them. ⁴ Then he remembered the wickedness of the gangs of Baean who were a plague and a permanent source of trouble for the Jews with their ambushes on the roads. ⁵ So Judas after blockading and besieging them in their towers, took an oath to exterminate them; he then burned the towers with all who were inside.

⁶ From there he crossed over to the land of the Ammonites where he encountered a large and well-organized army under the command of Timotheus. ⁷ He engaged them in many encounters, defeated them and crushed them. ⁸ He attacked and captured the city of Yazer with its neighboring villages and then returned to Judea.

⁹ The pagans of Gilead gathered together to destroy the Israelites who lived in their territory. But the Israelites took refuge in the fortress of Dathema, ¹⁰ and sent a letter to Judas and his brothers which said, "The pagans around us have joined forces to crush us ¹¹ and are now preparing to storm the fortress where we have taken refuge. Timothy is their leader. ¹² Come at once and rescue us from their hands since many among us have already died; ¹³ all our brothers living in the land of Tobias have been murdered, their women and children taken captives; about a thousand men have been killed."

¹⁴ They were reading this letter when other messengers arrived from Galilee tearing their garments as they gave this message: ¹⁵ "The people of Ptolemais, Tyre, Sidon and the whole of heathen Galilee have united to destroy us!"

¹⁶ When Judas and his men heard this news, they summoned a great assembly to determine what could be done for their brothers and sisters in distress who were fighting for their lives. ¹⁷ Judas said to his brother Simon: "Choose your men: go and free our brothers in Galilee; I and our brother Jonathan will go to Gilead."

¹⁸ He left the rest of the troops under the command of Joseph the son of Zechariah, and Azariah, a leader of the people, to defend the land of Judea, ¹⁹ and gave them this order: "Remain at the head of the people, but do not attack the pagans until we return."

²⁰ Three thousand men were assigned to Simon for the campaign in Galilee, and eight thousand men to Judas for Gilead. ²¹ Simon left

57. 1, 22. 59. Jn 10, 22. 1. 2 Mac 10, 14
15. Is 8, 23; Mt 4, 5. 21. 2 Mac 12, 10

6. 2 Mac 12, 2. 13. Ne 6, 18; 2 Mac 3, 11

◆ The Syrian generals reluctantly accept the treaty signed by the king. They encourage per-

secution against the Jews living in neighbouring territories, sometimes in very large groups.

for Galilee and defeated the pagans in many encounters,²² and pursued them to the gates of Ptolemais. About three thousand of the pagans fell, and Simon seized their spoils.²³ Then he took away with him the Jews who were in Galilee and Arbatta as well as their women and children, and all they had, and brought them into Judea with great rejoicing.

²⁴ Meanwhile, Judas Maccabeus and his brother Jonathan crossed the Jordan and journeyed through the desert for three days. ²⁵ There they encountered the Nabateans who received them in a friendly way and told them all that had happened to their brothers in the region of Gilead. ²⁶ They gave them the news that many Jews were imprisoned in Alema, Chaspho, Maked and Carnaim, all large and fortified towns in the vicinity of Bozrah and Bosor. ²⁷ They also related that Jews were also blockaded in other cities of Gilead, and that the pagans had decided to attack their strongholds on the following day intending to destroy all of them in one day.

²⁸ Judas quickly turned off with his army by the desert road to Bozrah; he occupied the city, put all the men to the sword, seized the booty and then burned the city. ²⁹ He left the place at night and advanced until they reached the fortress. ³⁰ At dawn, the Jews looked up and saw an innumerable army carrying ladders and engines of war to attack and capture the fortress.

³¹ Judas saw that the attack had begun; from the city an uproar rose up to heaven with shouts and trumpet blast. ³² He said to his men: "Let us now fight for our brothers." ³³ Then he divided his troops into three groups, and attacked the enemy from behind, sounding the trumpets and praying out loud. ³⁴ When the army of Timothy recognized that it was Maccabeus, they began to escape, but Judas dealt them a heavy blow, and about five thousand of the enemy fell that day.

³⁵ From there, Judas went to Alema; he attacked and occupied the city, killed all the men and seized the booty, and then he burned the city. ³⁶ From there, he captured Chaspho, Maked and Bosor and the remaining towns of Gilead.

³⁷ After these events, Timothy gathered a new army and encamped opposite Raphon, at the other side of the stream. ³⁸ Judas sent men to explore the camp and they brought back the following information: "All the pagans of this region have joined forces under Timothy, forming a powerful army. ³⁹ They have also

hired Arab mercenaries as auxiliaries, and they are now encamped at the other side of the stream, ready to attack you." So Judas set out to confront them in battle.

⁴⁰ Timothy saw that Judas was approaching the stream with his army, so he said to the captains of his troops, "If he crosses first and advances against us, he shall attack us with such great force that we will not be able to withstand him. ⁴¹ But if he hesitates and encamps at the other side of the river, then we shall cross over to attack and defeat him."

⁴² When Judas reached the banks of the stream, he assigned the officials of his men along the stream and ordered them: "Do not let anyone pitch his tent; all are to fight." ⁴³ Judas was the first to cross to the enemy, and all his men followed. They defeated all the pagans who threw down their weapons and took refuge in the sacred enclosure of Carnaim. ⁴⁴ But the Jews captured the city and burned the sacred enclosure with everyone inside. So Carnaim was crushed, and no one was able to withstand Judas.

⁴⁵ Judas gathered together all the Israelites from the region of Gilead, small and great, their women and children and their belongings, an immense multitude, to take them into the land of Judea. ⁴⁶ They reached Ephron, a strong and important town, situated by the road. It was impossible to go around it either to the right or to the left, so they were forced to go through it, ⁴⁷ but the inhabitants denied them passage and blocked the entrance with stones. ⁴⁸ Judas sent them a message of peace saying: "Allow us to go through your land as we go back to ours; we will simply walk through and none of us will do you any harm." But they refused to open the gates to him.

⁴⁹ So Judas gave orders to his army for everyone to take up his position

where he was.⁵⁰ The men of war took up their positions, and Judas attacked the city all day and night until it fell into his hands.⁵¹ He put all the male inhabitants to the sword, razed the city and took its plunder.⁵² Then they passed through the city over the bodies of the dead and came to the great plain after crossing the Jordan opposite Bethshan.

⁵³ Throughout the journey Judas kept on encouraging his people and rallying those who fell behind until they reached the land of Judah.⁵⁴ They went up to Mount Zion joyfully and well contented, and they offered holocausts because they had returned safe and sound, without losing a single man.

Joseph and Azariah are defeated

+ ⁵⁵ While Judas and Jonathan were in the land of Gilead, and their brother Simon was encamped in Galilee opposite Ptolemais, ⁵⁶ Zechariah's son Joseph, and Azariah were in command of the army. When they heard of their exploits and how well they had done in battle, ⁵⁷ they said, "We also have to win renown, so let us go and fight the pagans who live around us."

⁵⁸ So they gave orders to their army to march against Jamnia. ⁵⁹ But Gorgias came out of the city with his men and attacked them. ⁶⁰ Joseph and Azariah were defeated and pursued as far as the borders of Judea, and about two thousand Israelites fell that day. ⁶¹ The people suffered this great defeat because the Jewish commanders did not listen to Judas and his brothers thinking they themselves were capable of great deeds. ⁶² They did not

belong to those to whom the deliverance of Israel had been entrusted.

⁶³ The valiant Judas and his brothers were greatly honoured in Israel and became famous among the foreigners who heard of them, ⁶⁴ and many came to congratulate them.

⁶⁵ Judas with his brothers went to the Negeb to fight the Edomites. He seized Hebron and its villages, demolished its walls and burned its defending towers. ⁶⁶ Then he left for the land of the Philistines, passing through Marisa. ⁶⁷ That day some priests who wanted to be valiant fell because they imprudently attacked the enemy. ⁶⁸ From there Judas turned towards Azotus in the land of the Philistines. He destroyed their altars, burned the statues of their gods, plundered the city and then returned to Judah.

Last days of Antiochus Epiphanes

6 ¹ When King Antiochus was making his way through the upper regions of Persia, he received news about Elymais, a city renowned for its wealth in silver and gold. ² They kept in the wealthy temple of their city golden armour, breastplates and weapons left there by the Macedonian king, Alexander the son of Philip, the first sovereign of the Greeks. ³ So Antiochus went there but the inhabitants came out armed against him when they learned of his intention, so his attempt to take the city failed. ⁴ He had to turn back, and he returned much embittered to Babylon.

⁵ While he was still in Persia, it was reported to him that the armies sent to Judea had been defeated. They told him ⁶ that although Lysias had gone with a strong army, he had to flee before the Jews who had been strengthened with the weapons and the abundant booty taken from the neighbouring armies. ⁷ He heard too that the Jews had destroyed the abominable idol he had erected on the altar in Jerusalem, and had rebuilt the temple walls to the same height as before, and had also fortified the city of Beth-zur.

⁸ When he received this news, he was terrified and deeply upset. He fell sick and became greatly depressed because things had not turned out the way he had planned. ⁹ So he remained overcome by this terrible anguish for many days. He felt that he was dying, ¹⁰ so he called his friends and said to them, "Sleep

54. 2 Mac 12, 31 55. 2 Mac 12, 32 1. 2 Mac 1, 11; 10, 9 7. 1, 54; 4, 45

+ The war continues with its victories and its defeats. Here, the Bible stresses the reasons for the reversal: many of the leaders are motivated by personal interests.

■ The end of Antiochus Epiphanes is presented as an example of the death of the persecutors. We find another story, different from this, in 2 Mc 9.

has fled from my eyes and I am greatly crushed by my anxieties. ¹¹ And I keep on asking why such grief has come upon me – I who was generous and well-loved when I was in power – and now I am so discouraged.

¹² Now I remember the evils I did in Jerusalem, the vessels of gold and silver that I stole, the inhabitants of Judea I ordered to be killed for no reason at all. ¹³ I now know that because of this, these misfortunes have come upon me, and I am dying of grief in a strange land. ¹⁴ The king then summoned Philip, one of his friends, and appointed him administrator of his whole kingdom. ¹⁵ When he had entrusted him with the crown, robe and signet ring, with the charge of educating his son Antiochus and preparing him for the throne, ¹⁶ Antiochus died there in the year one hundred and forty-nine (163 B.C.). ¹⁷ As soon as Lysias learned of the king's death, he proclaimed his son Antiochus as his successor, for he himself had trained him from childhood and had named him Eupator.

Expedition of Antiochus V

¹⁸ The men from the Citadel were blockading the Israelites around the temple and did not let an opportunity pass of harming them on behalf of the pagans. ¹⁹ Judas decided to wipe them out, ²⁰ so he gathered together all the people to besiege them. The troops assembled and laid siege to the Citadel in the year one hundred and fifty, building firing platforms and siege engines. ²¹ But some of the besieged broke through the blockade and together with renegade Israelites ²² went to tell the king, "How much longer will you wait to do us justice and avenge our brothers?" ²³ We took the side of your father, we obeyed his orders and observed his laws. ²⁴ The result is that we are now besieged in the Citadel by our own people and treated as foreigners. All of us who were caught have been killed and they have seized our property. ²⁵ And they are fighting not only against us but in the neighbouring lands as well.

²⁶ Right now, they are encamped against the Citadel in Jerusalem to capture it, and they have fortified the temple and the city of Beth-zur. ²⁷ If you do not take the lead now, they will do greater things and then you will not be able to control them."

²⁸ The king was enraged when he heard this news, and he summoned all his Friends,

the generals of the army and the commanders of the cavalry. ²⁹ From other kingdoms and islands of the sea, he recruited mercenary troops. ³⁰ His forces numbered a hundred thousand infantry, twenty thousand horsemen and thirty-two elephants trained for battle. ³¹ They came through Idumea, besieged Beth-zur and attacked for days, using engines of war. But the besieged made a sortie and burned their engines and bravely kept up the resistance.

Battle of Beth-Zechariah

◆ ³² Then Judas ceased fighting at the Citadel and encamped at Beth-zechariah opposite the camp of the king. ³³ Early in the morning the king rose and his army boldly advanced along the road to Beth-zechariah. The troops prepared for battle and sounded the trumpets.

³⁴ They showed juice of grapes and mulberries to the elephants to arouse them for battle, ³⁵ and distributed them among the battalions: one thousand men in coat of mail and bronze helmet lined up at the side of each elephant. ³⁶ A cavalry of five hundred picked horsemen went before each elephant and accompanied it with the order not to separate from it. ³⁷ A strong wooden tower was fixed to each elephant by means of leather straps, and four warriors including the driver were on the tower.

³⁸ The rest of the cavalry were stationed on the right and left flanks of the army to harass the enemy and protect the battalions. ³⁹ When the sun shone on the shields of gold and bronze, the mountains glittered and gleamed like flames of fire. ⁴⁰ One part of the king's army was deployed up in the mountains and the other on the plain. All advanced confidently and in good order. ⁴¹ The Jews trembled when they heard the great

◆ Palestine is invaded once again and in the combat at Beth-zechariah, Judas' army, very inferior to the king's, must withdraw from the ene-

mies. But, two years later, the king makes peace and confirms the religious freedom of the Jews.

noise of this vast multitude, the marching of that mass and the clanking of their weapons. It was indeed an army extremely numerous and powerful.

⁴² Nevertheless Judas and his army advanced to give battle; and about six hundred men of the king's army fell.

⁴³ Eleazar, called Avaran, saw one of the beasts protected with armour which excelled all the others, so he supposed that it must be the king's.

⁴⁴ He then sacrificed himself to save his people and win eternal renown for himself. ⁴⁵ He boldly charged towards the animal right into the midst of the battalion, killing men right and left, scattering the enemy before him on both sides. ⁴⁶ He reached the elephant, darted in under it, and stabbed it in the belly. The elephant collapsed on top of him and he died on the spot.

⁴⁷ The Jews, however, aware of the tremendous force of the king's army and their bravery, retreated before them. ⁴⁸ The king's troops went up to Jerusalem to overtake them, and the king encamped in Judea and around Mount Zion. ⁴⁹ He made peace with the people of Beth-zur who evacuated the city since they had no food to continue the resistance, for that year was a year of rest for the land. ⁵⁰ The king seized Beth-zur and stationed a garrison there to guard it.

⁵¹ He encamped before the temple for a long time and set up firing platforms, crossbows, engines, fire-throwers, catapults, scorpions to discharge arrows, and slingers. ⁵² The defenders also constructed engines as their attackers had done and they fought for a long time. ⁵³ But they had no food in storage, as it was the sev-

enth year and because the Israelites who came to Judea from the pagan lands had consumed the last of their reserves. ⁵⁴ So, few men were left in the temple because of the famine; the others had dispersed.

The king grants religious freedom

+ ⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Philip to whom King Antiochus during his life had entrusted the education of his son Antiochus to prepare him for the throne, ⁵⁶ had returned from Persia and Media with the army that had accompanied the king to those regions, and was planning to seize power. ⁵⁷ This is why Lysias hastily gave orders to depart, saying to the king, the generals of the army and the soldiers, "We are losing strength every day, we are short of food and the place we are besieging is well fortified; we are moreover diverting our attention from the affairs of the kingdom. ⁵⁸ Let us, then, offer the hand of friendship to these men, and make peace with them and with their nation. ⁵⁹ Let us permit them to live according to their customs as before, since all this came to be because we suppressed their laws, and they have risen in defense of them."

⁶⁰ These words pleased the king and the generals, ⁶¹ so the king sent messengers to make peace with the Jews, and the Jews accepted it.

When the king and the generals had committed themselves with an oath, the Jews came out of the fortress. ⁶² The king went up to Mount Zion and when he saw the defenses, he broke his oath and ordered the surrounding wall to be demolished. ⁶³ Then he hurriedly left and returned

+ The fighting stops at the least expected time and the Jews are granted the right to continue practicing their religion (6:59). The resistance

of a handful of heroes has achieved this first result and it changes the history of the Jewish people.

to Antioch where he found Philip already in control of the city. So he fought him and took the city by force.

7 ¹In the year one hundred and fifty-one, Demetrius the son of Seleucus escaped from Rome. He sailed with a few men to a port of the kingdom where he arrived and proclaimed himself king. ²As soon as he entered the kingdom of his fathers, the army arrested Antiochus and Lysias to hand them over to him. ³When Demetrius heard this, he said: "I do not want to see their faces." ⁴So the army executed them and Demetrius took the throne.

⁵At once all the Israelites without law or religion came to him. They were led by Alcimus, a man who sought the office of chief priest for himself. ⁶And they began accusing their own people before the king, "Judas and his brothers have murdered all your Friends and have driven us away from our land. ⁷Send one of your trustworthy Friends, to see the havoc they have caused us and our province which belongs to the king. Let him punish all who support them."

Expedition of Bacchides and Nicanor

⁸The king chose Bacchides, one of his Friends and a distinguished man of the kingdom, the governor of the western province of the Euphrates. ⁹He also sent with him Alcimus whom he had appointed chief priest, and ordered them to punish the Israelites.

¹⁰They set out with a large army. On reaching Judea, they sent messengers to Judas and his brothers with treacherous proposals of peace. ¹¹But the Jews who knew that they came

with a powerful army, did not trust them.

¹²However a commission of teachers of the Law presented themselves to Alcimus and Bacchides to seek a satisfactory solution. ¹³These men from the group of the Hasideans, the first to seek peace in Israel, ¹⁴reasoned like this: "A man in the line of Aaron has come with the army, he will surely deal with us in fairness." ¹⁵Bacchides, moreover, sent them a friendly message and assured them under oath: "We do not wish any harm on you and your friends." ¹⁶They believed him. But he arrested sixty of them and executed them the same day, according to the word of the Scripture: *¹⁷Around Jerusalem, they have scattered the dead bodies of your saints; they have shed their blood, and there was no one to bury them.*

¹⁸All the people were terrified. And they said, "These men are evil and insincere, for they have violated the agreement they made with an oath."

¹⁹Bacchides left Jerusalem and encamped at Beth-zur. From there, he ordered the arrest of many prominent men who had deserted to him as well as some of the people. He had them beheaded and thrown into a deep pit.

²⁰Then he placed the province in the hands of Alcimus, leaving him with an army to help him and he returned to the king. ²¹Alcimus struggled to have the Israelites recognize him as chief priest, ²²and all who disturbed the peace of the people joined him. They became masters of the land of Judea and did great harm to the Israelites.

²³Judas saw that Alcimus and his men were an even greater menace to Israel than the pagans had been. ²⁴So

he went throughout the territory of Judea to do justice to those traitors and to prevent them from going about the country.

²⁵ Alcimus realized that Judas and his men were of greater strength and that he could not resist them, so he returned to the king and accused them of serious crimes. ²⁶ The king then sent Nicanor, one of his more illustrious generals and a known enemy of Israel, with the mission to utterly destroy this people.

²⁷ Nicanor reached Jerusalem with a large army; he sent Judas and his brothers false messages of friendship saying to them, ²⁸ "Let us not begin as enemies once more; I will come with a few men to meet you face to face in friendship."

²⁹ He indeed came to Judas and they greeted each other peaceably, but the enemy was prepared to seize him. ³⁰ Judas was told that Nicanor had come to him treacherously, so he withdrew from Nicanor, and would not see him again. ³¹ When Nicanor saw that his plans had been discovered, he went out to look for Judas, and this time to fight him. He found him near Capharsalama. ³² About five hundred of Nicanor's men fell and the rest fled to the city of David.

Nicanor is defeated

³³ After these events, Nicanor went up to Mount Zion and some of the priests came out of the temple to greet him peacefully and show him the sacrifice they offered for the kings.

³⁴ But he mocked them, he scorned and insulted them ³⁵ and angrily swore this oath: "If you do not deliver Judas into my hands immediately, as soon as I have destroyed him, I will return and burn this temple." And he went away furious.

³⁶ The priests entered the temple, and they

stood weeping before the altar and the sanctuary. They said, ³⁷ "You, Lord, chose this House that your name may be invoked in it, that it may be a house of prayer and petition for your people. ³⁸ Take vengeance on this man and on his army; let them die by the sword. Remember their insults and do not delay in punishing them."

³⁹ Nicanor left Jerusalem and encamped in Beth-horon where the Syrian army joined him.

⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Judas encamped in Adasa with three thousand men and prayed: ⁴¹ "Lord, when the messengers of the king of Assyria insulted you, your angel came and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand of his men.

⁴² So now, crush this army before us, so that all the rest may know that this Nicanor has blasphemed against your temple. Judge him according to his wickedness."

⁴³ The two armies met in battle on the thirtieth of the month Adar. Nicanor's army was defeated and he himself was one of the first to fall in the battle. ⁴⁴ When his troops saw that he was dead, they threw down their weapons and fled. ⁴⁵ The Jews pursued them a day's journey from Adasa to the entrance of Gazara, sounding the trumpets as they followed them. ⁴⁶ The people came out from all the neighbouring villages of Judea and surrounded the fugitives, forcing them to return to defend their lives. So all fell by the sword, not even one of them was left.

⁴⁷ Then the Jews seized the plunder and booty; they cut off Nicanor's head and the right hand he had so arrogantly stretched out, and they displayed them at the entrance to Jerusalem within sight of all. ⁴⁸ The people were elated and ⁴⁹ celebrated their victory annually on the thirtieth of the month Adar.

⁵⁰ The land of Judah enjoyed peace for a short time.

Alliance with the Romans

8 ¹ In the meantime Judas was informed about the Romans. He was told that the Romans were valiant in war and that they showed goodwill towards all who sided with them; they offered their friendship to all who approached them, ² and they were a strong ally in war.

He was told of their wars and of their exploits among the Gauls whom they conquered and forced to pay taxes, ³ and of all they had done in Spain to gain possession of the silver

25. 2 Mac 14, 5 33. Ezr 6, 10 37. Is 56, 7; Mt 21, 13 39. 2 Mac 15 41. 2 K 19, 35

o The prophets had insisted on the fact that because the Jewish people were God's people, they had to trust God without seeking any other help. To try to make alliances with the pagan

people would have meant to mistrust God. Judas has a different concept and he seeks alliance with the Romans.

The first victories had inspired great hope.

and gold mines,⁴ and how they had conquered that land by dint of intelligence and perseverance despite its great distance from their own land. He also learned how they had defeated the kings who came from the ends of the earth to attack them, how they managed to conquer and crush them. There were others who paid them an annual tax.

⁵ They had defeated and subjected Philip and Perseus, the kings of Macedonia and others who opposed them. ⁶ They had vanquished Antiochus the Great, king of Asia, who went to fight the Romans with one hundred and twenty elephants, cavalry, chariots and a very strong army. But he was defeated⁷ and fell into their hands. He and his successors were forced to pay an enormous amount in tax, to surrender hostages, and to cede some of their best provinces⁸ like India, Media and Lydia which afterwards the Romans gave to King Eumenes. ⁹ The Greeks had planned to come and destroy the Romans,¹⁰ but hearing of it, the Romans sent a single general against them. They killed a great number of Greeks, took their women and children, destroyed their fortresses and enslaved them to this day.

¹¹ In the same way, they also destroyed and subdued other countries and islands, as well as others who opposed them. ¹² But they usually remain faithful to their allies and to those who relied on them.

The Romans were really powerful. They conquered kingdoms far and near, and all who heard their name feared them. ¹³ They appointed as kings those who were to their liking and deposed those who were not.

¹⁴ But in spite of all this, not one of them had himself crowned or dressed as a king in order to be exalted. ¹⁵ They had created a senate and three hundred and twenty men deliberated on daily matters relating to the good of the people and the maintenance of order. ¹⁶ Every year they would choose one man to rule over them and govern the empire, and all obeyed him without envy or jealousy.

¹⁷ So Judas sent Eupolemus the son of John, and Jason the son of Eleazar to Rome, entrust-

ing them with the mission to make a covenant of friendship with the Romans. ¹⁸ Since the Greeks treated the Israelites as slaves, Judas hoped to liberate them from oppression in this way.

¹⁹ The envoys from Judas went to Rome, where they arrived after a long journey. When they entered the Senate they addressed the assembly: ²⁰ "Judas Maccabeus, his brothers and the people of Israel have sent us to you to conclude a covenant of peace with you and to be numbered among your allies and friends." ²¹ The Romans approved this proposal, ²² and this is the copy of the letter they wrote on bronze tablets which they sent to Jerusalem as a memorial of peace and alliance:

²³ "May all go well with the Romans and the Jewish people at sea and on land forever, may both sword and enemy be far from them! ²⁴ If war comes first to the Romans, or to any of their allies in any part of its empire, ²⁵ the Jewish nation shall enter the war wholeheartedly, as circumstances permit. ²⁶ The Jewish nation will not supply the aggressors with wheat or weapons, or money, or ships as Rome has decided. They must fulfill their obligations without recompense.

²⁷ In the same way, if the Jewish nation is attacked, the Romans shall fight at her side with all zeal as circumstances may allow. ²⁸ The Roman allies will not receive wheat or weapons, or money, or ships as Rome has decided, but the Romans shall fulfill their obligations without deception. ²⁹ On these terms the Romans conclude their alliance with the Jewish nation.

³⁰ If after these terms have taken effect, either party should wish to add or delete anything, the said party shall do so in common agreement with the other party, then what has been added or deleted shall be binding.

³¹ And concerning the harm King Demetrius does to the Jews, we have written to him as follows, 'Why do you lay such a heavy yoke upon the Jews, our friends and ally?' ³² If they complain about you again, we shall defend their rights and attack you by sea and land."

17. 2 Mac 4, 11

22. 14, 18

The Jews had never recovered their autonomy since the exile and now, Judas and his companions think that the time to restore the ancient kingdom of Solomon and David has come.

Judas is a great admirer of the organization and the power of the Romans and he thinks that their protection will lead to the restoration of the kingdom of David.

But the prophets were right: those who seek the kingdom of God and justice must not rely on the rich and the powerful. The Romans, whom

Judas admires so much, will become enemies. And two centuries later, in Jesus' days, they will destroy the Jewish nation.

+ Then comes the moving story of Judas' death. He dies with the glory of his faith and heroism, like the many who "were hoping for the restoration of Israel" and died for this hope.

We can see God's grace for him in this premature death. The path that he had begun because of his faith, was going to end up in

Death of Judas Maccabeus

9 ¹ When Demetrius was informed of the death of Nicanor and the defeat of his army, he sent Bacchides and Alcimus back to Judea with the best troops of his army. ² They took the road to Galilee and besieged the city of Mesaloth in the Arbela region. They captured it and killed many. ³ In the first month of the year one hundred and fifty-two, they encamped before Jerusalem. ⁴ From there twenty thousand infantry and two thousand cavalry set out for Berea. ⁵ Judas had his camp in Elasa with three thousand picked men. ⁶ When they saw the huge number of the enemy, they were terrified. Many slipped out of the camp, and only eight hundred men were left. ⁷ Judas saw the dispersal of his army and this crushed his spirit. The battle was imminent but he had no time to group them together. ⁸ Yet in spite of being dismayed, he did his best to encourage those who remained with him: "Let us fight our enemies. We may yet be able to defeat them."

⁹ They tried to dissuade him, "We cannot do anything now but save ourselves. We can come back later with our brothers and fight. But now we are too few." ¹⁰ But Judas answered them, "God forbid that I should run away from them. If our time has come, then let us die as valiant men for our brothers, without tarnishing our glory."

¹¹ The army of Bacchides marched out of their camp while the Jews remained in their place to engage them in battle. The cavalry was divided into two wings. In the first line, the veterans in war advanced, and the archers and slingers followed. ¹² Bac-

chides was on the right wing. At the sound of the trumpets, they advanced on both sides. The Jews also sounded the trumpets. ¹³ And the earth trembled with the noise of the armies, and a battle began which lasted the whole day.

¹⁴ Judas saw that Bacchides and the main strength of his army was on the right. The most courageous of the Israelites went with him, ¹⁵ and they defeated the right wing of the enemy, pursuing them up to the hills. ¹⁶ But when those on the left wing saw the right wing being defeated, they attacked Judas and his men from the rear. ¹⁷ They fought bitterly and many fell on both sides. ¹⁸ Judas also fell, and the rest fled.

¹⁹ Jonathan and Simon took their brother and buried him in the tomb of their fathers at Modein. ²⁰ All the people of Israel mourned and wept for him for many days, repeating this lamentation: ²¹ "How the hero has fallen, he who saved Israel."

²² The other deeds of Judas, his battles, exploits and heroism were not written for they were many.

Jonathan succeeds Judas

23 After the death of Judas, the renegades reappeared throughout the territory of Israel and the evildoers took courage. ²⁴ At the same time, there was a severe famine, and the country went over to their side. ²⁵ Bacchides chose renegade men and made them masters of the land. ²⁶ These men traced and searched out all the friends and supporters of Judas and brought them before Bacchides who punished and humiliated them in a thousand ways. ²⁷ It was a terrible trial for Israel such as had never been experienced since the disappearance of the prophets.

²⁸ So the friends of Judas came together and said to Jonathan, ²⁹ "Since your brother Judas died, we haven't found anyone like him

compromises for his descendants and in the corruption which often accompanies political power.

■ Jonathan, chosen to succeed his brother Judas, must flee to the desert with his people. He sends his brother John with the baggage to bring

13. 1 K 1, 40; Ps 97, 4	22. Jn 21, 25	27. 4, 46; 14, 41
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to head the resistance against the enemy, against Bacchides and all the enemies of our nation.³⁰ So we now choose you to take his place, to be our head and lead us in our wars." So from that day on,³¹ Jonathan accepted the leadership and succeeded his brother Judas.

³² When Bacchides heard of this, he planned to kill Jonathan.³³ But Jonathan was informed of the plot and fled to the desert of Tekoa, together with his brother Simon and his followers. They encamped by the lake Asphar.³⁴ Bacchides found this out on the sabbath day, and with all his army he crossed the Jordan.

³⁵ Jonathan had sent his brother John, representative of the people, to ask their friends the Nabatean to store for them their large amount of baggage.³⁶ But the tribe of Yambri and the people of Medeba captured John and took all he had with him, then departed with the booty.³⁷ After this had happened, Jonathan and his brother Simon were told that the Yambrites were celebrating a solemn wedding and were escorting the bride, a daughter of one of the magnates, from Nadabath with great pomp.

³⁸ Both remembered the murder of their brother John, so they went up and hid under cover of the mountain.³⁹ At a certain moment they heard the noise of the procession and saw in its midst a great deal of baggage. The bridegroom, his friends and brothers came out to meet the procession with tambourines, musical instruments and many weapons.⁴⁰ Then the Jews rushed down on them from their ambush and killed them. There were many casualties and others fled to the mountain. Finally the Jews seized all the plunder.⁴¹ So the wedding turned to mourning and the music to lamentation.⁴² Having avenged the death of their brother, the Israelites went back to the marshes of the Jordan.

Let us return to Bacchides.⁴³ He arrived with a strong army on the sabbath day at the banks of the Jordan.⁴⁴ So Jonathan said to his men, "Courage! Let us fight for our lives, for today things are going to be serious.⁴⁵ Dangers surround us – we have the waters of the Jordan on this side, the marshes and the thickets on the other side – there is no place to turn.⁴⁶ So cry out to Heaven for deliverance from our enemies."

⁴⁷ And the battle began. Jonathan stretched out his arm to strike Bacchides, but he eluded him and withdrew.⁴⁸ So Jonathan and his men

leapt into the Jordan, swimming to the other side; but their enemies did not follow them.⁴⁹ On that day, about a thousand of Bacchides' men fell.

⁵⁰ Bacchides returned to Jerusalem. Then he began to build fortified cities in Judea – the strongholds of Jericho, Emmaus, Beth-horon, Bethel, Timnath, Pharathon and Tephon – with high walls and barred gates,⁵¹ and a garrison stationed in each of them to harass the Israelites.⁵² He also fortified the cities of Beth-zur, Gazara and the Citadel, and placed troops in each of them with supplies of provisions.⁵³ He took the sons of the leaders of the land as hostages and imprisoned them in the Citadel of Jerusalem.

⁵⁴ In the year one hundred and fifty-nine, (159 B.C.) in the second month, Alcimus ordered the demolition of the wall of the inner court of the temple. This meant no less than destroying the work of the prophets.⁵⁵ Alcimus did in fact begin the demolition but soon after suffered a stroke, so the work was suspended. Alcimus was no longer able to speak, not even to rule over his household.⁵⁶ After a while, he died in great agony.⁵⁷ Because of his death, Bacchides returned to the king and the land had peace for two years.

The siege of Bethbasi

⁵⁸ Then all the renegades agreed on a plan: "Jonathan and his people now live in peace without any fear at all. Let us bring Bacchides back; he can arrest them all in one night."

⁵⁹ They went to Bacchides, and when they had convinced him,⁶⁰ he set out with a large contingent. He secretly sent letters to his supporters in Judea instructing them to seize Jonathan and his men. But their plot was found out and their plan foiled.⁶¹ Instead the supporters of Jonathan arrested fifty Jewish leaders of this conspiracy and had them executed.

⁶² Jonathan and Simon then withdrew with their men to Bethbasi in the desert; they rebuilt the ruins and fortified it.⁶³ When Bacchides heard this, he assembled all his men and notified his adherents in Judea.⁶⁴ He went to attack Bethbasi, besieged it for many days and built engines of war.⁶⁵ Then Jonathan left his brother Simon in the city and went out into the countryside with a handful of men.⁶⁶ He defeated Odomera and his brothers and the people of Phasiron in their camp.⁶⁷ Then they

it to a safe place beyond the Jordan. There, they are the victims of an ambush. Then, Jonathan goes to the other side of the Jordan to avenge them. When he comes back, he finds that Bac-

chides and his army had followed behind him and now block their access to the river. However, they break through enemy lines and swim across.



turned back and began to attack the troops who had laid siege to the city. Meanwhile, Simon and his men went out of the city and burned the engines. ⁶⁸ They attacked Bacchides who was defeated and dismayed by the failure of his expedition. ⁶⁹ He was greatly enraged against the renegades who had advised him to return to the Jewish country; he executed many of them, and decided to return to his land. ⁷⁰ When Jonathan learned this, he sent messengers to him to make a treaty of peace and to exchange prisoners.

⁷¹ Bacchides accepted his terms. For Bacchides' part, he fulfilled his promises and swore that henceforth and until the day of his death, he would never harm him in any way. ⁷² He turned over to Jonathan the prisoners earlier in Judea. Then, he returned to his own country and never came back again to the territory of Judea. ⁷³ So there was peace in Israel, and Jonathan resided in Michmash where he began to govern the land, and the renegades disappeared from Israel.

War between Alexander Balas and Demetrius

10 ¹ In the year one hundred and sixty (160 B.C.), Alexander Epiphanes, son of Antiochus, sailed for Ptolemais and occupied it. He was well received and he began to reign. ² When Demetrius heard this, he assembled a very large army and marched out to fight him. ³ At the same time, he sent a letter of friendship to Jonathan and offered him vast power. ⁴ For Demetrius thought: "Let us make the first move in making peace with him before he makes peace with Alexander against us, remembering all the wrongs we have done to him, his brothers and his nation."

⁶ So Demetrius authorized Jonathan to organize an army and manufacture arms; he named him his ally and ordered the release of the hostages who were in the Citadel of Jerusalem. ⁷ Jonathan went at once to Jerusalem and read the letter before all the people and those in the Citadel. ⁸ They were afraid when they heard that the king had authorized Jonathan to organize a great army, ⁹ and they released the hostages to Jonathan who handed

them back to their families. ¹⁰ Jonathan resided in Jerusalem and began rebuilding and restoring the city. ¹¹ He commanded the builders to build the walls and the defenses of Mount Zion with hewn stones. And they did so.

¹² Then all the foreigners who stayed in the fortresses built by Bacchides began to flee, ¹³ each of them abandoning his post and returning to his own land. ¹⁴ Only at Beth-zur did some renegades of the Law and the precepts remain, since this was like a place of refuge.

◆ ¹⁵ King Alexander was informed of the promises Demetrius had made to Jonathan; he was also given an account of the battles and exploits of Jonathan and his brothers and the trials they had endured. ¹⁶ So Alexander declared: "Shall we ever find another man like him? Let us make him our ally and friend." ¹⁷ And he wrote him a letter: ¹⁸ "King Alexander to our brother Jonathan, peace. ¹⁹ We have heard of you, that you are a valiant man and most worthy of our friendship. ²⁰ Therefore, we now appoint you High Priest of your nation and bestow on you the title Friend of the King (he also sent him a purple robe and a golden crown). So we invite you to watch over our interests and maintain friendly relations with us."

²¹ This is why in the seventh month of the year one hundred and sixty (160 B.C.), on the occasion of the feast of Tabernacles, Jonathan put on the sacred vestments. He also recruited troops and manufactured a great quantity of arms.

²² When Demetrius heard what had happened, he was greatly displeased and said, ²³ "What have we done that Alexander is ahead of us in gaining the friendship of the Jews? ²⁴ I will also write them kind words and promise them honour and gifts to win them to my side."

²⁵ So he wrote to the Jews:

"King Demetrius greets the Jewish nation. ²⁶ You have kept your agreement with us and have remained as our friends, and have not joined our enemies. We have heard of it and so we rejoice. ²⁷ Therefore, continue to be faithful and we will grant you privileges in return for all you do on our behalf. ²⁸ I will free the Jews from many taxes and grant them royal

8. 9, 53

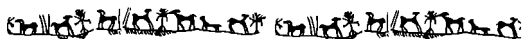
11. 6, 62; 12, 35

12. 9, 50

◆ Before Alexander, Jonathan represents the Jews, but with what title? The Jews had not had a king since the Exile, and what is more, they would not have accepted any king who was not a descendant of David. Since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, priests ruled over the Jewish community. And so Jonathan must be the High Priest and to be able to represent the Jewish people, he is to receive this charge from Alexan-

der. This starts a moral crisis for the Jews since no one could proclaim himself high priest, but became one only through family rights (see Lv 8).

Jonathan's appointment caused division among the most religious Jews. Many opposed him, among whom were the Hasideans (7:13) who would later give rise to the Pharisees.



privileges and exemptions. ²⁹ And from now on and for ever, I now free all Jews from payment of tribute, salt dues and crown levies. ³⁰ I give up from this day and henceforth the third of the harvest and half of the fruit of the trees which I have the right to exact from the region of Judea and the three districts annexed to it from Samaria and Galilee. ³¹ From this day on and for all time, Jerusalem shall be a Holy City and be free with all its territory, with the right to collect tithes and tributes. ³² I also give up control of the Citadel of Jerusalem and turn it over to the High Priest that he may choose the men he wants to defend it. ³³ I grant freedom without ransom to all the captives taken from Judea into any part of my kingdom. I free everyone from the taxes they owe me for their livestock.

³⁴ All feasts, sabbaths, new moons, special days and the three holy days before and after a feast shall be days of exemption for all the Jews in my kingdom. ³⁵ No one shall have the right to pursue or molest them for any motive whatsoever. ³⁶ I also decree that they be accepted into the king's army to the number of thirty thousand Jews who shall receive the same salary as the rest of the king's forces. ³⁷ Some of them shall be stationed to guard the king's fortresses, and positions of trust shall be given to some of them; their officers shall be chosen from among themselves and they will live according to their laws as the king has prescribed in the land of Judea.

³⁸ The three districts of Samaria annexed to Judea shall be considered part of Jewish territory; to avoid any conflict of power, these shall be subject to no authority other than that of the High Priest. ³⁹ I give the city of Ptolemais and its territory as a gift to the temple of Jerusalem to cover the expenses of public worship. ⁴⁰ Henceforth, I will give fifteen thousand pieces of silver annually for the maintenance of the temple which shall be taken from the royal revenues from appropriate places. ⁴¹ Moreover, I give all that should have been paid to me by the administrators in previous years.

⁴² In addition, I also remit the five thousand pieces of silver levied every year from the

tributes to the temple, and give them to the priests in charge of public worship. ⁴³ Anyone who takes refuge in the temple of Jerusalem or in any of its enclosures because of his debts on royal taxes or because of any other debts, shall not be disturbed and his possessions anywhere in my kingdom shall be duly protected.

⁴⁴ Finally, the cost of rebuilding or restoring the sanctuary shall be passed on to the king's account, ⁴⁵ as well as the expenses of reconstructing the walls of Jerusalem, the fortification of its defenses and the construction of the walls in the cities of Judea."

⁴⁶ When Jonathan and the people heard such proposals, they did not believe or accept them, for they remembered the great wrongs Demetrius had done to Israel and the ill-treatment to which he had subjected them. ⁴⁷ They decided in favor of Alexander, for he was the first to propose peace, and they became his faithful allies. ⁴⁸ King Alexander assembled a great army and encamped opposite Demetrius. ⁴⁹ The two kings began the battle and the army of Demetrius was routed. Alexander pursued him until Demetrius was defeated. ⁵⁰ The battle lasted until sunset, and on that day Demetrius died.

⁵¹ Then Alexander sent messengers to Ptolemy the king of Egypt with the following message: ⁵² "I am now again in my kingdom and have assumed power after defeating Demetrius and all his army. ⁵³ Now I occupy the throne of my fathers as master of all the land. Let us be friends. ⁵⁴ Give me your daughter in marriage, and I will become your son-in-law, and I will give you, and her, gifts worthy of you."

⁵⁵ King Ptolemy replied as follows: "Blessed be the day when you returned to the land of your fathers and ascended to their throne! ⁵⁶ I will without delay do for you as you have proposed. But meet me in Ptolemais. There we shall see one another and I will receive you as my son-in-law as you have requested."

⁵⁷ Ptolemy left Egypt with his daughter Cleopatra in the year one hundred and sixty-two, and arrived at Ptolemais. ⁵⁸ Alexander went to meet him and Ptolemy gave him his

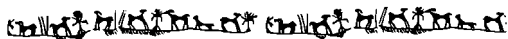
39. 10, 1

44. Ezr 6, 4

o Jonathan gets more and more involved in politics and this chapter does not hide how dirty politics can be, the way it is usually practiced. So, what we said earlier about Judas is confirmed (9:1): the time to restore a kingdom of God which would be a nation among nations had gone.

The mission of Christians is to be involved in politics as yeast among the masses, in spite of

the fact they will find temptations and errors among many unscrupulous people. But the Church must be careful not to go back to seeking success through a compromise with partisan forces, since its own mission cannot be confused with any political program. Moreover, it does not divide people into good and bad, friends or enemies, according to their positions in social struggles.



daughter Cleopatra, and celebrated her wedding with great splendour as kings do.

Political liability of Jonathan

o ⁵⁹ King Alexander also wrote to Jonathan to come and meet him. ⁶⁰ So Jonathan went to Ptolemais with great pomp and met the two kings. Then he gave them and their Friends much silver and gold and many other gifts. ⁶¹ The renegades, the pest of Israel, gathered together to accuse Jonathan, but the king paid no attention to them. ⁶² The king even gave orders that Jonathan remove his garment and be in purple and it was done. ⁶³ The king also seated him by his side, and said to his captains: "Go with him into the centre of the city and proclaim that no one is to accuse Jonathan under any pretext, and no one is to molest him for any reason." ⁶⁴ When his accusers saw the public honour given to Jonathan and that he was clothed in purple, they all fled. ⁶⁵ The king did him great honour and enrolled him among his first Friends, and appointed him general and governor. ⁶⁶ So Jonathan returned to Jerusalem happy and secure.

⁶⁷ In the year one hundred and sixty-five (165 B.C.), Demetrius the son of Demetrius, returned from Crete to the land of his fathers. ⁶⁸ When King Alexander heard of it, he was so greatly disturbed that he returned to Antioch. ⁶⁹ Demetrius took his general Apollonius, the governor of Coelesyria, who assembled a large force. He encamped at Jamnia and sent the following message to Jonathan, the high priest:

⁷⁰ "Are you the only one who resists our authority? And am I to be ridiculed because of you? Why do you stand against our authority in your mountains? ⁷¹ If you have confidence in your forces, come down to the plain and let us measure each other's strength there, for I have with me the army of the cities.

⁷² Inquire and find out who I am and who are those who support me. Men will tell you that you cannot resist us, for your fathers were twice defeated on their own land. ⁷³ Nor will you be able to withstand the cavalry, and so great an army on the plain where there are no stones or rocks offering a refuge."

⁷⁴ When Jonathan heard Apollonius' message, he was greatly aroused. So he left Jerusalem with ten thousand picked men, and his brother Simon came to his help. ⁷⁵ They encamped near Joppa, but the inhabitants of the city closed the gates to them, as Apollonius had a garrison there. ⁷⁶ So Jonathan gave the order to attack. The people in the city were so afraid that they opened the gates to him, and

Jonathan occupied Joppa. ⁷⁷ When Apollonius learned it, he mobilized three thousand cavalry and a large army. Then he set out towards Azotus, pretending to march through the land, but in fact his troops were spreading out in the direction of the plain, since he had a great number of cavalry on which he relied. ⁷⁸ Jonathan pursued him towards Azotus and they began to fight. ⁷⁹ Apollonius had left a thousand picked horsemen hidden behind Jonathan, ⁸⁰ but Jonathan was informed of the ambush.

The horsemen surrounded Jonathan's men and shot their arrows from morning till evening. ⁸¹ But the Israelites faced them as Jonathan had commanded until the horses of the enemy tired. Once the cavalry were exhausted, ⁸² Simon and his men advanced and attacked the infantry. The enemy was defeated and fled.

⁸³ The cavalry scattered over the plain and those who fled went to Azotus, where they entered the temple of Dagon, their idol, to save their lives. ⁸⁴ But Jonathan set fire to Azotus and the surrounding towns, and plundered them. He also burned down the temple of Dagon with all who had taken refuge in it. ⁸⁵ There were about eight thousand men who either fell by the sword or were burned to death. ⁸⁶ Jonathan then left for Askalon where the inhabitants received him with great honour. ⁸⁷ From there, Jonathan and his men returned to Jerusalem laden with booty.

⁸⁸ When King Alexander heard what had happened, he bestowed new honours on Jonathan. ⁸⁹ He sent him a golden brooch which is usually given to the kinsmen of kings. He also gave him Ekron and all its territory as his possession.

11 ¹ But the king of Egypt assembled an army as numerous as the sands of the seashore, with many ships, for he intended to trick Alexander, take his kingdom and add it to his own. ² He went to Syria with words of peace, and the inhabitants of the cities opened their gates to him. They came out to meet him, as Alexander had ordered, ³ because Ptolemy was his father-in-law. But as soon as Ptolemy entered the cities, he stationed garrisons in them. ⁴ When he reached Azotus, he was shown the burnt temple of Dagon, Azotus and its surroundings in ruins, the scattered corpses that had been abandoned, and the charred remains of those whom Jonathan burned to death in the battle, piled in heaps along the king's way.

⁵ They recounted to King Ptolemy everything Jonathan had done. They were hoping that the king would disapprove, but he said



nothing. ⁶ Jonathan went with great pomp to Joppa to meet the king. They greeted each other and spent the night there. ⁷ On the following day, Jonathan accompanied the king as far as the Eleutherus river, and then returned to Jerusalem. ⁸ King Ptolemy for his part seized the coastal cities as far as Deleucia by the sea, for he had made plans against King Alexander. ⁹ He sent this message to Demetrius: "Come and let us forge an alliance. I will give you my daughter who was married to Alexander, and you will reign on the throne of your fathers. ¹⁰ The fact is I now regret having given him my daughter, for he has tried to kill me." ¹¹ He accused Alexander because he wanted to take his kingdom. ¹² Ptolemy took his daughter away and gave her to Demetrius. In this way, his enmity towards Alexander became public. ¹³ Ptolemy then entered Antioch and took for himself the crown of Asia. So he held two kingdoms: the kingdom of Egypt and the kingdom of Asia.

¹⁴ At that time, Alexander was in Cilicia trying to quell a rebellion. ¹⁵ When he heard what had happened, he returned to fight Ptolemy. Ptolemy went out to meet him in battle with a strong army, and Alexander was defeated. ¹⁶ As he fled to Arabia and sought refuge there, ¹⁷ Zabdiel the Arab cut his head off and sent it to Ptolemy. ¹⁸ But after three days, Ptolemy died, and immediately the Egyptian soldiers who guarded the fortified cities were killed by the local inhabitants. ¹⁹ In this way, Demetrius became king in the year one hundred and sixty-seven (167 B.C.).

²⁰ In those days, Jonathan assembled the Jewish army to attack the Citadel in Jerusalem which was occupied by the Syrians, and he prepared many siege engines. ²¹ But some wicked men who were traitors to their country, informed the king. ²² When the king heard of it, he became angry and immediately set out for Ptolemias. From there he wrote to Jonathan telling him to stop the siege and to come to see him as soon as possible. ²³ Jonathan received the message, but he ordered the siege to continue. Then he decided to risk himself, and went to see the king with the elders and priests of Israel. ²⁴ Bringing gold, silver, fine garments and other presents, they went before the king in Ptolemias and won him over. ²⁵ Some traitors accused them. ²⁶ But the king in the presence of all his Friends treated Jonathan as kings before had treated him. ²⁷ He confirmed Jonathan's office as high priest with all the privileges he already had. And he numbered him among his first Friends.

²⁸ Jonathan asked the king to exempt Judea and the three districts of Samaria from taxes,

and promised him three hundred talents in return. ²⁹ The king agreed and wrote to Jonathan regarding the matter in these terms: ³⁰ "King Demetrius to Jonathan, to his brothers and to the whole Jewish nation, peace. ³¹ We are sending you a copy of the letter we have written to our kinsman Lasthenes that you may know: ³² King Demetrius greets his kinsman Lasthenes. ³³ Because of their fidelity to us, we have decided to do favours to the Jewish nation, who are our friends and who act correctly with us. We wish to reward their fidelity. ³⁴ We confirm the possession of the territory of Judea and the three regions of Aphairema, Kydda and Ramathaim which have been annexed to Judea from Samaria, with all their dependencies. And to all who go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice, we grant exemption from the tax the king formerly received from them annually until now, from the produce of the soil and from the fruit of the trees.

³⁵ In the same way, they shall also be exempt from the other taxes due to us, especially from the taxes on the produce of the salt mines, and the gold crowns they formerly offered us. ³⁶ None of these privileges shall ever be annulled. ³⁷ Have a copy of this decree made and delivered to Jonathan to be displayed on the Holy Mountain in a conspicuous place."

³⁸ King Demetrius was able to place the kingdom under his rule and no one dared oppose him, so he dismissed his army, sent all the men back to their homes except the foreign troops he had recruited from the islands of the pagans. And this drew the hatred of all the troops who had served his fathers. ³⁹ Then Trypho, one of Alexander's former supporters, took advantage of the discontent of the army against Demetrius. He went to lamleku the Arab who was in charge of the education of Antiochus, the son of Alexander. ⁴⁰ Trypho persuaded him to hand the boy over to him in order to restore Antiochus to the throne of his father. He told him of all the decisions of Demetrius and the resentment his soldiers had against him. And Trypho spent a long time there.

⁴¹ Meanwhile, Jonathan asked King Demetrius to withdraw the troops from the Citadel in Jerusalem and to call back the garrisons from the fortresses, since they were always fighting Israel. ⁴² Demetrius answered him, "I will not only do this for you and for your people, but as soon as I have the occasion to do so. ⁴³ For the present, you would do well to send me reinforcements, for all my soldiers have deserted me."

⁴⁴ Jonathan sent off three thousand valiant men to Antioch: they presented themselves



before the king, and this made him very happy. ⁴⁵ About a hundred and twenty thousand rebel inhabitants gathered at the centre of the city intending to do away with the king. ⁴⁶ Demetrius took refuge in the palace while the residents occupied the streets of the city and began to attack. ⁴⁷ The king then called on the Jews to help him, and the Jews rallied round him. Then they spread out through the city and killed a hundred thousand men on that day. ⁴⁸ They burned the city, seized a great deal of plunder, and saved the king. ⁴⁹ The Jews took control of the city. And the inhabitants were so discouraged that they begged the king. ⁵⁰ "Forgive us and stop the Jews from maltreating us and the city."

⁵¹ They threw down their arms and made peace. With this, the Jews merited the admiration of the king and they became famous throughout the kingdom. Then they returned to Jerusalem laden with booty. ⁵² But when Demetrius felt secure on his throne and the land was in peace, ⁵³ he forgot his promises and changed his attitude towards Jonathan. He did not treat him with the same kindness as he had done before, but began to treat him very harshly.

⁵⁴ After this Trypho came back with Antiochus who was still a boy. He was proclaimed and crowned king, ⁵⁵ and the troops discharged by Demetrius rallied to him and fought against Demetrius who had to flee. ⁵⁶ Trypho seized the elephants and occupied Antioch.

⁵⁷ Then the young Antiochus sent Jonathan this letter: "I confirm your office as High Priest and make you governor of four districts, and I include you among the Friends of the King." ⁵⁸ He sent him a service of gold plate, and granted him the right to drink from gold vessels and to be in purple and wear the golden brooch. ⁵⁹ He also appointed Jonathan's brother Simon as general from the Ladder of Tyre to the frontiers of Egypt.

⁶⁰ Jonathan then began to make rounds of the region and the cities on the western side of the Euphrates. The whole Syrian army came to his aid. He came to Askalon and the inhabitants of that city went out to receive him with full honours. ⁶¹ From there he went to Gaza, but the people there closed their gates on him. So Jonathan laid siege to it and burned the suburbs of the city, plundering everything. ⁶² Then the people of Gaza sought peace, and he made peace with them. But he took the sons of their elders as hostages and sent them away to Jerusalem. Then he travelled through the province until he reached Damascus. ⁶³ Jonathan then received news that the generals of Demetrius were in Kadesh of Galilee with a

great army and planned to capture him. ⁶⁴ Leaving his brother Simon in Judea, he went out to meet them in battle. ⁶⁵ Simon encamped against Beth-zur and laid siege to it for many days. ⁶⁶ The inhabitants sued for peace, which he granted them. But he expelled them from the city and occupied it, and stationed a garrison there.

⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Jonathan encamped with his army by the waters of Gennesaret; then early in the morning, they went to the plain of Hazor. ⁶⁸ The army of the pagans went out to confront them on the plain, after laying an ambush for him in the mountains. ⁶⁹ As they advanced directly towards the Jews, the men in ambush broke cover and began to attack. ⁷⁰ The men of Jonathan's side fled. And only Mattathias, the son of Absalom, and Judas, the son of Chalphi, the leaders of his army remained with him. ⁷¹ At this, Jonathan tore his garments, put dust on his head, then prayed. ⁷² Then he faced his attackers, defeated them and put them to flight.

⁷³ So the troops who had abandoned him came back to his side, and altogether they pursued the enemies as far as Kadesh where the enemy camp was, and there they, too, pitched camp. ⁷⁴ About three thousand pagans perished that day. Then Jonathan returned to Jerusalem.

Jonathan renews the alliances with the Spartans and Romans

12 ¹ Jonathan saw that circumstances were to his advantage. So he chose men and sent them to Rome to confirm and renew the alliance of friendship with the Romans. ² He also sent letters to the Spartans and to other places for this same purpose. ³ Those who went to Rome entered the Senate and delivered this message: "The High Priest Jonathan and the Jewish nation have sent us to renew with you the friendship and alliance that formerly united us." ⁴ The Senate gave them letters of recommendation to the authorities of each region, enabling them to journey safely back to the land of Judah.

⁵ This is the copy of the letter Jonathan wrote to the Spartans: ⁶ "Jonathan, High Priest, the senate of the nation, the priests and the whole country of the Jews, to the people of Sparta, their brothers: peace. ⁷ In the past, our high priest Onias received from Areios, your king, a letter stating that you are indeed our brothers, as the enclosed copy attests. ⁸ Onias received the envoy with great honour and accepted the letter which clearly spoke of friendship and alliance.

⁹ Though we are not in need, for we have



our consolation in our Sacred Books,¹⁰ we have decided to send ambassadors to you to renew our fraternal bonds and friendship in order not to become strangers to you, for it has been a long time since you wrote us.

¹¹ For our part, we constantly remember you in all circumstances, on special days, in the sacrifices we offer, as well as in our prayers; for it is but right and proper to remember our brothers,¹² and greatly rejoice at your prosperity and fame.¹³ For our part, we have been involved in many trials, in misery and wars, for neighbouring kings have attacked us.¹⁴ However we did not want to be a burden to you or to the rest of our allies and friends during these wars,¹⁵ for our help comes from Heaven. Finally we have been freed from our enemies who have been humbled.

¹⁶ So we have chosen Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Antipater, son of Jason, and sent them to the Romans to renew our former friendship and alliance with them.¹⁷ We have also ordered them to go to you, greet you and deliver this letter to you on our behalf, with which we wish to renew our alliance.¹⁸ We shall be glad to receive a favourable response."

¹⁹ This is a copy of the letter which Onias had received:²⁰ "Areios, king of the Spartans, to Onias the High Priest.²¹ We have found in one of our documents that the Spartans and the Jews are brothers, for both are of the race of Abraham.²² Now that we have come to know this, we shall be grateful if you send us news of your welfare.²³ And we say this to you: our livestock and our possessions are yours, and similarly all that are yours are ours. This is what we have instructed our envoys to say to you."

²⁴ Jonathan learned that the generals of Demetrius had come to attack him with a larger army than before.²⁵ So he left Jerusalem at once and went to face them in the country of Hamath, so as not to give them time to invade his own land.²⁶ He sent spies to their camp, and on their return, they told him that the enemy planned to attack them during the night.

²⁷ So, at sunset, Jonathan ordered his men to keep watch throughout the night with their weapons at hand, ready to fight. And he posted guards around the camp.²⁸ When the enemies learned that Jonathan was keeping watch with his troops and ready for battle, they were

afraid and discouraged; for this reason, they kindled fires in their camp and fled.²⁹ But neither Jonathan nor his army knew of their withdrawal until morning, for they saw the fires burning the whole night.³⁰ Jonathan pursued them but was not able to catch up with them, for they had crossed the Eleutherus river.

³¹ So Jonathan went back against the Arabs called Zabadeans, defeated them and plundered them.³² After breaking camp, he went to Damascus and travelled throughout the region. Meanwhile,³³ Simon had also set out and gone as far as Askalon and the neighbouring fortresses. He then proceeded to Joppa and occupied it,³⁴ for he had heard that the inhabitants of that city planned to hand the Citadel over to the supporters of Demetrius. And he stationed a garrison there to hold it.

³⁵ On returning, Jonathan summoned the elders of the people. The assembly decided to build fortresses in Judea,³⁶ to make the walls of Jerusalem still higher, and to erect a barrier between the citadel and the city, to separate it from the city and to isolate it and prevent its defenders from going out to buy or sell.

³⁷ They also held an assembly to rebuild the city. Part of the wall over rushing stream had fallen and they built up a new wall they called Chapthenatha.³⁸ Simon rebuilt Adida in the Shephelah, fortified it and erected barred gates in it.

³⁹ Trypho wanted to reign in Asia, and to do away with King Antiochus in order to be king himself.⁴⁰ But he feared that Jonathan might not allow him to do so, and might even come to attack him. He set out and came to Bethshan.⁴¹ At once Jonathan went out to meet him with forty thousand men, and he, too, came to Bethshan.

Jonathan is taken by deceit

+ ⁴² When Trypho saw that Jonathan had come with a large army, he was afraid to begin the assault.⁴³ So he received Jonathan with honour, presented him to all his Friends, gave him gifts, and instructed his Friends and his troops to obey Jonathan as

+ After Judas and two of his brothers, Jonathan will die in the liberation war. Simon, the last of the brothers will replace him.

The book continues with the story of Simon's rule and deeds until the year 134 B.C. when he is murdered.

Simon will be successful in his wars. He is very clever in taking advantage of the rivalries among the various kings struggling to settle in the kingdom of Persia. His victories and the peace which he achieved will dampen the enthusiasm for the faith which had started the liberation wars. Si-



they obeyed him. ⁴⁴ Then he asked Jonathan, "Why have you bothered to come with so many men? Are we perhaps enemies?" ⁴⁵ Send them back to their homes and remain here with some of them. Then you will come with me to the city of Ptolemais because I wish to hand it over to you, as well as the other fortresses and to place the rest of the troops and their officers at your disposal. Then, I will return home, for I have come only for this."

⁴⁶ Jonathan believed him and did as Trypho had asked him. He dismissed his men who then returned to the land of Judea, ⁴⁷ and three thousand men remained with him. Of these, he left two thousand in Galilee and only a thousand accompanied him. ⁴⁸ But as soon as they had entered Ptolemais, the inhabitants closed the gates. They seized him and killed all who had come with him.

⁴⁹ Trypho sent troops and cavalry to Galilee and to the Great Plain to wipe out all of Jonathan's men. ⁵⁰ On receiving the news that Jonathan and his companions had been seized and killed, his soldiers encouraged one another and prepared to face their pursuers. ⁵¹ When their enemy saw them ready to fight for their lives, they turned back. ⁵² So the men of Jonathan reached the land of Judea safe and sound. They wept for Jonathan and his companions, and all Israel was in mourning. And there was great fear among the Israelites. ⁵³ Then all the neighbouring nations planned to destroy them on seeing that they were now without leader or ally. And the

pagans said: "This is now the opportunity to wipe out the remembrance of them from among men."

Simon succeeds Jonathan

13 ¹ Simon heard that Trypho had assembled a great army to invade Judea and devastate it. ² As the people were frightened and apprehensive, he went up to Jerusalem. ³ There he called the people together and encouraged them with this exhortation:

"All of you know what I, my brothers, and the family of my father, have done for the laws and for the Holy Place. You also know the wars and the hardships we endured. ⁴ All my brothers died for Israel and now I alone am left. ⁵ God forbid that I should seek my own safety when things go wrong! For my life is not of more worth than the lives of my brothers. Now that all the nations have united in their hatred in order to destroy us, ⁶ I will defend my nation and the Holy Place, your wives and your children."

⁷ All were encouraged with these words ⁸ and they exclaimed in a loud voice: "Be our leader in place of Judas and your brother Jonathan. ⁹ Lead us in the war and we will obey your commands."

¹⁰ So Simon assembled all the men able to fight and hastened to finish building the walls of Jerusalem, which was fortified on all sides. ¹¹ Then he sent Jonathan, son of Absalom, with a strong army to Joppa. They drove out those who occupied it and remained there.

¹² Meanwhile, Trypho left Ptolemais with a large army to invade Judea, taking with him Jonathan as prisoner. ¹³ Simon encamped in Adida facing the plain. ¹⁴ But when Trypho learned that Simon had taken command in place of his brother Jonathan and was prepared to fight him, he sent some envoys to him with this message: ¹⁵ "We have in our custody your brother Jonathan because of the money he owes to the royal treasury for the offices he held. ¹⁶ So, send a hundred talents of silver and two of his sons as hostages lest he slip away when we release him, and come back against us. Then we shall let him go."

¹⁷ Simon knew that Trypho was deceiving

3. 1 K 19, 10; 19, 4

11. 11, 70; 12, 23

mon, the liberator, becomes Simon the dictator at the end of a process often repeated in history. To that effect, see 14:41-47; 15:32.

When Jesus comes one hundred and fifty years later, Simon's descendants will be the chief priests, the most materialistic group among the Jews (the Sadducees).

Note what is briefly mentioned in 13:41-42 and in 15:3. After four centuries of dependence, the Jews become a nation once again.

This new and exalting experience explains why, a century and a half later, in Jesus' days, they could not stand Roman domination.



him, but he still sent for the money and the boys so as not to draw upon himself the anger of the people of Israel who might say: ¹⁸ "They killed Jonathan because Simon refused to send Trypho the money and the boys." ¹⁹ He therefore sent the boys and the hundred talents, but Trypho broke his word and did not set Jonathan free.

²⁰ After this, Trypho advanced to invade Judea and plunder it. He moved along the way to Adora, but Simon and his army kept confronting him wherever he went. ²¹ Then the men in the Citadel sent messengers to Trypho urging him to come at once to their rescue by way of the desert and to bring them food.

²² Trypho prepared his entire cavalry to go, but it snowed so heavily that night that he was not able to go. So he left for Gilead ²³ and when he approached Baskama, he killed Jonathan and buried him there. ²⁴ Then Trypho returned to his own land. ²⁵ Simon sent men to look for the remains of Jonathan, his brother, and he buried him in Modein, the city of their fathers. ²⁶ All Israel deeply mourned and wept for Jonathan for many days.

²⁷ Simon built a monument over the tomb of his fathers and brothers, high enough to be seen even from afar, with the back and front covered with marble. ²⁸ He erected seven pyramids facing each other, for his father and mother and his four brothers. ²⁹ He surrounded the pyramids with great columns, and he had trophies of arms carved upon the columns as a lasting remembrance; and beside the armour sculptured ships were to be seen by all who sailed the sea. ³⁰ This is the tomb he constructed in Modein and it is still there today.

³¹ Trypho treated the young king Antiochus in bad faith, and put him to death. ³² He then made himself king in his place, put on the crown of Asia and caused great havoc in the country.

³³ Now Simon rebuilt the fortresses of Judea, surrounded them with high towers and great walls with barred gates, and stored food in them.

³⁴ Simon chose men whom he sent to King Demetrius in his attempt to obtain tax exemption for the region, on the grounds that all that Trypho did was to plunder. ³⁵ King Demetrius responded favourably to his request and wrote to him as follows,

³⁶ "King Demetrius greets Simon, High Priest and Friend of the King, the elders and the Jewish nation. ³⁷ We have received the golden crowns and the palm you have sent us and we are disposed to make with you a last-

ing peace, and to write to the officials to grant you remission from your debts. ³⁸ All our concessions in your favour are definitive and the fortresses you have built are yours.

³⁹ Moreover, we pardon all errors and offenses committed to this day, as well as the crown tax you owe. From now on, any other tax that used to be paid in Jerusalem shall no longer be collected. ⁴⁰ If any of your men are qualified to enlist in our army, they can do so. And let peace reign between us."

⁴¹ So, in the year one hundred and seventy (170 B.C.), Israel became free from the yoke of the pagans. ⁴² They began to write in their documents and contracts, "In the first year of Simon, high priest, general and leader of the Jews."

⁴³ In those days, Simon encamped against Gazard and surrounded it with his army. He constructed a mobile tower, brought it up to the city, attacked and occupied one tower. ⁴⁴ Then the men of the mobile tower entered the city, causing great dismay.

⁴⁵ The inhabitants with their wives and children went up on the walls, tore their garments cried out in a loud voice to Simon and sought peace. ⁴⁶ They said to him, "Treat us not as our wickedness deserves, but according to your mercy." ⁴⁷ Simon was reconciled with them and did not treat them according to the rigor of war. But he expelled them from the city and purified the houses where idols were kept. He then entered the city singing hymns of thanksgiving.

⁴⁸ After cleansing it from all its impurity, he settled in it men who observed the Law. He fortified it and built a house there for himself.

⁴⁹ The men who occupied the Citadel in Jerusalem could no longer come out or go into Jewish territory to buy or sell. So they were desperately in need of food, many of them dying of hunger. ⁵⁰ They begged Simon for peace, and he granted it to them. But he expelled them from there and cleansed the Citadel from all that reminded them of the presence of the pagans. ⁵¹ On the twenty-third day of the second month of the year one hundred and seventy-one (171 B.C.), the Jews entered it with songs and palm branches to the accompaniment of zithers, cymbals and harps, and with hymns and songs, for a great plague had been crushed and removed from Israel. ⁵² Simon decreed that this day be celebrated as a day of annual rejoicing. He strengthened the fortifications of the Temple hill by the side of the military Citadel, and dwelt there with his men.

⁵³ John, son of Simon, had come to man-



hood, so his father appointed him general in command of all the troops, and John lived in Gazara.

Simon rules victoriously over Judah

14 ¹ In the year one hundred and seventy-two, King Demetrius assembled his army and marched into Media to look for help in order to fight Trypho. ² Arsaces, king of Persia and Media, heard that Demetrius had entered his territory, so he sent one of his generals to capture him alive. ³ The general went and defeated the army of Demetrius, seized him and brought him to Arsaces, who put him in prison.

⁴ Judea had peace as long as Simon lived. He worked for the well-being of his country; his rule pleased the people, and he enjoyed much renown as long as he lived. ⁵ To add to his glory, he took Joppa and made it a harbour, opening a way to communicate with the islands of the sea. ⁶ He extended the frontiers of his land and was lord of his nation. ⁷ He brought back many captives, conquered Gazard, Beth-zur and the Citadel and cast out everything pagan that was in it. No one was able to resist him.

⁸ The inhabitants tilled their fields in peace; the land gave its grain and the trees their fruit. ⁹ The elders sat at ease in the squares and talked of their welfare, while the young men wore finery and armour. ¹⁰ He supplied the cities with food and made them into strongholds, until his fame spread out to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ He established peace in the land and Israel knew great joy. ¹² Each one sat under the shade of his vine and his fig tree, with no one to disturb him. ¹³ There was no one in the land to fight them, for the kings had been defeated. ¹⁴ He raised up the humble among his people, he observed the Law and cleared out the renegades and the wicked. ¹⁵ He restored the splendour of the Temple and increased the number of its sacred vessels.

¹⁶ When the news of Jonathan's death reached Rome and Sparta, these people, too, were deeply grieved. ¹⁷ But as soon as they heard that his brother Simon had succeeded him as High Priest and was in command of the country and the cities in it, ¹⁸ they wrote to him on bronze sheets to renew the alliance and friendship they had made with his brothers Judas and Jonathan.

¹⁹ The letter was read in Jerusalem before the whole assembly. ²⁰ This is a copy of the letter sent by the Spartans,

"The leaders and the people of Sparta to Si-

mon, High Priest, and to the elders, to the priests and to all the Jewish people, their brothers: greetings. ²¹ The envoys you sent to our people informed us of the successes and prosperity of your nation. We rejoiced at their coming. ²² We have recorded their declaration in our public acts as follows: 'Numenius, son of Antiochus, and Antipater, son of Jason ambassadors of the Jews—have come to renew their relationship with us.' ²³ It has been a pleasure for the people to receive them with honour and deposit a copy of their statement in the public archives as a remembrance for the people of Sparta.' And they made a copy of all this for the High Priest Simon."

²⁴ After this, Simon sent Numenius to Rome with a large gold shield weighing a thousand minas to confirm their alliance with the Romans.

²⁵ When the people came to know these events, they said, "What favour can we do for Simon and his sons?" ²⁶ It was he and his brothers and the family of their fathers who strengthened the resistance; they have fought the enemies of Israel and restored its freedom." ²⁷ So they engraved an inscription on bronze sheets and set it up on pillars on Mount Zion. This is a copy of the text:

"On the eighteenth of the month Elul in the year one hundred and seventy-two, the third year of Simon, the High Priest, ²⁸ in the grand assembly of the priests of Israel, the leaders of the nation and the elders of the people, the following was proclaimed:

²⁹ "During the frequent wars for freedom in our land, Simon, the son of Mattathias, a priest from the family of Joarib, and his brothers risked their lives and stood up against the enemies of their nation to preserve the Holy Place and the Law, and brought eternal glory to their nation. ³⁰ Jonathan unified the nation, and became the High Priest, and then rested with his fathers. ³¹ The enemies of the Jews then planned to invade their land in order to destroy their Holy Place. ³² So Simon arose to fight for his nation. He spent much of his own wealth to procure arms and to pay the salary of the soldiers of his nation.

³³ He fortified the cities of Judah and Bethzur on the frontiers of Judea, where the enemy arsenal had been and stationed a Jewish garrison there. ³⁴ He also fortified Joppa by the sea, and Gazara on the borders of Azotus, which was formerly inhabited by enemies, and established Jewish colonies there, providing them with all they needed. ³⁵ The people saw Simon's faith and the glory he had resolved to



win for his nation. They made him their commander and High Priest because of the services he rendered, the justice and faithfulness he showed to his nation, and because he sought in every way to increase the honour of his people.

³⁶ In his days, the Jews managed to root out the pagans from their land, especially from the city of David, Jerusalem, where they had built a Citadel from which they went out to profane the surroundings of the temple and to violate its holiness. ³⁷ He settled Jewish soldiers in it and fortified it for the security of the region and the city, and built the walls of Jerusalem higher. ³⁸ And for this, King Demetrius confirmed him in his office as High Priest, ³⁹ made him one of his Friends and bestowed high honours on him, ⁴⁰ for he had heard that the Romans had considered the Jews their friends, allies and brothers, and had received Simon's envoy with honour.

Simon: high priest and dictator

⁴¹ The king also took into account that the Jews and the priests had agreed that Simon be their leader and High Priest until a prophet worthy of trust appeared.

⁴² They wanted him to be their general and take charge of the Holy Place, and to appoint men to supervise the works, to administer the country, the army and the fortresses.

⁴³ They also wanted everyone to obey him, that all documents of the nation bear his name and that he be clothed in purple and wear golden ornaments.

⁴⁴ None of the people or of the priests shall be allowed to act contrary to these provisions or contradict his orders, or convene a public assembly without his consent, or be clothed in purple, or wear the golden brooch.

⁴⁵ Whoever opposes these decisions or violates any of these shall be liable to punishment."

⁴⁶ All the people agreed to grant Simon the right to act in accordance with these provisions. ⁴⁷ And Simon

accepted and agreed to assume the office of High Priest and to be the general and leader of the Jews and of the priests, and to preside over all.

⁴⁸ They decided that this decree be engraved on bronze sheets and set up in a conspicuous place in the sacred enclosure, ⁴⁹ and that copies be deposited in the Temple treasury and made available to Simon and his sons.

15 ¹ Antiochus, son of King Demetrius, sent from the islands of the sea to Simon, the High Priest and leader of the Jews, and to the whole nation, ² the following letter: "King Antiochus to Simon, high priest and leader, and to the Jewish nation: peace!

³ Since wicked men have seized the kingdom of our fathers, I now intend to recover it and to re-establish it as it was before. I have gathered a very large army and have equipped warships ⁴ to make a landing in the country and take revenge on those who devastated our land and laid waste many cities in my kingdom. Now, therefore, ⁵ I confirm in your regard all the tax exemptions and all other privileges granted you by my royal predecessors. ⁶ I authorize you to mint your own coinage for your nation. ⁷ I accept the autonomy of Jerusalem and the Holy Place; all the arms you have manufactured as well as the fortresses you have constructed and those you have occupied are yours. ⁸ From this day on, I cancel all debts to the king and everything you may owe in the future. ⁹ And when I have taken possession of my kingdom, I shall bestow great honours on you, your nation and on the Temple, making you famous throughout all the earth."

¹⁰ In the year one hundred and seventy-four, Antiochus marched out to the land of his fathers, and all the troops rallied to him, so that only a few remained with Trypho. ¹¹ Antiochus pursued him and Trypho took refuge in Dor on the coast. ¹² Trypho knew how critical the situation had become for him and that his army had deserted him. ¹³ Antiochus encamped before Dor with a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers and eight thousand horsemen. ¹⁴ And he surrounded the city while the ships attacked from the sea: the city was completely surrounded by land and sea, and no one could go in or come out.

¹⁵ Then Numenius and his companions arrived from Rome, carrying letters addressed to the kings and to the nations in the following



terms: ¹⁶ "Lucius, consul of the Romans, to King Ptolemy: peace! ¹⁷ The Jewish people sent by the High Priest Simon and by the Jewish people have come to us as our friends and allies to renew our friendship and alliance of old.

¹⁸ They have brought us a gold shield weighing a thousand minas. ¹⁹ It is our desire to write to the kings and the peoples that they should not harm the Israelites nor injure them or their cities or their land, nor ally themselves with their aggressors. ²⁰ We have accepted with pleasure the shield that the Jews sent us. ²¹ Now, if some wicked Jews who have fled from their land are in your country, hand them over to the High Priest Simon that he may punish them according to their Law."

²² The same letter was sent to King Demetrius, to Attalus, Ariarathes and Arsaces, ²³ and to all the nations, to Sampsames, the Spartans, Delos, Myndos, Sicyon, Caria, Samos, Pamphylia, Lycia, Halicarnassus, Rhodes, Phaselis, Cos, Side, Aradus, Gortyna, Cnidus, Cyprus and Cyrene. ²⁴ They also sent copies of these letters to the High Priest Simon.

War with the Syrians renewed

²⁵ King Antiochus encamped before Dor, in the new district, continually sending his battalions against it and constructing siege engines. He kept Trypho shut in and prevented him from going out or in. ²⁶ Simon sent him two thousand picked men to help him in the fight, with silver, gold and plenty of equipment. ²⁷ But Antiochus did not accept them; instead, he annulled the concessions he had granted to Simon and declared him his enemy. ²⁸ He sent Athenobius, one of his Friends, to him in order to meet him and say to him: "You have occupied Joppa, Gazara and the Citadel of Judea which are cities of my kingdom. ²⁹ You have laid waste their territory and done great damage in the land, and have seized many towns in my kingdom.

³⁰ Restore, then, the cities you have seized and the taxes of the places you now occupy beyond the borders of Judea. ³¹ Or pay me five hundred talents of silver as compensation for the damage you have caused and another five hundred talents for the taxes of the cities. If not, then I shall declare war against you."

³² Athenobius, the Friend of the king, arrived in Jerusalem and when he saw the magnificence of Simon, his plates of gold and silver and the pomp that surrounded him, he was amazed. But he delivered the king's message. ³³ Simon answered him, "We have not occupied any foreign land nor seized any foreign property: this is the inheritance of our

fathers. It was our enemies who seized this for some time, ³⁴ but now that we have a favourable opportunity, we are only recovering the inheritance of our fathers.

³⁵ Joppa and Gazara, which you claim, did great harm to our people and laid waste our land; but we are prepared to give you a hundred talents for them."

Athenobius did not say anything, ³⁶ but went back to the king very angry and reported to him Simon's reply. He also told him of Simon's magnificence and everything he had seen. So the king became furious.

³⁷ Meanwhile, Trypho fled to Orthosia on a ship. ³⁸ The king appointed Cendebeus as general and gave him part of the troops and the horsemen. ³⁹ He ordered him to encamp against Judea, rebuild Kedron and fortify its gates and make war on the people. The king then went on pursuing Trypho. ⁴⁰ Cendebeus arrived at Jamnia and began to disturb the people. He invaded Judea, imprisoned some people and put them to death. ⁴¹ He fortified Kedron, stationed horsemen and troops there to make sorties and to patrol the roads to Judea, as the king had commanded him.

Simon is murdered

16 ¹ At that time, John went up from Gazara to relate to his father what Cendebeus was doing. ² So, Simon called his two elder sons, John and Judas, and said to them: "I and my brothers and the family of my father have fought the enemies of Israel from our youth until today. And many times, we were able to liberate Israel. ³ But now I am old, while you – thanks be to Heaven – are already mature men. Take my place and my brother's, and go out to fight for our country. May Heaven's help be with you!"

⁴ Then he chose a thousand men and horsemen from the country whom he sent against Cendebeus. And they spent the night in Modein. ⁵ They arose early in the morning and advanced into the plain and saw what a large army, both infantry and cavalry, was coming to meet them.

A stream lay between them, ⁶ and John with his troops drew up against the enemies. His troops were afraid to cross the stream, so he crossed over first. On seeing this, his men crossed after him. ⁷ He divided his army into two groups and set the horsemen in the center for the enemy's cavalry was very numerous.

⁸ They sounded the trumpets, and Cendebeus and his army were defeated. Many of them fell, and those who remained fled to the fortress. ⁹ Judas, the brother of John, fell wounded, but John pursued the enemies until



Cendebeus reached Kedron which he had fortified. ¹⁰ The enemy also went to take refuge in the towers in the fields of Azotus, but John burned these down. About two thousand of the enemy perished. And after this, John returned safely to Judea.

¹¹ Ptolemy, son of Abubos, had become general in command of the plain of Jericho. He had much silver and gold, ¹² besides being the High Priest's son-in-law. ¹³ He became too ambitious and thought of becoming the leader of his nation. So he looked for ways to do away with Simon and his sons. ¹⁴ Simon was then making the rounds of the cities of Judea and attending to their administration. In the eleventh month called Shebat, in the year one hundred and thirty-four (134 B.C.), Simon came to Jericho with his two sons, Mattathias and Judas. ¹⁵ The son of Abubos received them treacherously into the small fortress called Dock which he had built. He gave them a grand banquet, but had set men in hiding. ¹⁶ When Simon and his sons were drunk, Ptolemy and his men reached for their weapons and rushed on Simon in the midst of the banquet. They

killed him with his two sons and some of his servants. ¹⁷ With this, Ptolemy committed a great act of treachery, repaying evil for good.

¹⁸ Ptolemy then made haste to send a letter to the king to inform him of what had happened, asking Antiochus to help him in handing over to him the cities and the country. ¹⁹ He also sent other men to Gazara in order to kill John, and asked the commanders of the Jewish troops in a letter to defect to him, promising them silver, gold and gifts. ²⁰ He then sent others to seize Jerusalem and the Temple hill.

²¹ But a man ran and reached Gazara before them, informing John that his father and brothers had been killed. And he added, "He has also sent some people to kill you." ²² John was shocked by the news. So he arrested the men who had been sent to kill him and put them to death, for he knew that they had come with this purpose.

²³ The rest of the deeds of John, his battles, his exploits, the walls he built and all his other achievements ²⁴ are written in the annals of his pontificate from the day he succeeded his father as High Priest.

2. MACCABEES



The second book of Maccabees is not the continuation of the first book.

Whereas 1 Maccabees presents the history of the Jewish people during those critical years in a global and balanced way, 2 Maccabees focuses on a series of facts – and at times, commentaries and legends – allowing it to emphasize the hopes and suffering of the persecuted believers. This second book, less interesting than the first for historians, is, nevertheless, extremely important in the Bible because of its profound vision of suffering and death and also of God's justice. This book – as Daniel and the Wisdom books – is the first in the Bible to state the belief in the resurrection of the dead.



First letter to the Jews in Egypt

1 Greetings to our brothers, the Jews in Egypt, from their brothers, the Jews in Jerusalem and in the region of Judea – may you have peace and happiness. ² May God fill you with every good and remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, his faithful servants. ³ May he give you all a heart to worship him and to fulfil his will with generosity and a well-disposed spirit. ⁴ May he incline your hearts to listen to his law and precepts, and give you peace. ⁵ May he hear your prayers and be reconciled with you, and not abandon you in time of misfortune. ⁶ This is what we now pray for you.

⁷ In the year one hundred and seventy-nine, when Demetrius was king, we Jews wrote to you during the most critical moment of trials that we had to endure during those years. And we said to you: "Jason and his associates have betrayed the cause of the Holy Land and of the Kingdom. ⁸ They have burned the Temple gateway and shed innocent blood."

But we prayed to the Lord and were heard. And now we have just offered a sacrifice with wheat flour, lighted the lamps again and set out the loaves of bread. ⁹ So we write to you again that you may celebrate the Feast of Tents in the month of Chislew in this year one hundred and eighty-eight.

Second letter to the Jews in Egypt

¹⁰ The inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea, their senators and Judas, to Aristobulus, teacher of King Ptolemy, belonging to the family of the anointed priests, and to the Jews in Egypt: greetings and prosperity

¹¹ Having been saved by God from great

dangers, we give him thanks because he came to our help against the king himself. ¹² God drove out those who fought against the Holy City; ¹³ their leader left for Persia with a seemingly invincible army, but the priests of the goddess Nanea laid a trap for them and killed them in her temple.

¹⁴ Antiochus and his friends came to that place under the pretext of marrying the goddess, but in reality they wanted to seize its great treasures as a dowry. ¹⁵ The priests of Nanea had set out the treasures and Antiochus entered the sacred enclosure with a few men. But as soon as Antiochus had entered, they closed the temple ¹⁶ and opened a secret door in the ceiling. Then they threw stones down and crushed the leader and his men. They then dismembered the bodies, cut off their heads and threw them to those outside. ¹⁷ In all these things, may our God be blessed for he has handed over the impious to death.

¹⁸ As we are about to celebrate the purification of the Temple on the twenty-fifth day of Chislew, it seems good to us to inform you, so that you, too, may celebrate the Feast of Tents and remember the fire that appeared when Nehemiah, who built the Temple and the altar, offered sacrifices. ¹⁹ For when our fathers were deported to Persia, the devout priest of the time took some of the fire from the altar and hid it secretly in the hollow of a dry well, with such caution that the place remained unknown to everyone.

²⁰ Many years had passed, when in God's own time Nehemiah, who was commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to look for it. ²¹ But they reported that they did not find the fire but instead a thick liquid. So Nehemiah ordered them to draw it out and bring it to him.

When the sacrifice had been prepared on the altar, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and the victims placed on it. ²² They did so and after some time the sun which had previously been clouded over, shone. At once such a great fire blazed up that all were astonished.

3. Dt 29, 3; Jer 24, 7	9. 10, 1; 10, 6	13. 1 Mac 6	18. 1 Mac 4, 36
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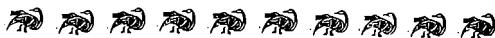
^o This part of the first letter could be a model for wishing someone a "Happy New Year."

The Jews of Palestine write this letter after having overcome their oppressors. When they are about to celebrate the Purification of the Temple retrieved from the enemy forces, they inform the Jewish communities dispersed in Egypt about it.

The letter deals with several rumors. We single out the legend according to which the Ark (which had in fact been destroyed in the fall of

Jerusalem in 587) had been saved and hidden. This was to express the great faith of the people: none of the things that God had done in the time of their fathers could be lost.

Note 2:13-15. This fact, not totally reliable, completes what we read in 1 Chr 29:29-30; 1 Chr 9:29; 16:11... Ezra 7:25-26; Neh 8; regarding the formation of the nucleus of the Bible, a task which was achieved not by Nehemiah, but rather by Ezra.



²³ While the sacrifice was being consumed, the priests together with all those present prayed. Jonathan led while Nehemiah and the rest responded. ²⁴ This was their prayer:

"Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, dreadful and strong, just and merciful, you are the only good king, ²⁵ you alone are generous, just, all-powerful and eternal. You who save Israel from many evils, who chose our fathers and sanctified them, ²⁶ accept this sacrifice on behalf of all your people Israel. Protect your heritage and sanctify it.

²⁷ Gather our scattered people together, set free those held in slavery among the nations, turn your eyes on those who are despised and crushed; so the pagans may know that you are our God. ²⁸ Afflict those who oppress us, who insult and treat us with contempt. ²⁹ Plant your people in your holy place, as Moses said."

³⁰ The priests sang the hymns, ³¹ and when the sacrifice was all consumed, Nehemiah ordered that the remaining liquid be poured over some large stones. ³² This was done, and a flame flared up but it was outshone by the fire from the altar. ³³ This matter became known, and it was reported to the king of the Persians that the liquid with which Nehemiah and his companions had burned the sacrifice was found in the place where the exiled priests had hidden the fire. ³⁴ So, after verifying the facts, the king ordered that a fence be built to enclose the place and decreed that it be a sacred place.

³⁵ The king gave some of that liquid to those who enjoyed his favour, and they gave him gifts in return. ³⁶ Nehemiah and his companions called the place "Nephtar" which means "purification" but afterwards, many called it "Naphtha."

2 ¹ It is found in the archives that the prophet Jeremiah ordered the exiles to take the fire, as we have already said. ² After giving them the Law, he exhorted them not to forget the precepts of God and not to let themselves be dazzled by the idols of silver and gold with all their adornment. ³ He spoke to them of many similar things, admonishing them never to lose their love for the Law.

Popular beliefs

⁴ It is also said in these writings of the past that the prophet Jeremiah fulfilling orders from Heaven, commanded that the ark of the Covenant with its tent be brought with him. And

he went to the mountain which Moses had climbed before and from where he had seen the promised land. ⁵ There Jeremiah found a cave; and he brought in the ark, the tent that covered it and the altar of incense. Then, he closed up the entrance with stones

⁶ Some of those who followed him returned to mark out the way, but they could not find it anymore.

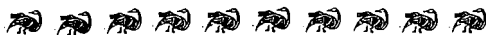
⁷ When Jeremiah learned this, he reproached them and said, "This place is to remain hidden until God has compassion on his scattered people and gathers them together. ⁸ Then the Lord will reveal these things again and his Glory shall appear through the cloud as it appeared in the time of Moses and when Solomon asked God to come and consecrate his house."

⁹ It was also reported in these archives how Solomon, inspired by his wisdom, offered the sacrifice of the dedication and completion of the Temple. ¹⁰ And as fire had come down from heaven through the prayer of Moses to consume the offerings and the sacrificial victim, so through the prayer of Solomon, fire also came down from heaven and burned up the holocausts. ¹¹ And what Moses had said was fulfilled: *Inasmuch as the sin-offering was not eaten, the fire consumed it.* ¹² Solomon celebrated the feast, too, for eight days.

¹³ This also can be read in the archives and in the Memories of Nehemiah's time. It is recounted there that Nehemiah founded a library and collected the books dealing with the kings and the prophets, the writings of David and the letters of the kings about offerings.

¹⁴ In the same way, Judas has just gathered all the books dispersed on account of the war we suffered, and they are now in our possession. ¹⁵ So, if you need any of them, send someone to get them for you.

¹⁶ We said we are now about to celebrate the feast of the purification of the Temple; you will do well to celebrate these feast days also, ¹⁷ for God has saved all his people and returned to everyone his own land. He let us recover the kingdom, the Temple, and the worship rendered to him in that Temple, ¹⁸ as is commanded in his Law. God himself, as we do



hope, will soon have mercy on us and gather us together from everywhere to the Holy Place, since he has rescued us from great evils and has purified this Place.

Author's preface

¹⁹ The story of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers has been written by Jason of Cyrene. He narrated the purification of the Temple of the Most High, the dedication of the altar, ²⁰ the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator, ²¹ and the heavenly manifestations in favour of those who fought bravely and gloriously for Judaism. Although they were few in number, they liberated the whole land and put to flight hordes of foreigners. ²² They regained the Temple renowned throughout the world, liberated the city and re-established the laws which were nearly abolished, for the Lord was gracious to them in his great kindness. ²³ All this, which has been set forth in five volumes by Jason of Cyrene, we shall now attempt to sum up in a single book. ²⁴ We recognize that these books contain many figures, and that it is difficult for those who wish to understand this history because of so many facts. ²⁵ So we have concerned ourselves to offer something engaging for those who simply want to read, which is easily committed to memory, and profitable for anyone who reads it.

²⁶ For us who have undertaken the arduous task of summarizing, it has not been easy but has cost as much effort ²⁷ as it would to prepare a banquet which would please everyone. But like those who prepare a banquet, we have endured this toil willingly in order to please others. ²⁸ So we leave to the historian the task of relating accurately all the details, and we have condensed this enormous work into a simple summary.

²⁹ For just as the architect of a new house has to be concerned about the whole construction, while the painters and decorators are concerned only about what relates to their task, so it is with us. ³⁰ The analysis of details and discussion on disputable points belongs to the historian. ³¹ But for one who tries to condense a report, his task is to summarize and not present a complete narration of facts and events.

³² So let us begin our narrative without going on at length about what has been said before, for it would be senseless to expand the preface while cutting short the narration of the history itself.

Heliodorus attempts to seize the temple treasures

3 ¹ While the Holy City enjoyed complete peace and the laws were observed as perfectly as possible through the piety of Onias the High Priest and his hatred for all wickedness, ² it came about that kings honoured the Holy Place and made the High Priest richer by their magnificent gifts. ³ Even Seleucus, king of Asia, paid from his own account for the expenses of the sacrificial services. ⁴ But a certain Simon, a priest of the tribe of Bilgah and the Temple administrator, came into conflict with the High Priest because he claimed that the inspection of the city markets should fall under his jurisdiction. ⁵ But he could not prevail over Onias. So he went to Apollonius of Tarsus, the governor of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, ⁶ and reported to him that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold wealth, that there was a great amount of money which had nothing to do with the expenses required by the sacrifices, and that all this could easily be brought under the control of the king.

⁷ Apollonius met with the king and told him about the wealth that had been disclosed to him. The king then sent Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, with a letter that authorized him to transfer the treasures. ⁸ Heliodorus at once set out on his journey, pretending that he was going to visit Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, but with the intention of carrying out the king's order.

⁹ On his arrival in Jerusalem, he was hospitably received by the city and the High Priest to whom he related the report that had been made. He revealed the reason for his coming

and asked the High Priest if the report was really true. ¹⁰The High Priest explained that there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans. ¹¹Some belonged to Hyrcanus, son of Tobias, a person of very prominent position, who had also been affected by these slanders. All in all, the treasury had four hundred talents of silver and two hundred of gold. ¹²Finally, Onias pointed out that it was utterly impossible to cheat those who had put their confidence in this Holy Place and in the inviolable majesty of that Temple venerated throughout the world.

¹³But, following the orders of the king, Heliodorus insisted that all those treasures should be turned over to the king. ¹⁴So, on the day set for Heliodorus to draw up the inventory, there was great disturbance in the city. ¹⁵The priests in their sacred vestments stood before the altar and called upon Heaven: he who had given the law governing deposits should now preserve them for those who had deposited them.

¹⁶None could look at the face of the High Priest without being deeply touched, for his appearance and his paleness revealed the anguish of his soul. ¹⁷A kind of fear overwhelmed him that made him tremble from head to foot, showing to those who saw him the sorrow of his heart. ¹⁸People rushed out of their houses in great confusion to pray together because the Holy Place was about to be profaned. ¹⁹The women, girded with sackcloth below their breasts, thronged into the streets. The younger girls who were not yet allowed to go out into the streets ran to the doorways, and some climbed the walls and others looked out from the windows. ²⁰All raised their hands to heaven and

joined in prayer. ²¹It was touching to see such a crowd prostrate in disarray on the ground and the High Priest in great anguish.

²²While they were praying to the All-powerful Lord to protect the deposits of the Temple and keep them safe for those who entrusted them to the High Priest, ²³Heliodorus began to carry out what had been decided upon.

²⁴He had already come near the Treasury with his bodyguard, when the Lord of the spirits and of every power caused so great a manifestation that all who had dared accompany Heliodorus were astonished before the power of God, and they lost their strength and courage. ²⁵There appeared to them a horse with magnificent gear and on it was a fearsome rider. It rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its forefeet. The rider appeared to have an armour of gold. ²⁶And two young man, strong and very beautiful and magnificently clothed, also appeared. They stood on each side of Heliodorus, and flogged him continuously, inflicting stroke after stroke.

²⁷Heliodorus fell to the ground, enveloped in great darkness; then his men took him up and put him on a stretcher. ²⁸So he was carried away, powerless even to help himself, he who but a moment before had proudly entered the treasury with a great retinue and all his bodyguard. Everyone clearly recognized the power of God. ²⁹Because of the divine intervention, Heliodorus became mute and lost all hope of saving his life. ³⁰Meanwhile the Jews blessed the Lord who had glorified his Holy Place. The Temple, which a little while before had been filled with terror and fear, now overflowed with joy and gladness because

of the extraordinary manifestation of God.

³¹ Then some of Heliodorus' companions begged Onias to call upon the Most High to grant the grace of life to him who was at the point of death.

³² The High Priest, on his part, feared that the king might suspect the Jews of some foul play against Heliodorus, so he offered a sacrifice for the man's recovery.

³³ While the High Priest was offering the sacrifice of atonement, the same young men, clothed in the same way, again appeared to Heliodorus, and standing before him, said, "Thank Onias the High Priest, for through him the Lord grants you the grace of life. ³⁴And as for you, who have been scourged by heaven's command, make known to all how great is the power of God." Having said this, they vanished.

³⁵ Heliodorus then offered a sacrifice to the Lord and prayed at great length to him who had spared his life. He took leave of Onias and went back with his guards to the king. ³⁶ There he began to bear witness to the works of the Most High God, which he had seen with his own eyes.

³⁷ The king asked Heliodorus who could be sent again to Jerusalem to carry out what he failed to do. Heliodorus answered him, ³⁸ "If you have some enemy whom you wish to eliminate, send him there and you will see him return well flogged; that is, if he ever returns at all, for surely, divine power is in that place. ³⁹ He himself who dwells in heaven watches over the place and defends it, striking to death those who come to profane it."

⁴⁰ This was what happened to Heliodorus and how the Treasury was saved.

4 ¹ The Simon mentioned before as the informer about the treasures of the Temple, who was traitor to his country, spoke evil of Onias, accusing him of a plot against Heliodorus and saying that he was responsible for all the troubles. ² He even dared to accuse Onias of conspiring against the state, Onias who was the great benefactor of the city, the defender of his compatriots and a zealous observer of the laws. ³ The hostility between them reached such proportions that crimes were even committed by some of the supporters of Simon.

Cultural crisis

⁴ Onias recognized the dangers involved in such an unbearable rivalry. Even Apollonius, son of Menestheus, governor of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, was instigating Simon to evil. ⁵ So Onias went to the king, not to accuse his fellow citizens, but for the good of the whole nation. ⁶ For he saw that it was impossible to maintain peace and stop the foolishness of Simon without the king's intervention.

+ ⁷ When King Seleucus died, his son Antiochus who was called Epiphanes, succeeded to the throne. Then, Jason, the brother of Onias the High Priest, usurped the office of high priest. ⁸ In a conversation with the king, Jason promised three hundred and sixty talents of silver and eighty talents from other revenues. ⁹ He further committed himself to pay one hundred fifty more talents if he would be allowed to establish on his own account a gymnasium with a Center for the cultural advancement of the youth and if the statute of Antioquian citizenship could apply to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well.

¹⁰ With the consent of the king and using the power at his disposal, he at

7. 1 Mac 1, 10

+ We single out this paragraph which vividly describes the penetration by Greek culture. Should it be seen as progress or cultural colonization? See what is said to that effect in 1 Mac 1:4. Since the priests were better formed, they

received the first shock of the cultural and spiritual crisis. Unfortunately for the Jews, at the time of the crisis, personal interests and politics are introduced in the appointment of the religious leaders.

once set about encouraging his fellow citizens to adopt the customs of the Greeks.¹¹ He suppressed the privileges that kings had granted to the Jews through John, the father of Eupolemus, who had established friendship and an alliance between the Romans and the Jews. He overthrew lawful institutions and introduced new customs contrary to the Law.

¹²So, he very readily founded a gymnasium right under the Citadel, and persuaded the noblest among the young to be educated in the Greek way.¹³ Paganism was propagated through Jason's influence, who proved to be more of a godless wretch than a high priest.

Greek customs were so much in vogue,¹⁴ that priests no longer showed any interest in serving at the altar. They despised the sanctuary and neglected the sacrifices and as soon as the discus throw began they would run to the stadium to take part in athletic competitions prohibited by the Law.¹⁵ They did not value anymore the customs of their fathers, but held in highest esteem the values of the Greeks.

¹⁶With this, they themselves were put in a difficult situation, for those whom they took as models and whose customs they wanted to imitate in everything proved to be their enemies and tyrants.¹⁷ They could not break the divine laws with impunity as the following episodes will show.

¹⁸When the quinquennial games held every five years were going on in Tyre before the king,¹⁹ the wicked Jason sent as envoys some "citizens of Antioch" from the inhabitants of Jerusalem and he entrusted to them three hundred drachmas of silver allotted for the sacrifice to Hercules.

When these envoys came, they decided that it was not fitting to spend the money on the sacrifice, but preferred to spend it on other things.²⁰ So through the sole initiative of those sent to spend the money for the sacrifice to Hercules, the amount was used instead for the construction of trireme ships.

²¹Antiochus had sent Apollonius, son of Menestheus, to Egypt to represent him in the enthronement of King Philometor. But when Antiochus learned that Philometor had become his political adversary, Antiochus was worried about his own safety.²² So, he left Joppa, and went to Jerusalem where he was well received by Jason and the whole city, entering the city in the midst of acclamations and torches. Then, he went with his troops to Phoenicia.

²³After three years, Jason sent Menelaus, brother of the Simon mentioned above, to bring the money to the king and initiate steps to negotiate urgent matters with him.²⁴ Menelaus presented himself to the king whom he impressed by his personal bearing as a man of authority, and so obtained the office of high priest for himself, offering three hundred talents more than Jason.²⁵ After receiving the royal mandate, he returned with nothing worthy of a high priest, but only with the rage of a cruel tyrant or a wild beast.²⁶ Jason, who had usurped the office of his brother, was now supplanted by another, and had to flee to the land of Ammon.

²⁷Menelaus held the office but did not pay the amount he promised to the king,²⁸ although Sostratus, the commander of the Citadel, demanded the payment, since the king had entrusted to him the collection of revenue. The two of them were then summoned by the king because of this.²⁹ Menelaus left his brother Lysimachus as his substitute, and Sostratus left Crates, the commander of the Cypriots.

Murder of Onias

³⁰Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Tarsus and Mallus revolted because their cities were given as a gift to Antiochis, the king's concubine.³¹ The king set out at once to re-establish order, leaving Andronicus, one of his ministers, in his place.³² Menelaus thought of taking advantage of the opportunity, and stole some of the golden vessels from the Temple, which

he then gave to Andronicus as gifts. He also managed to sell others in Tyre and in the neighbouring cities.

³³ When Onias had clear evidence of what Menelaus had done, he sought refuge in Daphne near Antioch, a place of asylum, and from there denounced him. ³⁴ For this reason, Menelaus met Andronicus in private and urged him to kill Onias. Andronicus went to Onias and deceitfully gained his confidence, offering Onias his right hand in oath. He was able to persuade Onias, in spite of the latter's suspicion, to come out of his place of refuge. Then, Andronicus at once killed him, without any regard for justice.

³⁵ For this reason, not only Jews but people of other nationalities as well became indignant and grieved over the unjust killing of that man.

³⁶ When the king returned to the regions of Coele-Syria, the Jews of Jerusalem, together with the Greeks who were for justice, went to see him and complained about the murder of Onias.

³⁷ The king was touched and became sad, and even wept as he remembered the personality and noble conduct of the departed. ³⁸ He became angry with Andronicus and immediately removed him from office. Then he ordered that Andronicus be divested of his purple robe, tore his garments off him, and led him all around the city up to the place where Andronicus had murdered Onias, and right there the king ordered that he be put to death – God dealing out to him the punishment he deserved.

³⁹ Lysimachus committed much sacrilegious plunder in Jerusalem with the connivance of Menelaus. When this became known, the populace rebelled against Lysimachus, who had already taken many golden vessels from the city. ⁴⁰ When Lysimachus saw the people rising up in rebellion and becoming enraged, he armed about three thousand men and began a violent repression, designating as leader a certain Auranus, a man advanced in years but of very little intelligence. ⁴¹ So, as the people were attacked by the men of Lysimachus, they reacted by picking up stones and clubs, and even gathered handfuls of ashes lying at hand, and threw everything against the men of Lysimachus. ⁴² In this way, they wounded many of them, killed some, and put the rest to flight. As for the sacrilegious robber Lysimachus, they killed him near the treasury.

⁴³ Because of all this a charge was brought against Menelaus and ⁴⁴ when the king arrived at Tyre, three men sent by the council of the

elders of Jerusalem told him of Menelaus' cruelty. ⁴⁵ Seeing his ruin, Menelaus promised a great amount of money to Ptolemy, son of Dorymenes, in order to have the king in his favour.

⁴⁶ Ptolemy then went with the king privately to a colonnade for some fresh air, and persuaded him to change his mind. ⁴⁷ The king actually dismissed all the accusations against Menelaus, the cause of all this evil, while he condemned to death Menelaus' unfortunate accusers who would have been acquitted had a tribunal of barbarians judged them. ⁴⁸ So those who had defended the cause of the city, the people and the sacred vessels were executed at once.

⁴⁹ Some Tyrians were so enraged by that crime that they prepared a magnificent funeral for them. ⁵⁰ But through the corruption of the rulers, Menelaus remained in power, growing in wickedness and becoming a tyrant towards his own people.

Antiochus sacks the Temple

5 ¹ By this time, Antiochus was preparing a second expedition against Egypt. ² And for nearly forty days, there appeared throughout the city, galloping through the air, horsemen dressed in gold. ³ Troops with swords drawn and formed in squadrons, cavalry squadrons in order of battle, attacks and charges from this side and that, movements of shields, many spears, arrows, missiles, the glitter of golden outfits and armour of all kinds. ⁴ Everyone prayed that these apparitions would be an announcement of something good about to happen.

⁵ As a false rumor spread that Antiochus had died, Jason gathered together about ten thousand men and launched a surprise attack on the city. The troops upon the walls defended the city, but once these were taken, the whole city fell into the hands of Jason, while Menelaus took refuge in the citadel. ⁶ Jason cruelly massacred his fellow citizens, without realizing that his victory against his own nation was the greatest defeat. He seemed to believe that he was winning over enemies when, in reality, these were his own people. ⁷ But he did not stay in power for long and after obtaining nothing but shame for himself, he had to flee once again to the land of Ammon. ⁸ Finally, he had a very unfortunate end. Accused before Aretas, the king of the Arabs, fleeing from city to city, pursued by all, scorned as a renegade from the law and hated as the executioner of his country and fellow citizens, he

was banished to Egypt. ⁹ And he, who had exiled so many from their own country, died in exile: for he went as far as Lacedemonia in the hope of finding protection there because of the kinship between that people and ours. ¹⁰ He, who had deprived so many of burial places, died with no one to mourn him, no funeral rites nor place in the tomb of his fathers.

Persecution of Antiochus

¹¹ When news of these events reached the king, he thought that the whole of Judea had risen in rebellion. He became furious and, leaving Egypt, went to take Jerusalem by force. ¹² He ordered his soldiers to kill without mercy everyone they encountered and behead as well all those who took refuge in their houses. ¹³ Young and old perished; men, women and children were massacred, and infants and virgins were put to the sword. ¹⁴ Within only three days, there were eighty thousand victims – forty thousand perished in the slaughter and as many were sold as slaves. ¹⁵ Not content with this, Antiochus boldly entered the holiest Temple in the entire world, guided by Menelaus, the traitor to the law and country.

¹⁶ With his unclean hands, Antiochus seized the sacred vessels, and with impious hands took away what other kings had given as gifts for the glory and honor of the Temple. ¹⁷ But in acting in such an insolent manner, Antiochus did not realize that the Lord had let him profane the Temple in order to punish the inhabitants of the city, because their sins had offended him.

¹⁸ For, had the city not been sinful, Antiochus would have been flogged the moment he entered, as Heliodorus who was sent by Seleucus to rob the treasury had been. And he would have also repented of his audacity. ¹⁹ But God had not chosen the people for the Temple, but the Temple for the sake of the nation.

²⁰ Therefore, the Temple also shared in the nation's misfortune, as it also shared afterward in its restoration. As it had been abandoned in the time of the wrath of God, it was again restored to its glory when the Most High Lord was appeased.

²¹ Antiochus took with him eighteen hundred talents which he had stolen from the Temple, and hurriedly went back to Antioch, so proud that he thought himself capable of sailing by land and walking on the sea. ²² At his departure, he left ministers to oppress our race. In Jerusalem, he appointed Philip, of Phrygian ancestry and of more barbarous character than he who had put him in place; ²³ and he left Andronicus in Gerizim. Besides there was Menelaus, who surpassed them in his hatred for his fellow citizens. This man had indeed a deep hatred for his Jewish brothers.

²⁴ Antiochus also sent Apollonius with an army of twenty-two thousand soldiers with orders to behead all the grown men and sell the women and children. ²⁵ Arriving in Jerusalem, under the pretext of peace, he waited until the holy day of the sabbath. Then he took the Jews by surprise as they rested. He ordered his men to conduct a military parade, ²⁶ and he killed all those who came out to see the show. Then, running through the streets, the soldiers killed many people.

²⁷ Judas Maccabeus, however, withdrew into the desert with about nine others willing to live like the wild beasts. There they fed on clean vegetables, for they did not want to eat unclean meat.

First victims of persecution

■ 6 ¹ After a while, the king sent an older Athenian to force the Jews to abandon their ancestral laws and live no longer according to the laws of God. ² And to have them also profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to the *Olympian god*. In the same way, he wanted them to dedicate the temple in Mount Gerizim to the *hospitable god*, according to the wishes of the inhabitants of the place.

³ This worsened the evil and made it difficult and unbearable for all.

9. 1 Mac 12, 21 15. 1 Mac 1, 21 18. 6, 12 19. Mk 2, 27 24. 1 Mac 1, 29 1. 1 Mac 1, 41

■ Religious persecution as it is experienced by the people means:

- obligatory suppression of religious customs;
- sexual licentiousness disguised as cultural progress;
- violence against those who remain faithful to God;
- abandoning the humble and women faced

with the cruelty of the law and of the people.

The moral crisis continues in the wake of the trials that good people are going through: How can God allow this?

An answer is given: the goal of these trials is to correct God's people. The Jews know that God's mercy is present in the trial.

⁴ The Temple was profaned by the orgies of the pagans who went there to have a good time with prostitutes, and had sexual intercourse in the sacred enclosures. And besides, they brought into the Temple things not permitted by the Law;⁵ the altar was laden with unclean victims prohibited by the law.⁶ It was no longer allowed to celebrate the sabbath or observe the customs of our fathers, or even to declare oneself a Jew.⁷ But, on the contrary, they were led by bitter necessity to celebrate the king's birthday with a monthly sacrifice.

And when the feast of Dionysus came, they were also forced to follow the Dionysus procession and wear floral wreaths.

⁸ At the suggestion of the inhabitants of Ptolemy, a decree was sent to the neighbouring Greek cities ordering them to treat the Jews who lived there, in the same way and oblige them to participate in the sacrifices.⁹ Those who would not adopt the Greek customs were to be beheaded. So it was easy to foresee the fatal outcome.

¹⁰ Two women were charged of having performed the rite of circumcision on their sons. They publicly paraded the women throughout the city with their babies hung at their breasts. Then they hurled them down from the city wall.¹¹ Others who had assembled in a cave to celebrate the sabbath were denounced to Philip and they allowed themselves to be burned. Because of the holiness of the sabbath day, they had scruples about defending themselves.

¹² I now ask the readers of this book

not to be shocked by these calamities. Bear in mind that this did not happen for the destruction of our race, but rather for our education.

¹³ God is showing his kindness when he does not let sinners continue on their way for a long time, but punishes them at once.¹⁴ As for the other nations, the patient Lord doesn't punish them until they reach the full measure of their sins. But he deals with us in a different manner:¹⁵ he does not wait until we have reached the full measure in order to punish us.¹⁶ Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us, and does not abandon his people, even when he punishes us with some adversity.

¹⁷ After reminding our readers of these truths, let us continue the story.

The martyrdom of Eleazar

◆ ¹⁸ Eleazar, one of the prominent teachers of the Law, already old and of noble appearance, was forced to open his mouth to eat the flesh of a pig.¹⁹ But he preferred to die honourably than to live in disgrace and voluntarily came to the place where they beat him to death. He spit out bravely the piece of meat,²⁰ as should be done by those who do not want to do things prohibited by the Law, even to save their life.

²¹ Those in charge of this impious banquet took him aside, since they had known him for a long time, and tried to convince him to pretend to be eating the meat, but in reality, to eat something allowed by the Law and prepared by himself.²² In this way, he could escape death, and be treated

8. 1 Mac 5, 15; 2 Mac 13, 25
18. Dn 11, 32; Lev 11, 7

11. 1 Mac 2, 29; Dn 11, 33

13. Wis 11, 10; 12, 20; 1 Thes 2, 16

◆ How noble are Eleazar's words:
- He does not want to hide his faith.
- He prefers honor to life.
- Above all he fears God.
- To die out of faithfulness to divine laws

sets a noble example for young people.
- Eleazar suffers physically, but he dies happy.
We have in him the prototype, the model of the martyr.

with humanity for the sake of their long-time friendship.

²³ But he preferred to make a noble decision worthy of his age and of the irreproachable life he had led from childhood. Above all, showing respect for the holy laws established by God, he answered that he would rather be sent to the place of the dead. And he added, ²⁴ "It would be unworthy to pretend at our age, and to lead many young people to suppose that I, at ninety years, have gone over to the pagan customs. ²⁵ If I led them astray in this way I would bring disgrace to my old age. ²⁶ Even if I could now be saved from men, I cannot – whether living or dead – escape from the hands of the Almighty. ²⁷ I prefer to bravely sacrifice my life now, as befits my old age. ²⁸ So I shall leave an excellent example to the young, dying valiantly for the sacred and holy laws."

Having said this, he gave himself over to death.

²⁹ Those who escorted him considered his words foolishness, so their previous gentleness turned into harshness.

³⁰ When he was almost at the point of death, he cried out, "The Holy Lord, who sees all, knows that though I could have saved myself from death, I now endure terrible sufferings in my body. But in my soul, I suffer gladly because of the respect I have for him."

³¹ In his death, he left a noble example and a memorial of virtue and strength, not only to the young but to the whole nation.

Martyrdom of the seven brothers

o7 ¹ It happened also that seven brothers were arrested with their mother. The king had them scourged and flogged to force them to eat the flesh of a pig which was prohibited by the Law.

² One of them, speaking in behalf of all, said, "What do you want to find out from us? We are prepared to die right now rather than break the law of our ancestors."

³ The king became furious and ordered that pans and cauldrons be heated over a fire. ⁴ When these were red-hot, he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out, his head scalped, and his hands and feet cut off while his brothers and mother looked on.

⁵ When he had been thoroughly mutilated, the king ordered that while still breathing, he be brought to the fire and roasted alive. While the smoke from the pan spread widely, the other brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die bravely. And they said, ⁶ "The Lord God sees all, and in reality, has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song, and clearly said: The Lord will have pity on his servants." ⁷ When the first had left the world in this way, they brought the second for execution. After stripping the skin with the hair from his head, they asked him: "Which do you prefer: to eat the flesh of a pig or to be tortured limb by

6. Dt 32, 36

o In relating the martyrdom of those seven brothers, whose names are unknown, the author places on their lips the declaration of their faith in immortality. This is the most valuable message of the book.

In the previous centuries, God's promises had been for the people as a whole. The believer was only hoping for the life and prosperity of his race.

Here, we have a giant step in the faith: the res-

urrection of individuals. It is not only the hope for the survival of the spirit, or the soul: the believer thinks he will be raised as a person to meet God. In Ezekiel 37, in the vision of the dry bones, God was promising to raise his people who had died. Here, every person hopes to rise, body and soul, to share the happiness that God promised and will give on the final day.

If martyrs are not raised, how could God achieve justice?

limb?" ⁸He answered them in the language of his ancestors, "I will not eat." And so he, too, was tortured.

⁹At the moment of his last breath, he said, "Murderer, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up. He will give us eternal life since we die for his laws."

¹⁰After this, they punished the third. He stuck his tongue out when asked to, bravely stretched forth his hands, ¹¹and even had the courage to say: "I have received these limbs from God, but for love of his laws I now consider them as nothing. For I hope to recover them from God." ¹²The king and his court were touched by the courage of this young man, so unconcerned about his own sufferings.

¹³When this one was dead, they subjected the fourth to the same torture. ¹⁴At the point of death, he cried out, "I would rather die at the hands of men, and wait for the promises of God who will raise us up; you, however, shall have no part in the resurrection of life."

¹⁵They took the fifth at once and tortured him. But with his eyes fixed on the king, ¹⁶he said to him, "Though you are mortal, you have authority over people and are able to do what you will. But do not think that our race has been abandoned by God. ¹⁷Wait, and you shall see his great power when he torments you and your descendants."

¹⁸After this, they took the sixth who, at the point of death, said, "Don't be mistaken. We suffer all this because of ourselves for we have sinned against our own God; so these astonishing things have come upon us. ¹⁹But do not think that you are going

to remain unpunished, after having made war with God."

²⁰More than all of them, their mother ought to be admired and remembered. She saw her seven sons die in a single day. But she endured it even with joy for she had put her hope in the Lord. ²¹Full of a noble sense of honour, she encouraged each one of them in the language of their fathers. Her woman's heart was moved by manly courage, so she told them:

²²"I wonder how you were born of me; it was not I who gave you breath and life, nor I who ordered the matter of your body. ²³The Creator of the world who formed man in the beginning and ordered the unfolding of all creation shall in his mercy, give you back breath and life, since you now despise them for love of his laws."

²⁴Antiochus thought that she was making fun of him and suspected that she had insulted him. As the youngest was still alive, the king tried to win him over not only with his words, but even promised to make him rich and happy, if he would abandon the traditions of his fathers. He would make him his Friend and appoint him to a high position in the kingdom. ²⁵But as the young man did not pay him any attention, the king ordered the mother to be brought in. He urged her to advise her son in order to save his life. ²⁶After being asked twice by the king, she agreed to persuade her son. ²⁷She bent over him and fooled the cruel tyrant by saying in her ancestral language:

"My son, have pity on me. For nine months, I carried you in my womb and suckled you for three years; I raised you up and educated you until this day. ²⁸I ask you now, my son, that when you see the heavens, the earth



and all that is in it, you know that God made all this from nothing, and the human race as well. ²⁹Do not fear these executioners, but make yourself worthy of your brothers – accept death that you may again meet your brothers in the time of mercy."

³⁰When she finished speaking, the young man said, "What are you waiting for? I do not obey the king's order but the precepts of the Law given by Moses to our fathers. ³¹And you who have devised such tortures against the Hebrews, shall not escape the hands of God. ³²Know that we perish because of our sins. ³³Our living Lord punishes and corrects us for a short time because he is angry with us, but he shall again be reconciled with his servants.

³⁴And you, the most wretched and impious man, do not be proud or be carried away by your vain hopes. Do not raise your hand against the sons of Heaven, ³⁵for you have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty God, who sees everything. ³⁶My brothers after brief suffering, have entered everlasting life in the friendship of God. But you, for your part, shall suffer the punishment you deserve for your arrogance.

³⁷With my brothers, I give up my body and my life for the laws of my fathers, calling on God that he may at once have pity on our race, and that by trials and afflictions, you may come to confess that he is the only God. ³⁸Through me and my brothers, may the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on the whole of our race come to an end."

³⁹The king was even more infuriated at him than at the others because of his mockery and he dealt more cruelly with him. ⁴⁰So the youngest also died undefiled, putting his whole

trust in God. ⁴¹After all her sons, the mother also died.

⁴²This is enough to make known what happened regarding the pagan sacrifices and the tortures beyond all imagination.

First exploits of Judas Maccabeus

8 ¹Meanwhile Judas, also called Maccabeus, and his companions, would enter secretly into the villages, all their relatives, summon those who has remained faithful to Judaism, and they finally assembled about six thousand men. ²They prayed to the Lord to turn his countenance on his people oppressed on all sides, to take pity on the Sanctuary profaned by impious men, ³to have compassion on the city – destroyed and on the point of being levelled – to listen to the cry of the blood reaching out to him; ⁴and they asked that he not forget the unjust killing of innocent children and show his indignation against those who had insulted his Name.

⁵The Lord's anger turned into compassion, and as soon as Maccabeus had organized his troops, they became invincible against the pagans.

Judas generally took advantage of the night for his military campaigns. ⁶So he attacked them by surprise, set cities and villages on fire, captured strategic positions, and put to flight many of the enemies. ⁷And people everywhere talked about him and his bravery.

⁸When Philip saw that Judas was making progress little by little and his victories increased from day to day, he wrote to Ptolemy, the military commissioner of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, to come and help him under the king's service. ⁹Ptolemy at once appointed Nicanor, son of Patroclus, one of the king's



first Friends, and sent him at the head of some twenty thousand men coming from all nations, with the order to wipe out all the Jews. At his side, he put Gorgias, a general of much experience in matters of war.

¹⁰Nicanor intended to raise two thousand talents by the sale of Jewish slaves in order to pay for the tribute the king owed to the Romans. ¹¹So he extended an invitation to all the coastal cities to come and buy slaves for a talent, without any regard for the punishment of the Almighty that might come upon him.

¹²When Judas learned that Nicanor had come with a great army, he told his men about this. ¹³So the cowardly and those who had no confidence in divine justice took to flight. ¹⁴Still others sold everything they owned and asked God to deliver from the impious Nicanor those who had been sold even before any battle. ¹⁵They prayed that if the Lord would not save them because of their own merits, that at least out of consideration for the covenant he made with their fathers and for that great venerable Name with which he had blessed his people, he would do so.

¹⁶Maccabeus gathered and reorganized his troops, numbering about six thousand, and exhorted them not to fear the enemy but to fight bravely against their unjust aggressors, despite their great number. ¹⁷He reminded them how those men had profaned the Holy Place, slaughtered the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and removed their traditional institutions. ¹⁸He said to them, "They come with confidence in their weapons and their boldness, but we trust in the almighty God, who is able to wipe out in one stroke all who invade our land and even the whole world." ¹⁹He recounted to them all the occasions when God had come to help their fathers, especially when he wiped out one hundred and eighty-five thousand men under Sennacherib. ²⁰He also reminded them of what had happened in Babylonia, in the battle against the Galatians. On that day, eight thousand Jews fought side by side with four thousand Macedonians, and as the Macedonians were hard pressed, their Jewish allies alone killed twenty thousand of the enemies' troops with heaven's help and seized a great booty.

²¹Judas encouraged them with these words, and made them ready to die for their laws and country; then, he divided the army into four groups. ²²He assigned his brothers Simon, Joseph and Jonathan to each lead one division with fifteen hundred men in each. ²³He ordered that the Sacred Book be read, and

he gave them their watchword "Help from God;" then, he himself led the first battalion, fell on Nicanor, ²⁴wounded and crippled many, and put the rest to flight.

²⁵They seized the money of those who had come to buy the Jews, and pursued them for a good while. But it was nearly evening, ²⁶so they had to return because it was the vigil of the sabbath. That is why they stopped pursuing their enemies. ²⁷They gathered the weapons and the plunder of their enemies, and celebrated the sabbath on that day when God had begun to show them his mercy. ²⁸After the sabbath, they divided part of the booty among those who had been tortured, the widows and the orphans; and they divided the rest among themselves and their men. ²⁹Having done this, they asked the Merciful Lord during a public prayer to be fully reconciled with his servants.

³⁰Then, in an encounter with the army of Timotheus and Bacchides, they killed more than twenty thousand men, and took control of the fortified cities. They divided the abundant plunder into equal shares among themselves, those who had been tortured, the orphans, the widows and the aged.

³¹They carefully stored in safe places the weapons they had taken from the enemies, and brought the rest of the booty to Jerusalem. ³²They killed the chief guard of Timotheus, an extremely wretched man who had done so much evil against the Jews. ³³Then, as they celebrated their victory in Jerusalem, they burned alive those who had burned the temple gates, including Callisthenes who had taken refuge in one small house. So these men paid the price they deserved for their impiety.

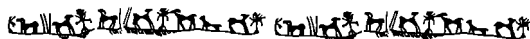
³⁴The thrice-as-wretched Nicanor, who had brought thousands of merchants to buy the Jews, ³⁵found himself humbled with God's help by those same men he had despised before. Having discarded his splendid robe he fled across the country as a fugitive, and reached Antioch, very much relieved that he had not perished with his army.

³⁶He who had intended to pay the tribute owed to the Romans by selling the Jews, now affirmed that the Jews were invincible and invulnerable, and that Someone fought for them, provided they were obeying the laws prescribed by him.

Death of the persecutor

9 ¹By that time, Antiochus had to return with haste from the regions of Persia.

²When he entered a city called Persopolis, and



tried to plunder the temple and seize the city, its inhabitants rebelled and took up arms against him. This people threw Antiochus and his men out. They fled very much humiliated. ³When Antiochus came to Ecbatana, he was informed of what had happened to the two generals – Nicanor and Timotheus – in Israel. ⁴He was infuriated and determined to take revenge on the Jews for the offense he had just received in Persepolis when they forced him to flee.

He ordered the chariot driver to hurry up and not to stop until the journey's end. But the judgment of God was coming upon him, for he said in his pride, "As soon as I arrive in Jerusalem, I shall turn it into a cemetery of the Jews."

⁵Then the Lord who sees all, the God of Israel, punished him with an incurable sickness of an internal nature. He had barely finished speaking when he felt an unbearable pain in his stomach and began to be afflicted all over his body.

⁶This was indeed just for one who had tortured others in the same way with countless new punishments. ⁷But this did not diminish his arrogance. In his rage against the Jews, he gave orders to journey ahead with even more speed. Yet, because his chariot was running very fast, Antiochus fell and his physical condition worsened.

⁸Not long before, in his conceit and sense of superiority he thought of reigning from the mountains to the seas. Now he had to be brought on a stretcher, giving to all a clear testimony of the power of God. ⁹So decayed was his body that it was full of worms and though he was still alive, his flesh tore off into pieces, leaving him in agonizing pain. The stench of his decay was so intolerable that his whole army shunned him. ¹⁰No one went near him who not long before thought he could touch the stars of heaven with his hand. ¹¹Only when he was afflicted with those wounds did he begin to shed his arrogance. His pains grew worse, and he realized this was the punishment of God. ¹²He himself could no longer endure his stench. He said, "It is right to submit to God. Mortal man should not try to be equal with him." ¹³And the wretch entreated the Lord who would no longer take pity on him.

¹⁴He had marched to Jerusalem to level it

and turn it into a cemetery. But now he even promised to reconstruct and declare it a free city. ¹⁵Moreover, he who before had refused burial to the Jews and wished to throw them with their children to the wild beasts, now offered to make them equal with the Athenians. He had plundered the temple and profaned the Sacred Place; ¹⁶but now he promised to decorate it lavishly, to return a great number of the sacred vessels, and to pay for all the expenses of the sacrifices. ¹⁷And he promised to become a Jew and to proclaim everywhere the power of God.

¹⁸His pains however did not diminish for the just judgment of God had come upon him. He lost hope of recovery and wrote to the Jews this letter of supplication, ¹⁹"To the honourable Jewish citizens, good health, prosperity and all good things from the king and general, Antiochus. ²⁰If you and your children are well and your wishes are fulfilled, we give thanks to Heaven, for we remember your token of affection and kindness. ²¹On my return from Persia, I became gravely ill, and because of this, I thought it necessary to be concerned for the common security of all of you. ²²I do not despair of my condition, and even have great hope of recovering from this illness. ²³But I thought of how my father would designate his successor whenever he set out for any military expedition into the uplands, ²⁴so that his subjects would not be upset if anything unexpected should happen or any misfortune should befall him. Everyone would know who is in power. ²⁵I am aware that neighbouring kings and provinces are watching the turn of events and waiting for an opportune time. Therefore, I have designated my son, Antiochus, as king. I already presented and commended him to most of you, when I set out for the northern regions. And now I communicate to him this letter I am sending you. ²⁶I ask you, then, to take into account the favours each and every one of you has received from me and maintain the same kindness toward me and my son. ²⁷I am sure that following my own policies of moderation and humanity, he shall live in good accord with you."

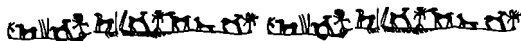
²⁸In this way that blasphemer and murderer ended, suffering terrible torments. He

+ The way God does justice. Antiochus' death is told differently in 1 Mac 6, which leads us to think that everything is not correct in this popular story. However, the author made no mistake in showing the change that illness and suffering bring about in the powerful.

At that moment, they see what they really are, and they become aware of their pride. They discover the connection between their present hu-

miliations and those they inflicted on others. They promise to change their ways, though a bit late, as long as God grants them life.

The end of the persecutor shows that, if indeed God's real punishment is for the after life, there are also sins so abominable that they are punished in this world, to be an example for others and to console the afflicted and the oppressed.



died miserably in the mountains of a foreign land. ²⁹His companion, Philip, brought his body and then withdrew to Egypt to the court of Ptolemy Philometor, because he feared the son of Antiochus.

Judas purifies the Temple

10

¹ With God's help Maccabeus and his men seized the Temple and the city. ² They destroyed the altars built by the foreigners in the public squares, as well as the sacred enclosures. ³ After purifying the Temple, they built a new altar. They kindled fire from flint and for the first time in two years offered sacrifices. Once again, there were incense, lamps, and the bread of presence.

⁴ Having done all this they threw themselves flat on the ground and asked the Lord not to send them such calamities anymore. But if they should sin again, they asked that he would correct them with gentleness and not hand them over again into the hands of blasphemous and ferocious foreigners.

⁵ The purification of the Temple took place on the same date on which the foreigners had profaned it, that is on the twenty-fifth of the month of Chislev. ⁶ For eight days they celebrated the feast with rejoicing, in the same way that they celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles remembering how, not long before on that same date, they were hiding in the mountains and caves like wild animals.

⁷ Then, carrying leafy branches and palms, they chanted hymns to Him who had brought the cleansing of his own Holy Place to a happy end.

⁸ They also decided by public vote that this event would be commemorated annually by the whole Jewish nation.

Victories of Judas in Idumea

⁹ We have just said how Antiochus, called Epiphanes, died. ¹⁰ We shall now proceed to narrate the events that happened under Antiochus Eupator, son of the impious, and to relate briefly the calamities brought about by the war.

¹¹ In fact, once he inherited the kingdom, he appointed Lysias to be in charge of his affairs and act as high commissioner for Coele-Syria and Phoenicia. ¹² Now Ptolemy, called Macron, was the first governor to do justice to the Jews. He was upset by injustices done against them, so he tried to solve all their problems satisfactorily. ¹³ But the Friends of King Eupator made use of this to accuse him before the

king. They continually called him a traitor, reminding him that he had once abandoned the land of Cyprus, which had been entrusted to him by Philometor, in order to go over to Antiochus Epiphanes.

Since he could not discharge his high office with dignity, he was driven to despair and committed suicide by poisoning himself.

¹⁴ It was then that Gorgias was appointed military commissioner of those regions, and began to pay soldiers to harass the Jews and, ¹⁵ gathering the fugitives from Jerusalem, managed to prolong the war.

¹⁶ The men of Maccabeus, after praying and asking the Lord to come and fight at their side, attacked the fortresses of the Idumeans. ¹⁷ They carried on with their assaults and the strong squares fell into their power. They repelled those who fought on the ramparts, slaughtered all who fell into their hands, and killed more than twenty thousand men.

¹⁸ At least nine thousand men took refuge in the two towers that were strongly fortified with everything they needed to withstand a prolonged siege. ¹⁹ Maccabeus left Simon, Joseph, Zaccheus, and those who were with them in sufficient numbers to sustain the siege, and went off to where his presence was more needed.

²⁰ Yet the men of Simon were tempted by greed, and let themselves be bought with the silver of those in the towers. So in exchange for sixty thousand pieces of silver, they allowed a number of them escape. ²¹ As soon as Maccabeus learned this, he assembled the leaders of the people and accused those men of having sold their brothers for money by letting their enemies escape. ²² He condemned them to death as traitors, and proceeded at once to capture the towers. ²³ He killed more than twenty thousand men in those two towers, successfully bringing to an end the undertaking they had begun.

²⁴ Timothy, who had been defeated before by the Jews, gathered together an enormous number of foreign troops and a great number of horses from Asia. He appeared in Judea in order to conquer it by force of arms. ²⁵ Before his attack, the men of Maccabeus prayed to God, sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. ²⁶ They bowed at the foot of the altar and asked God to treat them well and to be the enemy of their enemies, the adversary of their adversaries, as written in the Law.

²⁷ After praying, they armed themselves and advanced from the city. They stopped when they came close to the enemy. ²⁸ Right at daybreak, the battle was settled. One side



placed their confidence in their Lord as the pledge of success and victory besides their bravery, while the others were moved by hatred. ²⁹When the battle was at its height, there appeared from heaven before the enemies, five radiant men riding on horses with golden bridles, who put themselves at the head of the Jews.

³⁰They surrounded Maccabeus and defended him with their weapons, making him invulnerable. At the same time, they rained arrows and thunderbolts on the enemy, who in turn fell and were dispersed in great disorder, blinded and confused. ³¹Twenty thousand five hundred infantrymen and six hundred horsemen died.

³²Timothy took refuge in a heavily guarded fortress called Gezer where Chereas was in command. ³³The forces of Maccabeus gallantly besieged the fortress for four days. ³⁴Those within were confident in the strength of the fortress, so they hurled insults and curses at the Jews.

³⁵At daybreak on the fifth day, twenty young men from the troops of Maccabeus, enraged by the blasphemies they had been hearing, bravely stormed the wall and with brutal fury killed everyone who stood before them. ³⁶Others took advantage of this diversion to climb the walls and, setting fire to the towers, burned the blasphemers alive. Others destroyed the gates while the rest of the army entered to occupy the city.

³⁷They killed Timothy who had hidden in a well, and his brother Chereas, and Apolophanes. ³⁸When all this was over, they chanted hymns and praises to the Lord who had exalted Israel and had given them victory.

First campaign of Lysias

11 ¹After a while, Lysias, the king's tutor and kinsman, who was head of the government, was much displeased at the turn of events, ²and gathered together about eighty thousand men and his entire cavalry. They advanced against the Jews intending to make the city of Jerusalem a Greek colony and ³to convert the Temple into a source of revenue, as they had done with other sanctuaries of the pagans, and to put the office of high priest up for sale every year.

⁴He took God's power for granted, and went up with his infantry regiments, his horsemen by the thousands, and his eighty elephants. ⁵He entered Judea, came near Bethzur, a strong city some kilometers away from Jerusalem, and besieged it.

⁶When the men of Maccabeus learned that Lysias had begun laying siege to their strong cities, they prayed to the Lord together with all the people, with tears and lamentations, that the Lord might send a good angel to save Israel. ⁷Maccabeus himself was the first to take arms and exhort the rest to go with him to face the danger and help their brothers and sisters. They set out together, full of enthusiasm. ⁸While they were still near Jerusalem, a horseman dressed in white with golden armour appeared and stood at the head of them. ⁹So with one voice, everyone blessed the merciful God. They were strengthened and prepared not only to face men in battle but even the most savage beasts and walls of iron.

¹⁰They advanced with the aid of this ally sent from heaven, for the Lord had compassion on them. ¹¹They charged like lions against the enemy, brought down eleven thousand infantrymen and one thousand six hundred horsemen, and forced the rest to flee. ¹²Most of them fled, wounded and disarmed, until Lysias himself fled in disgrace in order to save himself.

¹³Lysias, being an intelligent man, reflected on the defeat he had suffered and understood that the Hebrews were invincible because the powerful God fought for them. ¹⁴So he sent a messenger to convince them to accept peace with every kind of just condition. And he even promised to persuade the king to make peace with them, too.

¹⁵Maccabeus, thinking of the common good of all, accepted Lysias' offer of peace. And in fact, the king granted all the demands that Maccabeus had presented to Lysias in writing. ¹⁶Lysias wrote to them as follows:

"From Lysias to the Jewish people, greetings. ¹⁷John and Absalom, your envoys, have delivered to us your written petitions, asking us to respond. ¹⁸I have set forth before the king everything that needed his attention; and I have granted everything that was within my competence. ¹⁹Therefore, if you maintain your good will toward the State, I will also try in the future to work in your favour. ²⁰As for the details, I have given orders for your envoys and my own representatives to discuss these with you. ²¹May everything go well with you. In the year one hundred and forty-eight, the twenty-fourth day of the month of the Corinthian God."

²²The king's letter was as follows: "King Antiochus greets his brother Lysias. ²³From the day we succeeded to the throne of our father, who has gone to the dwelling place of



the gods, it has been our desire that all our subjects live undisturbed so that everyone may dedicate himself to his own work.²⁴ Learning that the Jews do not wish to adopt Greek customs, as it was the will of my father, but prefer their own way of life and ask that they be allowed to live according to their laws,²⁵ and since it is our desire that this nation live in peace, we have decreed that the Temple be restored to them and that they be allowed to live according to the laws and customs of their fathers.

²⁶ You will do well, therefore, to send envoys to conclude a treaty of peace with them. May they come to know our constant aim, so they may be reassured and dedicate themselves with joy to their own occupations."

²⁷ This was the king's letter to the Jewish people: "King Antiochus to the Council of Elders and to the Jewish people: greetings! ²⁸ If you enjoy good health, we are happy for you; we ourselves are also well.

²⁹ Menelaus has told us that you wish to return to your homes and occupations. ³⁰ Therefore, I have issued a decree of amnesty for all who would go home before the thirtieth of the month of Xanthicus. ³¹ The Jews from now on may live according to their own customs concerning their food, and be governed by their own laws as before. None of them is to be molested in any way for anything done in the past. ³² I have ordered Menelaus to reassure you of all this. ³³ I wish you good health. In the year one hundred and forty-eight, the fifteenth day of the month of Xanthicus."

³⁴ The Romans also sent them a letter which read as follows: "Quintus Memmius and Titus Manius, ambassadors of the Romans, send their greetings to the Jewish people. ³⁵ Everything that Lysias, the king's kinsman, has granted you, we also approve. ³⁶ As for the matters about which Lysias considered it necessary to inform the king and take up with him, we ask that you study them carefully and send someone to us at once, so we can explain everything to the king to your advantage, for we are now leaving for Antioch.

³⁷ Lose no time, therefore, in sending someone to us, that we may know your plans. ³⁸ We wish you good health. In the fifteenth of the month of Xanthicus in the year one hundred and forty-eight."

Victories against neighbouring peoples

12 ¹ After these agreements had been concluded, Lysias returned to the king and the Jews began to return to their fields.

² But the commanders of the different regions, Timotheus and Apollonius, the son of Geneus, as well as Hieronymus and Domophenes, and Nicanor, the leader of the Cypriots, would not let them live in peace and quiet.

³ Moreover, the inhabitants of Joppa committed this grave crime: under the pretext of pleasing the Jews who lived with them, the city decided to invite them for a cruise, together with their wives and children, on a number of boats they had prepared. ⁴ They concealed their evil intention, and the Jews accepted the invitation to prove their desire to live with them in peace and without any suspicion at all. But once out in the open sea, the men of Joppa pushed them into the water and at least two hundred died.

⁵ When Judas Maccabeus was informed of this cruelty against his countrymen, he issued orders to his men. ⁶ After calling upon God, the just judge, he set out against the murderers of his brothers and sisters. He set fire to the harbour by night, burned the ships and put to the sword those who had taken refuge there. ⁷ But, as the gates were closed, he could not enter the city, so he withdrew, intending to come back to wipe out all the inhabitants of Joppa.

⁸ Meanwhile, he learned that the inhabitants of Jamnia wanted to deal in the same way with the Jews who lived there. ⁹ He also attacked the people of Jamnia by night, and set the harbour and ships on fire. The blaze was so great that the glow could be seen even from Jerusalem, some fifty kilometres away.

¹⁰ From there, they set out and marched against Timotheus, but when they had marched for about two kilometres, five thousand Arabs supported by five hundred horses, attacked them. ¹¹ A bloody battle took place, and the men of Judas emerged victorious with the help of God. The defeated Arabs sued for peace, and promised to give them livestock, and to help them in the future. ¹² Judas, convinced that they could indeed be useful to them, made peace with them. Then the Arabs withdrew to their camps.

¹³ Judas attacked a city strongly fortified with ditches and walls. The city was called Caspin. People of every race lived there. ¹⁴ The besieged, confident in the strength of their walls and because they had their storehouses full of provisions, underestimated the men of Judas and behaved most insolently toward them. They also shouted insults, blasphemies and sacrilegious words at them. ¹⁵ The men of Judas called on the great Sovereign of the world who had demolished the walls of Jer-



icho without engines of war during the time of Joshua, and then rushed furiously upon the walls.¹⁶ God willed that they should take possession of the city, and they slaughtered so many that the nearby lake, five hundred meters wide, seemed filled with blood.

The battle of Carnaim

¹⁷ After marching for one hundred and fifty kilometres, they arrived in Charax, where the Jews were known as Tubians.¹⁸ They did not find Timotheus there, for he had gone without having achieved anything; but he had left a strong garrison in one place.¹⁹ Dositheus and Sosipater, leaders of the troops of Maccabeus, marched against them and destroyed the garrison of more than ten thousand men left behind by Timotheus.

²⁰ Maccabeus then divided his army into battalions, set these two as their commanders, and rushed out against Timotheus who had twenty thousand infantrymen and two thousand five hundred horsemen with him.²¹ When Timotheus learned that Judas had come against him, he sent the women and children away with a good deal of the baggage to a fortress called Carnaim which was in an impenetrable place and difficult to reach because of the narrow approaches surrounding it.

²² At the sight of the first battalion of Judas, terror and panic seized their enemies because of an apparition of Him who sees all things. They fled in all directions, so that they were dragged on the ground by their own companions and wounded by their own swords.

²³ Judas pursued Timotheus in fury and ardour, putting to the sword those wicked men and killing about thirty thousand of them.

²⁴ Timotheus himself fell into the hands of Dositheus' and Sosipater's troops. He very cunningly pleaded with them to let him go, for, as he said, he had the parents and brothers of most of the Jews in his power and they would surely be put to death if he were to be killed.

²⁵ When he had convinced them by the strength of his words that he would let their brothers return safe and sound, they let him go.

²⁶ Then Judas left for Carnaim and Atargateion, and killed twenty-five thousand men there.²⁷ After defeating and destroying these

enemies, he led an expedition against the walled city of Ephron, where Lysias had taken refuge with people of every race. Strong young men were stationed outside the walls and they fought bravely. And there were stores of war engines and missiles inside.

²⁸ After calling on the Lord almighty to crush the forces of the enemy, the Jews seized the city and killed more than twenty-five thousand of the people inside.²⁹ Moving off from there, they went to Scythopolis, a city one hundred and twenty kilometres from Jerusalem.³⁰ But as the Jews who lived there assured Judas that the inhabitants of that city had always treated them well and had received them favourably in times of persecution,³¹ Judas and his men thanked these people and asked them to extend the same kindness to his race in the future. Then they returned to Jerusalem, since the feast of Weeks of Pentecost was approaching.

³² After the feast called Pentecost, they marched against Gorgias who was the governor of Idumea.³³ Gorgias came out with three thousand infantrymen and four thousand horsemen to meet him.³⁴ The battle began and some Jews fell during the fight.

³⁵ Dositheus, a horseman from Bachenor's troops, a very valiant man, grasped Gorgias by the cloak, and forcibly dragged him along, wanting to take that criminal alive. But a Thracian horseman rushed upon Dositheus and slashed his shoulder, so that Gorgias was able to flee to Marisa.³⁶ Judas saw that the men of Esdrias were exhausted because they had been fighting for a long time. He, therefore, prayed to the Lord to show himself as their ally and lead them in battle.³⁷ Then, he chanted a battle hymn in the language of their fathers, charged against the troops of Gorgias all of a sudden, and defeated them.

Sacrifice for the fallen

o ³⁸ Judas reorganized his army, and then went to the city of Adullam. Since it was the week's end, they purified themselves and celebrated the sabbath there.³⁹ The next day they

o Judas' soldiers feel encouraged in their faith when they find that their companions who died in the war deserved it because of some sin. Before, as for example in the days of Joshua, believers were resigned to accept God's justice and they were not concerned about their guilty brothers (see Jos 7).

Now, Judas' companions are concerned: did

those who sinned stop being our brothers? They belonged to God's people as we do: being raised to life, will they not share a happy future with us?

Hence, Judas' initiative and the prayer for the dead. They have just discovered the solidarity among the members of God's people, the living and the dead.



came to Judas to have the bodies of the dead taken away and buried with their relatives in the tombs of their fathers. ⁴⁰ They found under the tunic of each of the dead men objects consecrated to the idols of Jamnia, which the Law forbade the Jews to wear. So they realized why these men had died.

⁴¹ Everyone blessed the intervention of the Lord, the just Judge who brings to light the most secret deeds; ⁴² and they prayed to the Lord to completely pardon the sin of their dead companions. The valiant Judas urged his men to shun such sin in the future, for they had just seen with their own eyes what had happened to those who sinned. ⁴³ He took up a collection among his soldiers which amounted to two thousand pieces of silver and sent it to Jerusalem to be offered there as a sacrifice for sin.

They did all this very well and rightly inspired by their belief in the resurrection of the dead. ⁴⁴ If they did not believe that their fallen companions would rise again, then it would have been a useless and foolish thing to pray for them. ⁴⁵ But they firmly believed in a splendid reward for those who died as believers; therefore, their concern was holy and in keeping with faith.

⁴⁶ This was the reason why Judas offered this sacrifice for the dead – so that the dead might be pardoned for their sin.

Antiochus invades Judea

13 ¹ In the year one hundred and forty-nine, the men of Judas learned that Antiochus Eupator had come against Judea with countless troops, ² together with Lysias, his tutor who was head of the government. Each of them was in command of a Greek army of one hundred and ten thousand infantrymen, five thousand and three hundred horsemen, twenty-two elephants and about three hundred chariots of war with scythes.

³ Menelaus joined them, and incited Antiochus with every evil intent since he was not seeking the freedom of his country but only hoping that he would be restored to the office of High Priest. ⁴ But the King of kings roused the anger of Antiochus against that wicked man, when Lysias made the king realize that Menelaus was the cause of all the evils.

So the king ordered that Menelaus be taken to Berea and executed according to the custom of the place. ⁵ There is a tower in that place, twenty-five metres high, full of burning ashes, provided with a revolving device on top, which sloped on all sides into ashes. ⁶ Whoever robbed any sacred thing or committed any other notorious crime was brought up to the tower, and then, pushed into the ashes. ⁷ In this way, Menelaus died without even a burial. ⁸ This was indeed a just punishment for him who had committed so many offences against the Altar whose fire and ashes were sacred; and so, he met his death in ashes.

Prayer and success of the Jews in Modein

⁹ The king came with a heart full of evil designs, prepared to be more cruel to the Jews, than his father had been. ¹⁰ When Judas learned of this, he ordered his army to call on God day and night, so that as God had done in other circumstances, he would now also help those ¹¹ who were in danger of being deprived of their Law, their country and their temple. God could not let his people, who had hardly begun to breathe freely, fall once again into the hands of blasphemous pagans.

¹² Once all the people had carried out the order to pray to the merciful Lord with lamentation, fasting and prayer for three consecutive days, Judas encouraged them and commanded them to stand ready. ¹³ After summoning the Elders in private, he determined to leave with his men for a decisive attempt with the help of God, before the king's army could invade Judea and take control of Jerusalem.

¹⁴ Judas entrusted the decision to the Creator of the world, and encouraged his men to fight heroically to the death for the Law, the Temple, the city, the country and the institutions. So he left with his army and encamped near Modein. ¹⁵ He gave his men this watchword: "God's victory." With the most capable young men of his army he attacked by night the tent of the king, putting to the sword about two thousand men, the strongest elephant and its rider. ¹⁶ They caused fear and confusion in the camp and then withdrew in complete success.



¹⁷ All this happened just as day was dawning, for God's help protected them.

¹⁸ When the king saw the daring of the Jews, he tried to take control of their fortresses by using tricks. ¹⁹ He advanced against Bethzur, a city strongly defended by the Jews; he attacked it but was repelled and defeated.

²⁰ Judas supplied the defenders of the city with everything they needed.

²¹ Rhodocus, one of Judas' men, gave secret information to the enemies. He was hunted, captured and executed. ²² The king again kept in contact with the defenders of Bethzur, made peace with them and withdrew. ²³ He attacked the troops of Judas but was defeated. When he was informed that Philip, whom he had left in Antioch as head of the government, had revolted, he was dismayed. He sought peace with the Jews and swore to observe their just petitions; he became reconciled with them, offered sacrifices, honoured the Temple and showed generosity to the Holy Place.

²⁴ The king took leave of Maccabeus and named Hegemonides as governor from Ptolemais to the land of the Gerarites. ²⁵ When he came to Ptolemais, he found the inhabitants were indignant over that treaty; they were so angry they wanted to annul its terms. ²⁶ But Lysias came up to the tribunal to defend what had been decided; he convinced and appeased them, winning their goodwill before he set out for Antioch. This was what happened with the king's expedition and retreat.

14 ¹ Three years later, Judas and his men were informed that Demetrius, son of Seleucus, had landed in Tripoli with a great fleet and a powerful army, ² and had taken control of the kingdom, killing Antiochus and his tutor Lysias.

³ A certain Alcimus, who had been High Priest before, but was disgraced during the time of the rebellion, realized that there was no way for him to be restored to the ministry at the sacred altar. ⁴ So, he went to King Demetrius in about the year one hundred and fifty-one, and offered him a golden crown, a palm and even some olive branches from the Temple. On that day, he did not ask for anything. ⁵ But he found a proper occasion for his evil designs when he was called to a meeting of the king's council. When he was asked with what disposition and spirit the Jews were to be confronted, he answered, ⁶ "There exists a party called Hasmoneans among the Jews, headed by Judas Maccabeus, that keeps up war and rebellion, and hinders the re-establishment of peace and

order in the land. ⁷ Because of them, I have been deprived of the dignity of my ancestors, that is, the office of High Priest. And I came here, ⁸ concerned for the king's interests above everything else, but for my compatriots as well, since the fanaticism of those men has plunged our people into great misery.

⁹ You know all this, O King, so look upon our land and nation which is hard-pressed on all sides, with that same kindness you have for all. ¹⁰ For as long as Judas lives, it is impossible for the State to find peace."

¹¹ When Alcimus had said this, the rest of the King's Friends who were hostile to Judas, quickly incited Demetrius against him. ¹² And the king immediately chose Nicanor, who commanded the squadron of elephants, and appointed him military commissioner of Judea ¹³ with orders to kill Judas, disperse his men and restore Alcimus as priest of the great Temple.

¹⁴ The pagans who had earlier escaped from Judea for fear of Judas, flocked in great number to Nicanor, thinking that the misfortunes and defeat of the Jews would mean victory for them.

Treaty of peace

between Nicanor and Judas

¹⁵ When the men of Judas learned that Nicanor was coming and about the invasion of the pagans, they sprinkled dust upon their heads, and called on Him who had established his people forever, and had each time protected his people by wonderful manifestations. ¹⁶ Then, at their leader's command they set out to march, and the battle began near Dessau. ¹⁷ Simon, the brother of Judas, had attacked Nicanor, but his men were suddenly confounded by the enemies, suffering a slight setback.

¹⁸ However, as Nicanor had heard of the courage of Judas and his men and of how bravely they fought for their country, he feared resolving the situation by bloodshed. ¹⁹ So, he sent Posidonius, Theodotus and Mattathias to arrange for peace. ²⁰ After a thorough consideration of the conditions, he communicated this to his troops and it seemed that they were unanimous about it. The treaty of peace was accepted.

²¹ So they set the date on which the leaders should meet. A chariot came forward from each side and they prepared seats of honour. ²² Judas positioned armed men in strategic places, in case of sudden treachery on the part of the enemy. But their meeting went well.



²³Nicanor spent some time in Jerusalem without doing any harm, and even dismissed the people that had gathered around him. ²⁴He always had Judas with him, for he had a high regard for him. ²⁵He advised him to get married and have children, so Judas got married and enjoyed a peaceful life.

²⁶When Alcimus saw the good understanding between the two, he secured a copy of the signed accord and went to Demetrius, accusing Nicanor of acting against the interests of the State, inasmuch as he had appointed Judas, the enemy of the kingdom, as his minister.

²⁷The king was infuriated and stirred up by the slanders of that wicked man. He wrote Nicanor telling him how indignant he was over the treaty and ordering him to put Maccabeus in chains and to send him to Antioch at once.

²⁸Nicanor was dismayed to learn that he was asked to break the treaty with Judas who had done nothing wrong. ²⁹But he could not go against the king's orders, so he sought an occasion to carry this out by deceit.

³⁰Maccabeus noticed that Nicanor had become more reserved towards him and more unpleasant in their usual meetings, so he understood that this did not promise well. He began to gather some of his men, but did not make this known to Nicanor. ³¹When the latter became aware that Judas had escaped without being disloyal, he appeared in the holy Temple while the priests were offering the ritual sacrifices, and demanded that they hand Judas over to him. ³²The priests declared on oath that they did not know where he was to be found. ³³Then, he stretched out his hand to the sanctuary and made this oath: "If you do not hand Judas over to me in chains, I shall raze this place consecrated to God, destroy the altar, and right here build a splendid temple to Dionysus." ³⁴And after saying this, he left.

The priests stretched forth their hands to heaven and called on him who had unceasingly defended our nation, saying ³⁵"O Lord of the universe, though you do not need anything, it has pleased you to put among us this temple as your dwelling place. ³⁶So now, keep undefiled forever this house that has just been purified."

³⁷Razis, one of the elders of Jerusalem, was denounced to Nicanor as being a very patriotic man, well known as "father of the Jews" because of his kindness. ³⁸In the time before the rebellion, he had been accused of Judaism and with much enthusiasm he had totally given himself to the defense of Judaism.

³⁹Now then, Nicanor, wishing to show his hatred towards the Jews, ordered more than five hundred soldiers to take him prisoner. ⁴⁰He thought that by putting him in prison, he would deal a great blow to the Jews.

⁴¹When the soldiers were about to capture the tower and were breaking the door of the courtyard (they had already ordered that fire be brought to burn the door), Razis, surrounded on all sides, struck his belly with his own sword. ⁴²He preferred to die bravely than fall into the hands of foreigners and suffer insults unworthy of his noble birth. ⁴³But when he fell upon his sword, he did not hit exactly, so when he saw the troops were now rushing in through the gates, he gathered enough strength to climb to the top of the tower, and manfully threw himself down upon the soldiers. ⁴⁴But they quickly withdrew, so he fell into an empty space.

⁴⁵Still alive, and aflame with valor, he stood up in spite of the blood that gushed forth and the wounds he had, and came running through the soldiers. ⁴⁶He stood on a steep rock and there, with his blood almost completely drained from him, he took hold of his intestines with both hands and hurled them at the crowd. Then calling upon the name of the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again one day, he died.

Victory for Judas and death of Nicanor

15 ¹Nicanor was informed that the men of Judas were in the neighbouring villages of Samaria, so he prepared to safely attack them on the day of the sabbath. ²The Jews, who were forced to accompany him, said to him, "Do not destroy them so savagely and barbarously, but show respect for the day of the sabbath, for He who sees all has honoured this day and sanctified it." ³But the wretch asked if there were indeed a sovereign in heaven who had commanded that the sabbath be holy. ⁴They answered "It is the living God himself, the Sovereign in heaven, who has commanded us to celebrate the seventh day."

⁵"So I, as sovereign on earth, command you to take up arms and carry out the decrees of the king." But he could not bring to completion his evil designs.

⁶Nicanor was so sure of victory, that he planned to build a monument with the mortal remains of Judas and his men. ⁷But Maccabeus, for his part, felt confident and put his trust in God's help. ⁸He encouraged his men not to fear the attack of the pagans, and not to

forget the times God had come to their help, confident that even now God would give them victory.⁹ He roused their spirit with the words of the Law and the Prophets, reminding them of previous triumphs.¹⁰ Encouraging his men more and more, he finished by showing them the evil of the pagans and how they had betrayed their oath.

¹¹ So he armed them not with the sword or shield but with the certainty that comes from noble words. Then he made them all full of joy by telling them what he saw in a true dream.

◆ ¹² He had seen Onias, the former High Priest, a courteous, good man, humble in his ways, distinguished in his words and exemplary in his irreproachable conduct since childhood. With arms outstretched, Onias prayed for the whole Jewish community.¹³ Then, a gray-haired and honourable man appeared praying in the same way, and characterized by dignity and majesty.¹⁴ Then Onias, the High Priest, said to Judas, "This is he who loves your brothers, he who prays without ceasing for the Jewish people and for the Holy City. He is Jeremiah, the prophet of God."¹⁵ And Jeremiah had stretched out his right hand giving a golden sword to Judas, as he said, ¹⁶ "Receive this sword as a gift from God, with which you shall destroy your enemies."

¹⁷ Encouraged by these beautiful words of Judas, which were able to encourage righteous people and strengthen young souls, they determined not to set up camp with defenses. They decided instead to rush out bravely and take the offensive to settle the matter by fighting bravely for the Holy City of Jerusalem, their religion and the Temple were in danger.¹⁸ They considered of secondary importance any concern for their wives, children and friends; because they feared above all for the Temple consecrated to God.¹⁹ Regarding those who had stayed in the city, their anxiety was by no means little, since they were worried about the battle that was about to begin in the camp.

²⁰ Everyone waited for the imminent outcome as the enemies attacked. They had set their troops in place, led the elephants to strategic positions and had the cavalry in the wings.²¹ Then Maccabeus could see this multitude with their weapons of every kind and the ferocious elephants. He stretched forth his hands to heaven and called on the Lord who

works marvels, for he knew that God gives victory to those who deserve it, and this does not depend on weapons, but on the will of God.

²² So Judas said in prayer, "O Lord, you sent your angel in the days of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, and he wiped out one hundred and eighty-five thousand men of the army of Sennacherib."²³ So now, O Lord of Heaven, send your good angel, before us too, to fill our enemies with fear and terror.²⁴ Show your power and let your arm strike those who insult you and who come to destroy your holy people." With this, he ended his prayer.

²⁵ Meanwhile, Nicanor and his men advanced amid blasts of trumpets and shouts of war.²⁶ Judas and his men, on their part, entered into battle with supplication and prayer.²⁷ As they fought with their hands, their hearts prayed to God. And being so magnificently strengthened by the manifest presence of God, they killed no less than thirty-five thousand enemies.

²⁸ When the battle ended, and they returned rejoicing, they found Nicanor dead, lying on the ground with all his armour.

²⁹ Then they blessed God in their ancestral language amidst shouts and clamours.³⁰ Judas, who had once fully consecrated himself to the welfare of his fellow residents and had never wavered in his affection for them, ordered that Nicanor's head and arms up to the shoulders be cut off and brought to Jerusalem.

³¹ There he summoned his compatriots and priests. He stood before the altar and ordered them to send for those in the citadel.³² He showed them the head of that wretch, Nicanor, and the hand which that wicked man had raised in pride above the house of God.³³ He ordered that Nicanor's tongue be cut into pieces and given to the birds, and the hand be hung in front of the sanctuary as punishment for his arrogance.³⁴ Then they blessed Heaven saying, "Blessed be he who did not let his Sacred House be defiled!"

³⁵ Finally, Judas ordered that Nicanor's head be hung in the citadel as a sign of God's help.³⁶ By popular agreement, they decided that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month called Adar in Aramaic, the vespers of the day of Mordecai would be commemorated as a festival day.

Author's conclusion

³⁷ These were the events during the time of

10. 5, 25; 12, 3	14. Gen 18, 24; Ex 32, 11	17. 1 Mac 7, 39
22. 8, 19; 2 K 19, 35	32. Jdt 13, 15; 14, 1	

◆ The faithful are discovering the solidarity binding the living and dead members of God's people. Here, the men of God of the past inter-

cede for their deceased: Jeremiah, the prophet of previous centuries as well as Onias, the High Priest murdered a few years before.



Nicanor. As from those days, the city remained under the power of the Hebrews. I end my account here. ³⁸If the narration has been good and well composed, that is indeed what I desired; but if it has been ordinary and indifferent, it is what I was able to do. ³⁹The readers'

pleasure depends on how the account was arranged, just as it is with one who drinks. It does not do any good when one drinks only pure wine or water but wine mixed with water is tasty and delightful. Let this, then, be my last word.



Israel's period of glory and prosperity was very short indeed. The kingdom of David, the kingdom of God among the sons of Israel, had become a very small nation, no different from the rest of the small nations that were trying to survive in the midst of powerful neighbours. The Israelites had believed in their mission as long as good fortune had been on their side. But when it became obvious that they could no longer dominate other people and maintain their own privileged situation, the Israelites lost the sense of their privileged situation and began to live like the rest.

Israel knows that Yahweh, their God, is the "God of gods" because of their books and because the old people have told their children; the Israelites go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and follow the religious customs of their elders. But, as Isaiah will reproach them, all of this is nothing more than men's laws, a religion that is learned and does not spring from the heart. The processions are well attended, the clergy is powerful, but behind this show, there is no life, and with a little push the official religion would fall apart.

This has happened because people need an "experience" of God, in order to come to real faith, and when a people only tell and retell the religious experience of their elders, their faith becomes anaemic. In those days, Isaiah was a man who lived this experience and encountered the Living God. This young man from a noble family "had seen Yahweh" (chapter 6) and he never stopped speaking in the name of the God who was present in Israel though Israel ignored him.

What do we find in the following poems?

- Echoes of days of anguish.

Judah, quite small, is squeezed in between two great nations, Ashur (Assyria) and Egypt, and the politicians wonder which of the two they must allow to swallow them up. Isaiah responds:



"Seek first the kingdom of God and see to it that you practice justice among yourselves. And God will make you stronger than the powerful."

– A persevering struggle to arouse the faith of men deprived of vision.

The externals of religion abound, but there is very little sense of responsibility, not much love for God, and little concern about doing his will. Isaiah will repeat: "Believe in him, he is holy, he is the Rock, the greatest power in the world hidden in Jerusalem, and if you do not become strong by relying on him, he will crush you."

– God's promises to David's descendants.

But, whether the rulers are good like Hezekiah or evil like Ahaz, they are mediocre men to be trusted with such great promises. Yet, in the darkest hours, Isaiah will declare that the Lord has chosen Jerusalem and David, his king. From David's line, Christ, the king of Peace, will be born.

SOME FACTS ABOUT ISAIAH'S TIME

Beginning in the year 740, the northern nation of Ashur rises up and begins its conquests. All the peoples of the Middle East are afraid and try to resist with the encouragement of Egypt, another great power. In this conflict the northern nation of Israel will disappear; Samaria, its capital, will be captured and its residents deported in 720.

In 736, northern Israel and their neighbours from Aram try to force the kingdom of Judah to join them against Ashur. Then Ahaz, the king of Jerusalem, call for the help of the Assyrian armies, in spite of Isaiah's warnings. The Assyrians destroy both Israel and Aram, and also plunder the land of Judah.

In the years 701-691 Sennacherib, king of Assyria, comes to subdue Judah. King Hezekiah, encouraged by Isaiah, resists the enemy, and the famous miraculous liberation of Jerusalem takes place.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

The book of Isaiah and his disciples (see the following paragraph) is the most important of the prophetic books. It is the one which Jesus and his apostles will always recall and quote.

Isaiah's words are found in chapters 1-39 of the book bearing his name. The second part of the book, namely, chapters 40-66, brings together the words of other prophets who wrote a century and a half later.

• Verse 1 introduces the prophecies of the first twelve chapters: we find messages proclaimed on different occasions, over a long period of time but they are not arranged according to the time they were spoken.

I raised children and they have risen against me. We often think that God demands what is due to him, but it is not so: the Lord is a Father, a neglected Father. He feels hurt in his love, not because of any particular sin, but because his children live stupidly and irresponsibly: *my people do not understand.*

Perverved children. Men must hear the prophets' harsh words, because the power of their interests, their passions and propaganda is such that they get used to accepting everything, except the truth and the vocation of man to be, to do and to think as a son of God.

From the sole of the feet to the head. Isaiah denounces the general situation of the country without attributing it to one particular group more than to another. They are all guilty of bringing about oppression and poverty and they all find reasons not to live in the truth.

Shall I strike at you again and again? Scar-city, bad laws, defeat are not in themselves the punishment of God; we prepare them ourselves. But if those who are suffering are God's children, he is committed to them, yet God does not spare them because only suffering can teach them. So, in another sense, it is true that God is the one striking them.

Here we have several things which are repeated in the following pages:

The daughter of Zion means the city of Zion, or Jerusalem. Zion was the area of Jerusalem where David had established his residence.

The Holy One of Israel. In chapter 6, God will reveal himself as the *Holy One*, that is to say, God whose mystery is inaccessible and whose brilliance causes the death of any creature blemished by sin. Isaiah will be the prophet of the Holy God.

Yahweh Sabaoth or the Lord of Hosts: it is an ancient title for Yahweh. It means both the God who leads Israel's armies to victory and the God who rules the heavenly hosts, the angels, the stars and the forces of the universe.



Against thoughtless people

o1 ¹This is what Isaiah son of Amoz foretold concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

²Listen, O heavens!
Give heed, O earth!
For the Lord speaks:

"I raised children,
I brought them up,
but they have risen against Me.

³The ox knows its master
and the ass its owner's manger,
but Israel does not know me,
my people does not understand.

⁴A nation of sins,
a people weighed down with iniquity,
a wicked race, perverted children!
They have turned away from
Yahweh
and despised the Holy One of Israel.

⁵Shall I strike you again and again?
You will only rebel the more,
for your whole head is diseased
and your whole heart is afflicted.

⁶From the soles of your feet –
to the top of your head
wounds and bruises, sores
uncleaned and unbound,
undressed with soothing ointment

⁷Your country lies desolate,
razed by fire are your cities.
Raped and sacked is your land,

laid waste before your very eyes,
as when besieged by alien hordes.

⁸The Daughter of Zion is
abandoned

like a shanty in a vineyard,
like a hut in a melon field,
like a town hamleted.

⁹Had not Yahweh of hosts
left us a small remnant,
we would be like Sodom,
we would be like Gomorrah.

¹⁰Hear the warning of Yahweh,
rulers of Sodom.
Listen to the word of God,
people of Gomorrah.

+ ¹¹"The number of your endless
sacrifices—
What do I care about them?"
says the Lord.

"I have had more than enough
of whole-burnt offerings
of rams and the fat of fatlings;
the blood of bulls and lambs and
he-goats
does not delight me anymore.

¹²When you come to trample my
courts,
who asked you to visit me?

¹³I do not need your oblations.
Your incense is an abomination.
New Moons and Sabbaths and
meetings,

evil with holy assemblies,
I can no longer bear.

¹⁴New Moon and appointed feasts
have become a burden

2. Dt 30, 19; 31, 28; Ps 50, 4; Hos 2, 1	3. 11, 1	5. Jer 5, 3; Hos 6, 1	6. Lk 10, 34
10. Gen 18, 20; Dt 29, 22	13. Am 5, 22; Hos 6, 6; Jer 7, 22; Ps 50, 8		14. Jer 15, 6

+ *What do I care about your many sacrifices?* The condemnation of external worship that does not express a true surrender to God is characteristic of the prophets. The sacrifices and the festivals in question here were required by the law of God; yet God says that he detests them, because when done without the proper dispositions, they are a lie. (see Ps 40:7 and 50:16. also, Matthew 5:23).

Give the fatherless their rights. The Mosaic commandments condemned theft (Ex 20:14). The prophets are denouncing a social system

which crushes the lowly.

Some people are fond of great ceremonies, others of their own devotions and prayers and still others, of doing generous and philanthropic works. When doing this, we may be disguising the injustice we do every day.

Come and let us reason together. Suddenly God appears as merciful and as a saviour. God does not want to punish but rather to find someone with whom to dialogue, someone to love. The prophets keep repeating: "Come, return to me."

¹⁵ When you stretch out your hands
I will close my eyes;
the more you pray,
the more I refuse to listen.
Your hands are bloody;
¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean.
Remove the evil of your deed
out of my sight.
Put an end to your wickedness
¹⁷ and learn to do good.
Seek justice,
give hope to the oppressed;
give the fatherless their rights
and defend the widow."

¹⁸ "Come," says the Lord.
"let us reason together.
Though your sins be like scarlet,
they will be white as snow;
though they be as crimson red,
they will be white as wool.
¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the good things of the
earth;
²⁰ but if you resist and rebel,
the sword will eat you instead."
Truly the Lord has spoken.

You became a harlot

◆ ²¹ Zion, the faithful city,
has become a harlot!
She who abounded in justice,
a lodging of righteousness,
has become a hideout of murderers!
²² Your silver has become dross
your best wine diluted with water.
²³ Your rulers are tyrants,
partners of thieves.
They love a bribe
and look around for gifts.
No one protects the orphan,
or listen to the claim of the widow.
²⁴ This is why the Lord speaks,
Yahweh Sabaoth,
the Mighty One of Israel:
"I will take vengeance on my foes
and exact payment from my
enemies.
²⁵ I will turn my hand against you,
I will smelt away your dross, and
I will remove your impurities.
²⁶ I will restore your judges,
I will give back your counselors,
as it was then in the beginning.

17. Ex 22, 21; Job 33, 17
18. Mi 6, 2; Ps 51, 9
19. Hos 9, 15; 5, 33; Ex 23, 8
25. Ezk 22, 18

19. Jer 2, 7
20. Dt 32, 42
21. Ex 16; Hos 1, 2
26. 56, 5; 60, 14; Jer 23, 6

◆ Jerusalem is the city chosen by God. As the groom chooses his bride, so did Yahweh choose this people. Now, they are a *harlot*, because with their crimes, their trampling on the poor, they are being unfaithful to Yahweh. Those who forget God and run after their own interests, without caring for their brothers and sisters, are adulterers.

It is a question of *justice*. Justice is one of the words most often used by the prophets. In the Bible, the "just one" is the one who lives according to the truth, that is, he remains faithful to the Covenant with God. What the prophets are asking with such insistence is that justice be profound *righteousness* and not just an external observance of the laws. Finally with Jesus, we come to the "justice" of the Holy Spirit, meaning the holiness of God deep in the heart of man.

In a world in which so much is said about justice, we know there is a vast difference between knowing what is just and doing it.

Zion will be *redeemed with justice*. We will find this theme again in other parts of Isaiah. Israel, plundered and ruined, prays for salvation, but is not prepared to listen to God. But God says: "My salvation means punishing what you

are doing". In fact, the salvation, or the liberation that God grants us, does not mean entering a world without problems, a new earthly paradise, but rather, to begin to live under God's demanding expectation.

You shall be called the city of righteousness. Happiness is promised to all the "just", namely, those freed from sin, and this will be only partially achieved in this world. There are, of course, events in our world which image and anticipate the definitive salvation. In some way, the *Rule of Justice* is already coming when decisive steps are taken in the struggle for the promotion of all men, when an entire people feel liberated. It happened in sacred history, in the circumstances of that time (see Is 37, or even Exodus; see also Mark 9:1). But also, and perhaps more frequently, the times of distress are those that bring the Kingdom of God forward, through crises and revolutions. And they prepare the Kingdom, not so much by the good they bring, but rather because they overthrow ancient structures in which social sin had settled (Lk 21:28 and Rv).

● This passage deals with the pagan cults which were practised in groves and woods

Then you will be called
The City of Righteousness,
The Faithful City."

¹⁷ Zion will be redeemed when I
come to judge.
There will be a remnant: the just
ones.

¹⁸ But rebels and sinners
side by side will be destroyed,
and those who desert the Lord
will likewise perish.

¹⁹ Yes, you will be ashamed of your
sacred oaks which have given you delight;
you will blush for your gardens
which you have chosen.

²⁰ For you will be like an oak
the leaves of which wither,
and like a garden
which runs out of water.

²¹ The strongman will be as tinder
and all his work a spark:
both will burn together
and no one will quench the fire.

God promises lasting peace

+2 ¹ The vision of Isaiah, son of
Amoz, concerning Judah and
Jerusalem.

29. 17, 10; 57, 5; Hos 4, 13 30. Ps 1, 3
Ps 122, 4 4. Hos 2, 20; Zac 9, 10 5. 10, 17

where they used to sleep with the prostitutes
consecrated to the Baals.

+ This is apparently unreal vision and yet it is
being fulfilled and will be fulfilled.

The small hill overlooking the city of David
and on which Solomon's temple is built, has
become in this vision the center of the universe.
All the nations are going there. Why are they
going there? Because they know they need the
word of God. And, after having exhausted the
resources of science, economy and politics, they
realize they need a *Teaching*, that is to say, a
Revelation from God. The word "Torah", which
in later days will mean the "Law", is designated,
at first, the Instruction given by God as we trans-
late it here.

The Law of God is, above all, a teaching about
the meaning of man and about his mission. And
the answer to such questions is finally found in
the person of Christ, Son of God, made man and
the model for his brothers and sisters. Recall
how Jesus also went up a mountain to be trans-
figured before his apostles. It is there that they
were given the *Law* and the *Teaching*: "Listen
to him".

² In the last days, the mountain of
Yahweh's house shall be set over the
highest mountains and shall tower
over the hills.

³ All the nations shall stream to it,
saying, "Come, let us go to the moun-
tain of the Lord, to the house of the
God of Jacob, that he may teach us his
ways and we may walk in his paths.
For the Teaching comes from Zion,
and from Jerusalem the word of
Yahweh.

⁴ He will rule over the nations and
settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plow-
shares and their spears into pruning
hooks. Nation will not raise sword
against nation; they will train for war
no more.

⁵ O nation of Jacob, come, let us
walk in the light of the Lord!

Hide in the dust

■ ⁶ You have forsaken your people,
the land of Jacob,
for it was full of diviners.

2. Zac 14, 4 3. 60, 3; 66, 20; Zac 14, 16;

*Let us go up to the house of the God of
Jacob.* The Kingdom of God will be formed
around the people of Jacob-Israel and their
kings, the descendants of David. Throughout
the ages God preserves a Center in the world,
the visible focus of the invisible kingdom: first,
Israel, then, the Church. Today, the Church re-
veals itself as a sign upon a mountain, open to
the contemplation of both believing and unbel-
ieving people.

It is true that the Church has many human fea-
tures (in the negative sense of the word) and,
often, it is not found among movements for
renewal at the present time. But, perhaps we fail
to discern the profound riches which the Church
develops in sincere believers. In the world, they
are those who keep the fire that Christ lit, burn-
ing, and who create a network of more human
relationships and more authentic life around
them. And this, in the final analysis, is what pre-
pares for the coming of a new world. Isaiah
alone has done more for the moral development
of the world than all the kings of Assyria with
their armies, their victories and their laws. In the
same way, the sincere actions of the least among
believers can be more effective in bringing prog-



They have become soothsayers like
the Philistines,
and they have clasped hands with
pagans.

⁷ Their land full of silver and gold,
there is no end to their treasures.

Their land full of horses,
there is no end to their chariots.

⁸ Their land is full of idols,
and they bow down
before the work of their hands,
before the things their fingers have
made.

⁹ Man will be humbled
and the mortal fallen,
forgive them not!

¹⁰ Get behind the rocks,
hide in the dust,
for fear of the Lord,
from the splendor of his majesty!

¹¹ The haughty looks of man will
be humbled; the pride of mankind
will be brought low. Yahweh alone
will be exalted on that day.

¹² Yahweh will stand up, that day,
against all the proud and arrogant,
against all that is lifted up or great,

¹³ against all the cedars of Lebanon
and all the oaks of Bashan,

¹⁴ against all the lofty mountains,
and all the soaring hills,

¹⁵ against every high tower
and every fortified citadel,
¹⁶ against all the ships of Tarshish
and their cargoes of luxuries.

¹⁷ The arrogance of man will be
humbled; the pride of mankind will
be brought low. Yahweh alone will be
exalted on that day, ¹⁸ and all the idols
will pass away.

¹⁹ Men will flee
into the hollows of the rocks,
into the caverns of the earth,
from the terror of Yahweh,
from the splendor of his majesty,
when he arises to terrify the earth.

²⁰ On that day,
men will throw to the moles and to
the bats
their idols of silver and gold,
which they made for themselves to
worship.

²¹ They will flee
into the caverns of the rocks,
into the crevices of the crags,
from the terror of the Lord,
from the splendor of his Majesty,
when he arises to terrify the earth.

**²² Beware of man,
whose nostrils have but a breath;
What is his worth?**

8. Dt 17, 16; Ps 20, 8; 2 K 14, 25; Jer 25, 6
19. Num 10, 35; Ps 82, 8

22. Gen 2, 7; Job 7, 16

10. Hos 10, 8; Lk 23, 30

11. Lk 1, 51

ness to the world than many noisy meetings. This
leaven of authentic civilization is what, one day,
will be placed "on the high mountains", or "on
the lampstand" to enlighten the world. (See Mt
5:14).

*This text is not addressed to Jerusalem
(capital of Judah), but to the northern king-
dom (Samaria is the capital) which bears the
name of their ancestor Jacob-Israel.*

At the time, the northern kingdom enjoyed
years of prosperity. It followed that idols multi-
plied. In those days, those who became rich did
not know what to do with their gold other than
making statues and ornaments which they dedi-
cated to some god from whom they expected
security and protection. Isaiah foresaw the disas-
ter which was approaching for those uncon-
cerned people.

In speaking about the destruction of war and

the fear of the defeated, Isaiah considers this
disaster as an encounter of materialistic-minded
men with their God who comes to judge them.

Their land is full of idols. An idol in our life
is like a cancer in the body; it is something overly
important which consumes our real life. This is
what science, progress, conveniences, a house,
a car or money do, when they are no longer a
means of fulfilling God's plans but have become
instead an "idol" to which we devote all our
energy and hope.

Note the refrain in 3:11-17: *Man's pride will
be brought low.* Pride of the great, of the wise,
pride of the mediocre and of the falsely humble.
The pride of the religious man who believes he
knows God because he knows how to speak
about him. Pride of the mortal creature coming
to the end of his days without having encoun-
tered the living God. More than folly, pride is an



I can no longer bear your songs, "Love! Love!" The work of divine love is human reconciliation through justice and truth.



The child or the car. A test for the worshippers of idols
and for social development – and for Christian faith.



3 ¹ See how the Lord,
Yahweh Sabaoth,
takes away provisions and men
from Judah and Jerusalem –

² the hero and the soldier,
the judge and the prophet,
the diviner and the elder,

³ the captain and the man of rank,
the counselor, the sorcerer,
and the enchanter.

⁴ I will make striplings their princes
and raw lads their rulers.

⁵ People will oppress each other –
every man his fellow man,
every neighbour his neighbour;
the young will bully the old
and the base will insult the honourable.

⁶ When that day comes,
a man will take hold of his brother
in the house of his father
and say, "You have clothes,
then be our leader
and rule over this heap of ruins."

⁷ But he will cry out in protest:
"I cannot undertake
to be a healer of all this,
when in my own house
there is neither food nor clothing;
do not make me leader of the people."

⁸ See how Jerusalem crumbles
and Judah falls,
for their words and deeds
have been a defiance of the Lord,
a provocation in his glorious presence.

Alas for the wicked!

■ ⁹ The look on their faces de-
nounces them: they do not hide their
sin: instead, they parade it, like Sod-

om: Woe to them! They bring about
their downfall!

¹⁰ Say, "Fortunate are the right-
eous, they will eat of the fruit of their
deeds."

¹¹ But woe to the wicked: the evil
that their hands have done shall be
done to them!

¹² O my people, spoiled by your
rulers, dominated by your creditors!
O my people, your leaders mislead
you, and confuse your paths.'

¹³ Yahweh takes his place in court
and stands to try his people. ¹⁴ Yahweh
calls to judgment the elders and the
princes:

"You have devoured my vineyard.
The spoil of the poor is in your
houses. ¹⁵ What right have you to
crush the people and to grind down
the poor?" declares Yahweh Sa-
baoth.

How haughty are these women!

◆ ¹⁶ Yahweh says, "Haughty are
the women of Zion, walking with
their heads held high, with mincing
steps, flirting with their eyes, orna-
ments tinkling on their ankles."

¹⁷ But Yahweh will cover the heads
of Zion's women with scabs and make
their scalps bald.

¹⁸ On that day the Lord will take
away the ankle ornaments, the head-

5. Mi 7, 6	13. Jer 2, 5	16. Ex 16, 50	17. Jer 13, 26
<p>insult to the Holy God and it demands amend- ment: the more divine love is, the more demand- ing and jealous it is. The pride of man, the arro- gance of a social class, the security of a prosper- ous society: all of that will be brought low.</p>			

■ The prophets live their faith in the midst of
the events of their times, not forgetting the
historical reality in order to speak only about
"poverty". In Isaiah's view, the poor are poor
because the others are oppressors. The sin is in
the laws and in those who have forgotten God to
the point of taking power into their own hands.
Isaiah denounces the sin of the leaders in order
to save the entire people from God's judgment.

◆ Isaiah lashes against the elegant women of
Jerusalem:

– With their rings, necklaces, and their cloth-
ing they resemble the idols: made to seduce
men.

– They have their share in injustice: What
luxury is not paid for by the poor? How
many men can offer gifts with pure hands?

Today we are far more familiar with luxury
and we know the astronomical amount of
money which is wasted for example, on dogs, on
drugs and on pornography in a starving world.

*The end of the discourse is in 4:1. After the
death of their husbands, widows will at any
cost, look for a man to give them, at the very
least, legal protection.*

In Amos 4:1 we found similar criticism
against the women whom the prophet calls "fat
cows."

bands and the crescents, ¹⁹the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves, ²⁰the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume bottles and the amulets, ²¹the signet rings and nose rings, ²²the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags, ²³the garments, the turbans, and the veils.

²⁴Instead of fragrance, there will be stench, instead of girdle, rope; instead of well-set hair, baldness; instead of jeweled gown, sackcloth; and instead of beauty, shame.

²⁵Your men will fall by the sword; your heroes, in battle.

²⁶The city gates will lament and mourn as Zion, ravaged, sits on the ground.

4 ¹On that day, seven women will fight over a single man. "We will eat our own food," they will say, "we will wear our own clothing, only let us be called by your name and take away our disgrace."

A remnant saved on Mount Zion

o ²On that day the *Shoot* of Yahweh will be beautiful and glorious; and the *Fruit* of the earth will be honour and splendour for the survivors of Israel.

³Those who are left in Zion

and remain in Jerusalem will be called holy – all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem,

⁴when Yahweh washes away the filth of the women of Zion and purges Jerusalem of the bloodstains in its midst with the blast of searing judgment and the blast of destruction.

⁵Then will Yahweh create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its assemblies a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of fire by night.

⁶For over all, the Glory of the Lord will be a canopy and a pavilion, a shade from the scorching heat by day, a refuge by night from the storm and rain.

The song of the vineyard

+5 ¹Let me sing for my beloved a love song about his vineyard.

My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

²He dug it up, cleared the stones, and planted it with the choicest of vines.

He built there a watchtower

25. 47, 1; Lam 2, 10	1. Gen 30, 23; Lk 1, 25	2. 6, 13; Am 9, 13; Jer 23, 5; Zac 3, 8
3. Mal 3, 16; Eek 13, 6; Rev 13, 8	5. Ex 14, 20; J1 2, 16; 25, 4	1. 3, 14; 27, 2; Hos 10, 1
Jer 2, 2; Ps 80, 9; Mt 20, 1; 21, 33; Jn 15	2. Dt 32, 32	

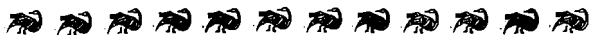
o In the turbulent history of nations, God allows a small and insignificant people to take shape. From among them a chosen group called "Remnant" appears and takes root. As a pyramid is gradually reduced to a point, so is this remnant reduced, until it becomes only one man, the Saviour. Here, he is called the *fruit of the earth*. He is also called *sprout*, because he will be the sprout of the new humanity.

Notice here, as in 1:27, the description of the Kingdom of God begins with a *judgment*. When we do our best to destroy the oppressive forces and our own complicity with them, we are cooperating in this purification. However, this task is beyond our own strength: Christ is the one who judges the world (John 12:31) and the one who grants it forgiveness of sins (John 20:22).

Also, as in 2:2, the Kingdom of God is a place where God becomes present to his people: see the *Cloud* and the *pillar of fire* in Ex 13:21.

Above Mount Zion which symbolizes the Church, God will be a *shade from the heat of the day*.

- He will provide rest for the weary: "Come to me and I will refresh you" (Mt 11:28).
- He will give his strength to the young of every generation who have many illusions and are soon burned by the sun: that is to say that evil, corruption and opposition discourage them and leave them embittered.
- Christ will be their protection from exhausting heat and from sweeping storm.
- The new trends in the world can harm the unwary and the isolated but not those who live in the church community.



and hewed out a winepress as well.
Then he looked
for a crop of good grapes,
but it yielded only wild grapes.

³ Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and
men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
⁴ What more was there to do
that I have not done for my vine-
yard?

Good grapes was the yield
that I expected,
but why did it yield,
only sour grapes?

⁵ Now I will let you know
what I am going to do
with my vineyard:

I will remove its hedge
and it will be burned,
I will break down its wall
and it will be trampled.

⁶ I will make it a wasteland,
I will neither prune nor hoe it,
and briars and thorns will grow
there.

I command the clouds, as well,
not to send rain on it.

⁷ The vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth
is the people of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant vine.
He looked for justice,
but found bloodshed;
He looked for righteousness
but heard cries of distress.

Woe to you, rich!

■ ⁸ Woe to you who join house to
house,
who add field to field,
till no room remains
and you are left to dwell alone
in the midst of the land.

⁹ Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn in my
hearing:
"Many houses will remain in ruins,
beautiful mansions without
occupants.

¹⁰ Ten acres of vineyard
will yield only a barrel of wine;
ten bushels of seed,
only a bushel of grain."

¹¹ Woe to those who rise early in the
morning

6. Dt 11, 4

8. Dt 1, 8; Jer 24, 10; Lev 25, 23; Dt 15, 1; Mi 2, 2

11. 56, 12; Am 6, 4

However large the Church may be, it will always have the features of a "remnant". Jesus called his followers "little flock" (Luke 12:32). In our days the reduced number of active and courageous participants is the little remnant and at the same time the hope for the future.

+ Song of the "love" of God who at the end, threatens to destroy those who despise him. Isaiah knows this well because he had encountered God whose love is tender and terrible.

The prophets readily replace the language of religion with the language of passionate love. Friend, Lover, Husband: The Lord does not resemble God as depicted by the Jews.

The vineyard is the people whom Yahweh reared over the centuries of their history and among whom so many prophets worked, watering it with their sweat, when it was not with their blood. Perhaps we should not look for a specific meaning in every detail of the parable: the tower, the wine press. In a somewhat similar text, in Micah 6:1-5, God reminds us of all he has done for his people.

After seeing how considerate the Lord has

been, Isaiah denounces the injustice and oppression which rule daily life in Jerusalem. In that, he sees proof that the law, the miracles and the blessings of the Lord have been in vain. Their history shows that the kingdom of David is already a failure and Judah will be destroyed.

The same image of the vineyard appears in Isaiah 27:2 and in Jeremiah 2:21. Jesus will recall it in John 15.

■ The Bible shows that God does not tolerate that some occupy all the land when so many are without a plot to allow them to live (see Lv 25:8). There is no justification either for a society leaving all the capital in the hands of owners so that most of the workers cannot benefit from the riches of their own country. Isaiah's words also condemn those who take over all the real power in a society, preventing others from exercising their human responsibilities in the nation and in workers' unions.

The six woes point to the same people: to rich and the noble who are unwilling to shoulder their responsibilities with regard to their people and who squander money.

Because they are acting against all justice,

to run after strong drink,
and tarry late in the evening
till they are inflamed with wine.

¹² They have lyres and harps,
timbrels and flutes,
and wine at their banquets;
but they have no thought for the
deeds of the Lord,
nor see what he is planning.

¹³ Thus my people go into exile
for want of understanding,
their dignitaries dying of hunger,
their masses parched with thirst.

¹⁴ Therefore the grave has enlarged its
throat
and opened its mouth immeasurably;
into it descend both masses and nobility
with their throngs and their revelry.

¹⁵ Man shall be humbled
and the mortal fallen,
and the eyes of the haughty cast down.

¹⁶ But Yahweh Sabaoth will be exalted
when he comes to judgment;
and the holy God will show himself holy
in his righteousness.

¹⁷ Then will the lambs graze as in
pasture,
fatlings and kids will browse among the
ruins.

¹⁸ Woe to those who draw iniquity with
cords of deceit,
to those who draw sin as with cart ropes,

¹⁹ to those who say, "Let God hurry,
let him speed up his work
so that we may see it.

Let the plans of the Holy One of Israel

draw near and come true
so that we may know what they are."

²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good, and
good evil,

who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter.

²¹ Woe to those who are wise in their own
eyes
and cunning in their own sight.

²² Woe to those who are valiant in mixing
drinks

and heroes at drinking bouts,
²³ but acquit the guilty for a bribe
and deprive the innocent of his right.

²⁴ Therefore, as the tongues of fire lick
up stubble,
as dry grass sinks down in the flames,
so their roots will rot,
and their flowers be blown away like
dust,

for they have rejected the law of
Yahweh Sabaoth
and scorned the word of the Holy One of
Israel.

²⁵ Therefore the Lord,
his wrath burning against His people,
raised his hand against them
and struck them down.
The mountains quaked:
the corpses are like refuse in the streets.
Yet for all this
his anger does not subside,
his hand is still raised, ready to strike.

²⁶ He gives a signal to nations afar,
He whistles to them from the ends of the
earth;
speedily and swiftly they come.

12. 29, 23 16. Num 20, 13; Ezk 20, 41
21. Rom 11, 25 26. Jer 4, 8; 50, 2

19. Jer 17, 15; 2 Pet 3, 3

20. Mt 3, 2

their own judgment has become corrupt:

- they make fun of what the prophets say;
- they do not follow the laws of the Lord.
- they call good, evil and they manage to convince others to accept injustice or keep quiet.

When false values are imposed on a society it culminates in evil. This is the social scandal which Jesus addressed in Matthew 18:7.

Isaiah predicts the exile without hesitation. It would have been wiser to understand the will of God and the way in which he rules over events. But the people make use of their intelligence only to advance their own interests or to excel in the empty games of the rich.

Do we not see today in our own society how many people with some advantage of education

seek first to enjoy a comfortable standard of living while they allow their own people to sink into poverty?

◆ On that day, in the year 740, Isaiah is in the Temple, or rather, he sees himself in the Temple, in spirit. In the innermost room, where the Ark is kept, there is only the divine presence: Yahweh seated as king, the train of his cloak filling the anteroom, as if to express the overflow of holiness and the power of God over the holy place and the city of Jerusalem.

During this brief moment, Isaiah encounters God in an intimate, authentic way, and this encounter will mark him for his entire life. This cannot be expressed, nor can he try to describe Yahweh who communicated with him in a spiritual way. The vision he had, the images and

²⁷ None of them is weary,
none stumbles
none slumbers or sleeps;
not a waist belt is loosened,
not a sandal thong is broken.

²⁸ Their arrows are sharp,
all their bows are strong;
their horses' hoofs seem like flint,
their chariot wheels like the whirlwind.

²⁹ They roar like young lions;
they growl as they seize their prey,
no one to rescue as they carry it off.

³⁰ On that day
they will roar over their prey
like the roaring of the sea.
Just look at the land –
darkness and distress,
the light flickering out in shadows,
darkened finally by the clouds.

The call of Isaiah

◆ 6 ¹In the year that King Uz-
ziah died I saw the Lord seated
on a throne, high and exalted, the train

of his robe filling the Temple. ²Above
him were seraphs, each with six
wings: two to cover the face, two to
cover the feet, and two to fly with.

³They were calling to one another:
"Holy, holy, holy
is Yahweh Sabaoth.
All the earth is filled with his Glory!"

⁴At the sound of their voices the
foundations of the threshold shook
and the Temple was filled with
smoke. ⁵I said, "Poor me! I am
doomed! For I am a man of unclean
lips living among a people of unclean
lips, and yet I have seen the King,
Yahweh Sabaoth."

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to
me, in his hands a live coal which he
had taken with tongs from the altar.
⁷He touched my mouth with it and
said,

27. Na 3, 18
Is 14, 29; 30, 6; Eek 1, 11

30. 8, 22; Jl 2, 2; Zep. 1, 15
3. Ps 29, 9

1. 2 K 15, 32; 1 K 22, 19
5. Zep 3, 9; Ex 3, 6; Jdg 6, 22

2. Num 21, 6; Dt 8, 15;
7. Ex 29, 36

the words that he heard are like flashes emerg-
ing from this mysterious and unspeakable en-
counter.

Isaiah speaks of the *holy* God, that is to say,
totally other, infinitely different from any crea-
ture. At the very moment of becoming present,
he is out of our reach. *Holy God* is a way of say-
ing that God is mystery. Isaiah continues to hold
on to the presence of God and at the same time
he is invaded by a fear which is not frightening.
In the presence of the Holy One man experi-
ences himself as a sinner, not because of a par-
ticular sin, but because of his very nature: he
feels incapable of placing himself in the hands of
God who surrounds him with his presence.

*Poor me! I am doomed! because God has
said: "Man cannot see me and live."* (Ex
33:20). But God draws near; the Seraph ap-
proaches Isaiah with coals signifying externally
an interior purification through divine fire. Isaiah
is forgiven in the very instant he responds by an
act of faith and completely accepts his mission.
From then on, Isaiah will know and will say that
it is necessary to choose: either believe in the
Lord or else be destroyed by contact with the
Holy One.

Seraphim, that is, *the burning ones*. Since
their days in the desert, the Israelites had pre-
served the belief in good and evil spirits. Accord-
ing to them, some of these spirits appeared
under the form of burning serpents; read Nm
21:4-9 and 2 Kgs 18:4 on the subject. These
texts help us to understand why Yahweh ap-

pears surrounded by fantastic Seraphim with hu-
man faces. Being superior to men, these beings
can live close to God, but they must shield them-
selves from the splendour of his glory.

The Glory of God is the radiance coming
from God, who is present in the Jerusalem
Temple, as in the center of the world, radiating
his power from one end of the earth to the other.
Thus, God remains a mystery, but his energy is
present everywhere, and at every moment.

Isaiah receives his mission:

- He will be God's spokesman.
- Instead of believing, the people will harden
their hearts.
- This will be the cause of Judah's ruin. All
that will remain will be the root from which
something new will spring forth.

Let them be deaf. These verses apply not
only to Isaiah's mission but to Jesus himself
(Mark 10:4) and after him, the apostles. (Acts
28:26 and Jn 12:40) They will remember these
words to express the result of their own mission.
Challenged by the word of God many people
and social groups close themselves and refuse
the message which could have saved them. The
word of God is for our rising or our downfall,
depending on how we welcome it. (Lk 2:34)

*Everything is expressed in Hebrew which
makes it difficult to render certain shades of
meaning.*

- "Dull the minds of the people" or "you will
be the occasion for their minds to become

"See, this has touched your lips;
your guilt is taken away
and your sin is forgiven."

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" I answered, "Here I am. Send me!" ⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Much as you hear, you do not understand; much as you see, you do not perceive.'"

¹⁰ Let their hearts be hardened,
make them deaf and blind,
lest they hear and see
and their hearts understand.
Yet if they came back to me,
I would have them healed."

"Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered,

"Until towns have been laid waste
and left without inhabitant;
until the houses are deserted
and the fields ruined and ravaged.

¹² For Yahweh will send away the
men
and the fields will be left deserted.

¹³ Even though a tenth in it remain,
it will be burned. Yet there will be a
stump like of a fallen oak; this stump
is a holy seed."

First warning to Ahaz

7 ¹ When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, laid siege to Jerusalem but they were unable to capture it.

² When the news reached the house of David, "Aram's troops are encamped in Ephraim", the heart of the king and the hearts of the people trembled as the trees of the forest tremble before the wind.

³ Yahweh then said to Isaiah: "Go with your son *A-remnant-will-return*, and meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washer's Field.

⁴ Say to him,
Stay calm and fear not; do not lose courage before these two stumps of smouldering firebrands – the fierce anger of Rezin the Aramean and the blazing fury of the son of Remaliah. You know that ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted against Judah, saying: ⁶ Let us invade it, and scare it and seize it and put the son of Tabeel king over it. ⁷ But the Lord Yahweh says:

It shall not be so,
it shall not come to pass.

^{8a} For the head of Aram is Damascus and Rezin is only lord of Damascus
^{8b} the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and Remaliah's son is only the lord of Samaria.

^{9a} Within five or six years now
Ephraim will be shattered
and will no longer be a people.

^{9b} But if you do not stand firm in faith,
you, too, will not stand at all."

8. 1 K 22, 20	10. Ex 10, 1; Is 29, 9; Eek 2, 5; Jn 9, 39; Mt 13, 14; Jn 12, 43; Acts 28, 26; 35, 5; 42, 18
13. 4, 3; 28, 16	1. 2 K 16, 5; 3. 36, 2; 2 K 18, 17; 4. 8, 12

dull" is rendered the same way in Hebrew.

– "So that they will neither understand nor be converted" or "in such a way that they will neither understand nor be converted" are said the same way in Hebrew.

Therefore, some translate these verses with words suggesting that Yahweh orders Isaiah to "dull the minds of the people" and "in order that" the people will not be converted, which is foreign to the text.

■ The passage 7:1-9 summarizes the situation which occurred in 736 when the people of Aram and Israel (the northern kingdom with its capital, Samaria) invaded the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem (the southern kingdom). Several names may make this text difficult to understand: Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah, Remaliah's son, king of Israel (also called Ephraim: 7:9), are the enemies.

King Ahaz thinks of everything except the help of God who had committed himself to David's heirs as long as they trust him and seek justice.

Isaiah opposes the king: if the Assyrians intervene, there will be as much destruction in Judah as in Israel and Aram, even if Ahaz is the ally of the Assyrians. The king must rely on the Covenant and Yahweh's protection.

+ The prophecy about the Virgin giving birth is one of the most important in the Bible even though it leaves some questions unanswered.

To support his warnings already expressed in 7:4-9, Isaiah offers a miraculous sign to the king: *Ask the Lord...* (v. 11). Ahaz refuses piously to hide his determination not to turn back (v. 12). Then, the prophet explodes in anger: these descendants of David whom God has always protected are useless! Another descendant of David will be able to bring salvation to God's

The Virgin is with child

+ ¹⁰ Once again Yahweh addressed Ahaz. ¹¹ "Ask for a sign from Yahweh your God, either to come from the deepest depths or from the heights."

¹² But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask. I will not put Yahweh to the test."

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Now listen, descendants of David. Have you not been satisfied trying the patience of men, that you also try the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself gives you a sign:

The Virgin is with child and bears a son and calls his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will live on curds and honey by the time he learns to refuse the bad and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to reject evil and choose the good, the land of the two

kings that you abhor will be deserted. ¹⁷ Yahweh will bring a time much worse than any since Ephraim broke away from Judah. He will bring upon you the king of Assyria.

¹⁸ On that day Yahweh will whistle for flies from the farthest streams of Egypt

and for bees from the land of Assyria.

¹⁹ They will come and settle in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks on all the bush lands and on all the water holes.

²⁰ On that day, with a razor hired from beyond the river (with the king of Assyria), Yahweh will shave the head and the hair of the legs and the beard as well.

²¹ On that day a man will raise a heifer and a couple of sheep, ²² and from the abundance of milk

10. Mt 5, 2 Lk 1, 31; Mt 1, 23	11. 38, 22; Jdg 6, 36; Mt 16, 1 Lk 1, 31; Mt 1, 23	12. Ex 17, 2 17. 1 K 12	14. Gen 16, 11; Jdg 13, 3;
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people. Yahweh is preparing to send him. His mother (called here *the Virgin*: see what follows) gives him the name he will deserve (v. 14). This future king will be raised humbly (v. 15), and will bring peace. Before that Ahaz and his followers' absurd politics will certainly bring total ruin to the country.

Now a few points need to be clarified.

1. *Immanuel* means *God-with-us*. This child does not only give us God's blessings, or miraculous and divine liberation, but through him, God becomes present among humankind and the promises heard so many times come true: *I will be their God and they will be my people*. (Nos 2. 25; Ez 37:27; Rv 20:3).

2. Why is *The Virgin* mentioned? The term used in Isaiah does not actually mean *the Virgin* but rather *the young girl* and when it was used as such, it simply referred to the young queen. Here Isaiah is referring to the future mother of the King-Messiah, and we know that she was the Virgin Mary. But, even before this amazing birth of the Virgin's son, many believing Jews suspected that the Messiah's origin would be extraordinary. If God was constantly reproaching believers for not loving him exclusively, how could the Messiah's mother be a woman of many loves?

Besides, according to an expression in their language, they used to say *the Virgin of Israel* or *the Virgin daughter of Zion* to refer to the people and to the holy city (Is 37:22). And so to them, the verse: *the Virgin will give birth*

sounded like: the believing community will give birth to the Messiah. Mary had to be a virgin, but she also represented all the believers who had hoped for the Saviour with a virgin heart (see Lk 1:31). It is worth noting that, even before Jesus, the Greek translation of the Bible had already substituted the virgin for the original term *young girl*.

3. It may surprise us to have Isaiah announce this liberation of God's people as an answer from God to Ahaz, or, as something that would happen within a few years. But Isaiah was speaking as a prophet who combines in one vision events of the same nature, although occurring at different times. In some sense, those gloomy years were announcing future crises, misfortunes and sins which formed one whole with the tragedies that would precede the coming of the kingdom of God.

Isaiah gives the sign to King Ahaz, to his heirs, *David's descendants* (1:13), and to all who live in a world devastated by sin, and this sign points to Christ. Just as in the lost earthly Paradise, we have the image of a woman, or of the son of a woman who will crush the serpent's head, here we have another image, that of the virgin with her son, *God-with-us*. Immanuel suffers for his brothers' sins, and that is why he can reconcile us with God.

Isaiah's contemporaries, obviously, did not understand all of this. It is only with time that the many meanings of this 'sign' will be understood.

those who survive in the land
will feed on curds and honey.

²³On that day every place
planted with a thousand vines
worth a thousand silver shekels
will be covered with briars and thorns.

²⁴Men will go there
armed with bows and arrows,
for the whole country
will be covered with briars and thorns.

²⁵To all the hills which used to be cultivated with hoe,
no one will dare come for fear of briars and thorns.

There cattle will be let loose
and sheep left to graze.

The waters of Shiloah gently flowing

o 8 ¹The Lord said to me, "Take a large cylindrical seal and write on it in ordinary characters: *Hurry to Sack-Spilling is Close*. ²Do this before Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah my reliable witness."

³I went to my wife; she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then Yahweh said to me, "Call him *Quick to plunder—Booty is Close*, for this is Yahweh's word:

⁴Before the child knows how to call his father or mother, the wealth of Damascus and the booty of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria."

⁵Again Yahweh spoke to me; ⁶"Because this people refuses the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, and cowers in fear before Rezin and the son of Remaliah, ⁷therefore the Lord will bring against them the waters of the River, deep and mighty – the king of Assyria with all his pomp.

It will rise over all its channels
and overflow all its banks;
"it will sweep on to Judah;
flow over it and pass on
reaching up to the neck.

It will spread its wings over the whole
breadth of your land,

O Immanuel!

⁹Know it, O you nations,
Hear, O you distant lands,
gird yourselves for war and be dismayed!

¹⁰Devise a plan and it will be thwarted,
make a resolve and it will not stand,
for God-is-with-us.

Yahweh, a hidden God

■ ¹¹Thus Yahweh spoke to me
when his hand took hold of me;
he warned me not to walk
in the way of these people:

¹²"Do not speak of conspiracy
whenever these people dread
conspiracy;

do not fear what they fear
nor be in dread with them.

¹³Only Yahweh Sabaoth
must you hold in veneration,
only him must you fear, only him
must you dread.

¹⁴He will be a sanctuary
and yet a stumbling-stone,
the rock of offense
for both nations of Israel.
He will be like trap and snare
for the people of Jerusalem.

23. 32, 13 2. 10, 6 3. 7, 14 6. 30, 15 7. Jer 46, 7; Dt 11, 10 8. 10, 28 10. Rom 8, 31
11. Jer 20, 7 12. 7, 13; 7, 2 13. 1 Pet 3, 14 14. Rev 21, 22; Lk 2, 34; Rom 9, 32; 1 Pet 2, 7

The word *sign* as used by Isaiah, can also be translated as a *marvelous event*.

● Prophets teach through their words and also through their actions. Here, the strange name that Isaiah gives his son serves as a warning for everyone. Such a name, along with Immanuel form a pair in this chapter, and they complement each other in pointing both to the invasion caused by Ahaz and to the liberation which will come later.

The waters of *Shiloah* (8:6) are the only source of water supply for Jerusalem, located on a plateau. They symbolize the secret protection of the Lord, present in the midst of his people and in whom all should place their faith. Whereas the king of Assyria whom Ahaz called to help,

will be like the river whose raging waters will flood everything. He will destroy Judah's enemies, but he will also leave Judah in ruins. In this, we also have the prophecy of the destiny of modern nations believing they will solve their internal problems by jumping on the bandwagon of more powerful nations.

■ *When his hand took hold of me.* Isaiah is referring to one of those decisive encounters when God made him his prophet and he was under the rule of God's Spirit.

Do not speak of conspiracy! The first thing God did was to free him from the narrow mindedness of most people who, in difficult times, are led by their fears instead of looking for new ways. From then on, he will not even be stopped by his people's misfortune, but rather

the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressors,

⁴Every warrior's boot that trampled in war,
every cloak that rolled in blood,
will be thrown out for burning,
will serve as fuel for the fire.

⁵For a child is born to us,
a son is given us;
the royal ornament is laid upon his shoulder,
and his name is proclaimed:
"Wonderful Counsellor, Divine Hero,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

⁶To the increase of his powerful rule
in peace, there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over all his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forever.

The zealous love of Yahweh Sabaoth will do this.

5. 7, 14; Lk 2, 11; Jn 3, 16; Ps 110, 2; Rev 19, 12; Ps 2, 6; Ps 45, 7; Ps 72, 17; Dt 10, 17; Mt 5, 4; Zac 9, 10
6. 11, 9; 32, 18; 33, 20

ing to their custom, the Assyrians took part of the people to the other extremity of their empire. They resided in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali (see previous paragraph) which, centuries later, would become Galilee. Dispersed among the pagans, they were coming out of Sacred History to enter *into darkness*.

The liberation promised to them is presented as a crushing victory of the Lord, inaugurating a reign of peace, related to Emmanuel, the new born baby.

The people walking in darkness... The Gospel (Mt 4:15) sees in that people the crowds whom Jesus addresses:

- A people dominated by all kinds of oppressors.
- A people seeking the light and without hope.

A child is born to us, the man who will rule the earth and who will crush the pride of nations. The *Prince of Peace* burns military gear.

Wonderful Counselor, that is to say that he is part of the heavenly Council where God makes decisions.

Father of a new race, as Abraham was: a *Hero* as David the warrior king had been.

This new prediction of a definitive liberation and of a Saviour does not specify the 'when'. In 7:10-15, we already mentioned that the fulfilment of God's promises may be delayed longer than we think.

WE DO NOT ABANDON HOPE

In the Bible, there are many earlier promises related to this divine promise which appear as if they were to happen immediately.

- Abraham is promised a son and Isaac is born; but the true heir is Christ. Abraham is promised a land for his children who will, in fact, occupy Canaan; but the true land is the kingdom of God.
- David is promised an heir and a lasting kingdom, but Christ is the definitive king, not Solomon.

On this subject, we should read chapter 11 in the letter to the Hebrews: it shows that men keep looking for the lasting city throughout the ages.

In fact, the Bible teaches us to hope. It presents to us a series of goals we must long for and attain and, in so doing, we are growing until we focus only on the inheritance after death which God promised. But then, in any happy event - as for example the birth of a newborn child - believers may see a sign of the kingdom of Peace which God gives us.

+ The poem beginning here and ending in 10:4 was written years before the one we just saw. It is addressed to the people of Israel who although weakened by their defeats, remain unconcerned and indifferent to God.

What the prophet condemns on God's behalf is their social injustice.

Threats against Israel

+ ⁷ Yahweh sent a word against Jacob;
the sentence fell upon Israel.

* The people of Samaria and Ephraim
saw,

and they said in pride

and in arrogance of heart:

* "The bricks have fallen down,
but we will rebuild with hewn stones;
the sycamores have been cut down,
but in their place we will plant cedars."

¹⁰ Therefore Yahweh raised their foes
and stirred up their adversaries:

¹¹ from the east, Arameans,
from the west, Philistines—
with mouth open, they devoured Israel.

Yet for all this

his anger does not subside,
his hand is ready to strike.

¹² For the people have not come back to
him who has smitten them; they have not
sought Yahweh Sabaoth.

¹³ Therefore Yahweh has cut off from Is-
rael both head and tail, palm branch and reed
in a single day—

¹⁴ the elders and prominent men are the
head, the tail is the prophet of lies.

¹⁵ The guides of these people misled them,
and the sheep were lost. ¹⁶ The Lord, therefore,
will not spare their young men or have com-
passion on their orphans and widows. Every-
one has become evil and ungodly; every
mouth speaks in folly.

Yet for all this

his anger does not subside,
his hand is ready to strike.

¹⁷ For wickedness has burned like fire
and consumed both thorn and brier;
it raged and set thickets ablaze,
and all of them vanished like smoke.

¹⁸ By the wrath of Yahweh Sabaoth
the land is set aflame,
the people are burned like fuel for fire.
No one spares his brother:

¹⁹ feeding left and right, they still go
hungry;

snatching here and there they remain
unsatiated.

Each one devours his neighbour's flesh.

²⁰ Manasseh devours Ephraim,
Ephraim devours Manasseh;
and against Judah, together they march.

Yet for all this

his anger does not subside,
his hand is ready to strike.

Legal injustice

10

¹ Woe to those who enact unjust laws
and issue oppressive decrees!

² Woe to those who rob the poor of their rights
and deprive my people of justice!

They prey on grieving housewives and widows.
They terrorize the orphans and the helpless.

³ What will you do on the day of punishment
when disaster comes from afar?
Where will you flee for help?

To whom will you leave your wealth?

⁴ You can do nothing but cringe
among the captives and exile
or fall down among the slain.

Yet for all this Yahweh's anger does not subside,
His hand is still raised, ready to strike.

Assyria instrument of God

■ ⁵ Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger,
the staff of my fury!

⁶ Against a godless nation I send him,
against a people who provoke my wrath
I dispatch him,
to plunder and pillage,

1. Pro 22, 22 2. Ex 22, 22; Dt 24, 17; Job 31, 14
In 10:2, the widows, orphans and the poor
are the categories of people that the Bible al-

3. Zep 1, 18 5. 10, 27; 14, 24; 30, 27 6. Jer 51, 20
ways calls to our attention. In other passages,
foreigners are also mentioned.



to tread them down like mud in the streets.

⁷ But his mind is far from this, his heart harbours other thoughts; what he wants is to destroy, to make an end of all nations.

⁸ For he says:

"Are not my commanders like kings?

⁹ Was it not the same for Calno as for Carchemish,

for Hamath as for Arpad,

and for Samaria as for Damascus?

¹⁰ Just as my hands have seized idolatrous kingdoms, whose graven images excelled those of Samaria and Jerusalem.

¹¹ Just as I have dealt with Samaria and her idols, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols?

¹² When Yahweh has finished all his work on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, he will punish the king of Assyria for his wilful pride and arrogant insolence. ¹³ For the king says:

"By my own strength I have done this and by my own wisdom, for I am clever. I have moved the frontiers of peoples, I have plundered treasures, I have brought inhabitants down to the dust,

I have toppled kings from their thrones.

¹⁴ As one reaches into a nest, so my hands have reached into nations' wealth.

As one gathers deserted eggs, so have I gathered the riches of the earth. Not one flapped a wing or opened its mouth to chirp a protest."

¹⁵ Does the axe claim more credit than the man who wields it? Does the saw magnify itself more than the man who uses it?

Then this would be like a rod wielding the man who lifts it up, or like a cudgel controlling one who is not of wood.

¹⁶ Therefore the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth,

will send a wasting sickness upon the king's sturdy warriors.

Beneath his plenty, a flame will burn like a consuming fire.

¹⁷ The Light of Israel will be a fire and his Holy One a flame-- to burn and devour his thorns and briars all in a single day.

¹⁸ His rich forests and fruitful land Yahweh will completely destroy, as when a sick man wastes away.

¹⁹ The remnant of the trees in his forest will be so few, so easy to count, that a child could make a list of them.

A remnant will return

◆ ²⁰ On that day, the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the people of Jacob will no longer rely upon the man who struck them down, but instead will truly rely upon the Holy One of Israel.

²¹ A remnant will return – a remnant of Jacob – to the mighty God. ²² For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return; their end has been ordered, justice shall overflow.

²³ For the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth will make a full end, as decreed by Him, all over the earth. ²⁴ Thus says the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth,

"O My people who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians who strike you with the rod and lift up their staff against you as did the Egyptians.

²⁵ In a little while my anger against you will be over and will be directed to their destruction.

²⁶ Yahweh Sabaoth, will lash at them with a scourge, as He did with the Midianites at the rock of Oreb. His rod will be over the sea, and He will raise it as He did in Egypt.

²⁷ On that day, their burden will be lifted off your shoulders, their yoke lifted off your neck. The yoke will be destroyed.

7. Mi 4, 12
23. 28, 22

10. 37, 12
24. 37, 6; Ex 5, 14

16. 31, 9

19. 1, 9; 4, 2; 6, 13

22. Rom 9, 27

■ This poem addresses the Assyrians when they were a threat, perhaps in the campaign of 701 (see the commentary on chapter 31).

◆ In 8:3 we already mentioned Isaiah's son whom he had called: "Soon-plunder-quick-booty".

Here, his other son's name, mentioned in 7:3: "A-remnant-will return" is explained. Several times in the Bible we find Remnant to refer to the Remnant of Israel, namely, the small

group who will remain after God punishes Israel for their infidelity (see Amos 5:15).

From the time God spoke to Elijah of the "seven thousand men" (1 Kings 19:18), the prophets are constantly saying that the sins of Israel will not cancel God's plans. A remnant will remain when Israel is destroyed, and they "will return". This has a double meaning:

– they will return from the countries where they were deported.



They have gone up from Rimmon

²⁸ and have come to Aiath;

they have passed through Migron
and stored supplies at Michmash.

²⁹ They have crossed over the pass
and now camp at Geba for the night.

Ramah is in terror;

Gibeah of Saul has fled.

³⁰ Lift up your voice, O daughter of
Gallim,

let it be heard at Laishah

and answered at Anathoth.

³¹ Madmenah is in flight;

the people of Gebim flee for their lives.

³² This day the invaders will halt at Nob;

they will shake their fists

at the mount of the Daughter of Zion,
at the hill of Jerusalem.

³³ Behold, the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth
lops off the boughs with terrifying
violence.

The tall trees are hewn down,

the lofty ones are brought low.

³⁴ With an axe he cuts down the thickets;
and Lebanon, the majestic one, falls.

The Prince of Peace

o 11

¹ From the stump of Jesse a shoot will come forth;
from his roots a branch will grow and bear fruit.

² The spirit of the Lord will rest upon him –
a Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,

a Spirit of counsel and of power,

a Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord

³ – that he may rule in the fear of the Lord.

Not by the appearances will he judge,

nor by what is said must he decide,

⁴ but with justice he will judge the poor
and with righteousness decide for the meek.

Like a rod, his word will strike the oppressor,
and the breath of his lips slay the wicked.

⁵ Justice will be the girdle of his waist,

32. Mt 1, 10;

1. 4, 2; Jer 23, 5; Rom 15, 12

2. 1 S 16; 2 S 23, 2; Pro 8, 12-14; Jn 1, 32; Col 2,

3

4. Rev 2, 16;

5. 2 Thes 2, 8; Eph 6, 14

– they will return to their God interiorly: will
convert to the Lord in their hearts.

• Those who have read the New Testament know that the Jews of Jesus' time were expecting a Messiah. This, however, had not always been the case. From Abraham to David, the Israelites were looking for the land promised by God and they conquered it. After David, they thought that a better king could not be found and, during the two and a half centuries that followed, they were only hoping that their present and future kings would resemble David. The very promise that God made to David about his descendants (2 Sam 7:14) was not understood as the announcement of a future Messiah.

Isaiah is the first to announce the Messiah, namely, a king like David but better. Here he is presented as a shoot coming from the stump, once the tree has been felled. Thus, he suggests that the present kings, who are sinners and without much faith, are going to disappear. More than a descendant of David, Emmanuel will be a new David (he is called son of Jesse like David).

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him as he did on the prophets and more so. The prophets were inspired by a mysterious power called "Spirit of God", but not at all times. In him, the Spirit will always dwell.

– A spirit of wisdom and intelligence, as with Solomon.

– A spirit of prudence and strength, as with David.

– A spirit of knowledge and respect for the Lord, as with Moses and the Patriarchs.

To do justice for the meek was and continues to be the first function of kings. The Messiah-King will be God's deputy, attentive to the poor, and he must receive the Spirit, or Breath of God for this endeavor. We must not oppose material liberation to spiritual liberation as if believers were to let others build a more just world. God's work that saves persons, can never be separated from educating the people: it demands the repression of the oppressors and ruling in the fear of the Lord.

It would be wrong to think that, with Christ,



truth the girdle of his loins.

⁶ The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
the leopard will take rest with the kid,
the calf and the lion cub will feed together
and a little child will lead them.

⁷ Befriending each other, the cow and the bear
will see their young ones lie down together.

Like cattle, the lion will eat hay.

⁸ By the cobra's den the infant will play.

Into the viper's lair the child will put his hand.

⁹ No one will harm or destroy over my holy mountain,
for as water fills the sea
the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

+ ¹⁰ On that day the Root of Jesse will be raised as a signal for the nations. The people will come in search of him, thus making his dwelling place glorious.

¹¹ On that day Yahweh will again raise his hand to reclaim the remnant of his people from Assyria, from Egypt, Pathros and Ethiopia, from Elam, Shinar, Hamath and from the coastlands of the sea.

¹² He will set up a signal for the nations, and assemble the exiles of Israel; He will gather the scattered people of Judah from all the corners of the earth.

¹³ Then Ephraim will cast off its jealousy and Judah will be rid of its enemies. Ephraim will not envy Judah nor Judah be hostile to Ephraim.

¹⁴ But the two will sweep down together upon the shoulder of Philistia to the west and plunder the people to the east. They will lay their hands upon Edom and Moab and make the children of Ammon their subjects.

¹⁵ Yahweh will dry up the tongue of the Egyptian sea; he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates in His scorching fury and break it into seven streams that men can cross dryshod.

¹⁶ There will be a highway for the remnant of His people coming back from Assyria, as there was for Israel coming out of Egypt.

Song of the saved

12 ¹ On that day you will say:
"I give thanks to you, O Lord.
Although you have been angry with
me

your anger has been appeased
and you have consoled me.

² God is indeed my salvation;
in him I trust and am not afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength.

6. Gen 2, 19; 9, 2; Hos 2, 20; Lev 26, 6

11. Ex 3, 20; Is 40, 3

3. 55, 1; Zac 14, 8; Jer 2, 13; 17, 13; Eze 47, 1

8. Gen 3, 15

15. Ex 14, 21

9. Acts 2, 14

16. 40, 3

10. Rom 15, 12

2. Ex 15, 2

this longing for justice is over. The love and forgiveness that Jesus proclaims bring about the salvation of humankind through truth, justice and shared food. Should we forget these requirements, "spiritual" and naive love would be nothing but illusions.

The renewal of God's people will be manifested in nature: the lion will eat grass. We could put this in modern terms: thanks to technology and a greater cooperation between people, nature's hostile forces will be placed at the service of man.

Beginning with Isaiah, the prophets will see the Messiah, or the future king anointed by God, as the man of the Spirit. See the second part of Is 42:1. Luke's Gospel will say this of Jesus: "The

Spirit of God is upon me" (Lk 4:18). When the Spirit of God is conferred on believers through the sacrament of confirmation, the church recalls the Spirit of wisdom, intelligence, strength, etc.

+ This poem in 11:10-16 was written later at the time of the exile. It was placed here to develop the prophecy concerning the "stump of Jesse."

In verses 10 and 12 note the theme of the "signal for the nations," found also in Lk 2:35, though in a different form.

Then we have a song of thanksgiving. About the fountains of salvation, see Is 55:1 and the story of the Samaritan woman in Jn 4:1.



He is my song:
 he has become my salvation."
³ You will draw water with joy
 from the fountain of salvation.
⁴ On that day you will say:
 "Give thanks to the Lord, acclaim
 his name; among the nations
 proclaim
 his work and make known
 how exalted is his name."
⁵ Sing to the Lord, the Magnificent,
 Wonders he has done all over the
 earth.
⁶ Sing for joy,
 shout with exultation,
 O people of Zion,
 for great in your midst
 is the Holy One of Israel."

Against Babylon

■ 13 ¹ An oracle concerning Baby-
 lon.

seen by Isaiah, son of Amoz:

² On a bare hilltop raise a banner;
 cry aloud to them,
 wave a hand for them
 to enter the Gates of the Nobles.
³ I have ordered my sacred knights,
 I have summoned my mighty warriors—
 all those who rejoice in my triumph—
 I have commanded them to carry out my
 wrath.
⁴ Listen, a rumbling on the mountains
 as of a great multitude!
 Listen, a tumultuous uproar
 as of kingdoms massing together!
 Yes, Yahweh Sabaoth is mustering an
 army for war.
⁵ From faraway lands,
 from the ends of the heavens,
 they come – Yahweh
 and the instruments of his wrath—
 to destroy the whole earth.
⁶ Wail, for the day of Yahweh is near;
 it will come as destruction from the
 Almighty.

⁷ Every man's arm will go limp,
 every man's heart will fail him,
⁸ Every one will be gripped with terror.
 Pain and sorrow, taking hold of them,
 men will be in anguish
 like women in travail.
 They will look aghast at each other,
 their faces aflame as with fever.

⁹ See how the day of Yahweh comes:
 it is a cruel day
 coming with wrath and fierce anger.
 It will make the earth desolate;
 it will destroy sinners within it.

¹⁰ The stars and constellations at night
 will send forth no light, the moon
 will not shine; in the morning the sun
 will be dark as it rises.

¹¹ I punish the world for the evil it does,
 and the wicked for the sins they do.
 I make the arrogance of the proud cease;
 I end the haughtiness of the ruthless.

¹² I will make men scarcer than gold
 and mankind more rare than the gold of
 Ophir.

¹³ I will make the heavens tremble
 and the earth shake its foundation,
 at the wrath of Yahweh Sabaoth
 on the day of his burning anger.

¹⁴ Like a hunted gazelle,
 or like a flock without a shepherd
 each man will return to his own people,
 each one will flee to his native land.

¹⁵ Whoever is captured will be
 butchered,
 whoever is caught will be slaughtered.
¹⁶ Their babies will be dashed to pieces
 before their eyes,
 their houses will be looted,
 their wives will be raped.

¹⁷ Against them I will stir up the Medes,
 who take no pleasure in silver
 and find no delight in gold.

¹⁸ Their bows and arrows will strike
 down young men.
 Without mercy or compassion,
 they do not spare infants and children.

¹⁹ Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms,
 pride and glory of the Chaldeans,
 will be like Sodom and Gomorrah
 when overthrown by God.

²⁰ She will never be inhabited,

4. Jn 4, 14	8. Eek 7, 17	9. Zep 1, 14; Job 38, 13	14. Jer 51, 9	16. Ps 137, 9
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■ Chapters 13 to 33 are a series of oracles
 against the neighbouring people. The Bible calls
 them *The nations*, and since none of these
 people knew the only true God, they were
 pagans. And so, whenever we read "the nations"

in the Bible, we could translate "the pagans" or
 "the foreigners".

*The poem of 13:1-22 was written later in
 the days of the exile. The same is true of 14:1-
 2 and 14:22-23.*



nor dwell in from age to age.

There no Arab will pitch his tent,
no shepherd will tend his flock.

²¹ There wild beasts of the desert will lie,
howling creatures will fill the houses,
owls and ostriches will dwell there
and wild goats will leap about.

²² There mad dogs will cry out in her
strongholds,

and jackals in her palaces.
Her time is close at hand;
her days are now numbered.

14 ¹ The Lord will take pity on Jacob,
he will choose Israel again and settle
them in their own land. Then foreigners will
join them and be counted with the people of
Jacob.

² Nations will take them and bring them to
their own place. And the family of Israel will
adopt in Yahweh's land those male and female
captives and make of them servants and
maids.

Thus the people of God will make captives
of their captors and rule over their oppressors.

How you have fallen, shining star!

◆³ On the day Yahweh gives you
rest from your suffering and turmoil,
from your fear and your cruel bond-
age ⁴ you will take up this taunt
against the king of Babylon:

How has the oppression ceased?

How has the strongman ended?

⁵ Yahweh has broken the staff of the
wicked,

the scepter of the tyrant

⁶ who struck down the people
with blow after blow,
who ruled the nations in anger,
with unrelenting persecution.

⁷ The whole earth is at rest and at
peace,

breaking forth into song.

⁸ Even the cypresses exult
and the cedars of Lebanon say:

"Now that you have fallen,
no loggers come to cut us down."

⁹ The grave below is all astir
to meet you when you come.
It stirs up the dead to greet you—
all who were leaders of the world.
It raises from their thrones—
all who were kings of the nations.

¹⁰ They all speak and say to you:
"You say you are strong, but you
are a weakling

you are as weak as we are;
in fact, you have become like us!

¹¹ All your pomp has been
brought down to the grave,
along with the sound of your harps;
maggots spread out beneath you
and worms are your blanket.

¹² How are you fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How are you cast down to the
ground,

you who mowed down the nations!

¹³ You said in your heart,

"I will ascend to heaven,
I will raise my throne
higher than the stars of God;
I will sit on the Mount of Assembly,
in the far recesses of the North.

¹⁴ I will climb up above the clouds;
I will be like the Most High!"

¹⁵ But down to the nether world you
go,
to the deep recesses of the Pit.

¹⁶ All who see you stare at you
and ponder over your fate:

"Is this the man who shook the
earth,

who made kingdoms quake,
¹⁷ who made the world a waste,
who overthrew its cities

1. ESK 37, 14; 56, 3; ZAC 2, 15

2. 66, 20

5. 9, 3; ESK 26, 17; LAM 1, 1

13. PS 48, 3

15. ESK 32, 33; GEN 3, 5; ESK 28, 2; DN 11, 36; 2 THES 2, 4

◆ The poem in 14:3-21 was spoken by Isaiah on the occasion of the death of an Assyrian king. The prophet describes the fallen king as equal to his victims after his death.

It is worth noting how those empires of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt which dominated the world and made the Jews tremble disappeared without leaving a trace.



and would not give its captives
release?"

¹⁸ All kings of nations lie in state,
each in his own tomb.

¹⁹ You are nevertheless cast out of
the tomb,
like an untimely rejected birth,
like a trampled corpse buried
under the slaughtered,
under those cut down by the sword,
thrown to the common grave.
²⁰ You were not given a monument
for you have brought your land to
ruin,
and caused your people to be slain.
May the descendants of evildoers
never be mentioned again!
²¹ Go up, slaughter the sons for
the sins of their fathers,
lest they rise and possess the land
and cover the earth with their cities.

²² "I will rise up against them, says
Yahweh Sabaoth.
I will cut off from Babylon her name,
her remnant, offspring and posterity,"
says the Lord.

²³ "I will turn her into a swampland,
into a habitation of reptiles and croco-
diles;
I will sweep her with the broom
of destruction," says Yahweh Sabaoth.

²⁴ Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn:
"As I have planned, so will it be!
As I have decided, so will I do

²⁵ I will destroy the Assyrian in my land,
trample him down on my mountains;
take his yoke off my people's neck,
and remove his burden from their
shoulders.

²⁶ This is the plan proposed for the whole
earth: this is the hand stretched out over all
nations. ²⁷ Yahweh has made a decision, and
who will annul it? His hand is stretched out,
and who can turn it back?

Warning to the Philistines

²⁸ In the year King Ahaz died this oracle
was proclaimed:

²⁹ "Rejoice not, all you Philistines,
that the rod which smote you is broken;
from the root of the snake will come forth
a viper,

and its offspring will be a flying dragon.

³⁰ The cattle of the poor will have the best,
and the beggar will rest in safety.

But with famine I will kill your root
and slay even your remnant.

But with famine I will kill your root
and slay even your remnant.

³¹ Wail, O gate! cry, O city!
tremble in fear, all you Philistines!
For smoke comes from the north—
a great army sweeps down on you.

³² What answer will then be given
to the messengers of the nation?

"Yahweh has laid the foundation of Zion,
and there his afflicted people will take refuge."

Lament for Moab

15 ¹ *An oracle concerning Moab:* Laid
waste in a night. Ar of Moab is
ruined!

Laid waste in a night, Kir of Moab is
ruined!

² The people of Diman have gone
to the high places, to weep.
Over Nebo and Medeba, Moab wails.
Every head is shaved,
every beard is shorn.

³ In the streets they wear sackcloth;
on the rooftops and in the squares
every one wails,
every heart melts in tears.

⁴ Heshbon and Elealeh cry out;
their howling is heard as far as Jahaz;
the armed men of Moab cry aloud
and their hearts are faint.

⁵ My heart cries out for Moab;
her fugitives flee as far as Zoar,
as far as Eglath-shelishiyah.
At the ascent of Luhith
they go up weeping;
on the way to Horonaim
their cries are heart-rending.

21. Gen 11:24, 10:5 27. Dn 4:35 29. Am 5:19; 1. Jer 48:29-38 2. Am 8:10; Jon 3:6

• The following poems mostly celebrate the defeats of the various people forming the world around Judah. Isaiah's mission consisted in seeing and justifying the slow collapse of his nation. He delighted also in seeing that the pagan empires, driven by purely human ambitions, were going to their ruin. Isaiah judges in God's light.

In the world around him, he sees only human pride and God's infallible designs.

However, in 18:7 and 19:16-24, note two additions placed there much later. One of the Jews who settled in Egypt wrote these lines showing his conviction that one day the pagan nations would convert to the true God.



⁶ The watered fields of Nimrim
have become a wasteland;
the turf is dried up,
the grass is withered,
the verdure is gone.

⁷ Now they carry away their possessions,
the wealth they have stored,
to the Brook of the Willows.

⁸ Their cry rings round the border of

Moab,

resounds as far as Eglaim,
reaches as far as Beer Elim.

⁹ The waters of Dimon flow with blood,
but worse is yet in store,
for I will bring lions upon Dimon,
upon those who escape from Moab,
and upon those who survive in the land.

16

¹ Like wandering birds
cast out of their nests,
the daughters of Moab
stay at the fords of Arnon.

² They send lambs to the ruler of the land,
from Sela across the wilderness,
to the mountain of the Daughter of Zion.

³ Take counsel,
render decision with justice.
Even at high noon
let your shade be like the night
to hide the fugitives.
Do not betray the refugees.

⁴ Let the outcasts from Moab
sojourn among you;
be a refuge to them
against the destroyer.

When the oppressor is no more
and the destruction is over
and those who trample the land
underfoot have gone,

⁵ a throne will be established
steadfast in love.

One from the House of David
in all truth, will sit on it;
he will administer justice swiftly
and judge the people righteously.

⁶ We have heard of the pride of Moab,
of her arrogance and insolence,
of her empty pretensions.

⁷ Let her wail then,
and let every one wail for her.
Mourn for the raisin-cakes of Kirhare-

seth.

⁸ The fields of Heshbon languish,
the vines of Sibmah wither.
The tyrants of the nations
have trampled down the choicest vines,

those that once reached Jazer,
spreading towards the desert,
stretching out as far as the sea.

⁹ Therefore I weep as Jazer weeps
for the vines of Sibmah.

I drench you, O Heshbon,
O Elealeh, with my tears!

For over your fruit and your vintage
have been heard loud battle cheers.

¹⁰ But they are gone: joy and gladness
have now vanished from your orchards.

In the vineyards
no more singing is heard,
no more shout of joy is raised.
In the winepresses
no foot treads out wine,
no voice shouts in exultation,
no heart sings a vintage song.

¹¹ Like a lyre, therefore,
my soul moans for Moab;
my heart pines for Kir-areseth.

¹² When Moab appears on the high places,
she will only grow weary;
when she goes to pray at the sanctuary,
it is to no avail.

¹³ This is the word which Yahweh has spoken
against Moab in the past. But ¹⁴ now Yahweh
says, "Within three years, as a servant
bound by contract takes note of time, the glorious
power of Moab will have ceased to command
respect, her survivors will be very few
and feeble."

Against Damascus

17

¹ An oracle concerning Damascus.

"Damascus will cease to be a city
and will become a heap of ruins.

² Her towns will be abandoned
and left as pasture for flocks;
there they will lie down afraid of no one.

³ Ephraim will be left undefended,
Damascus will no longer be a kingdom.

The remnant of Aram will have
the same glory as the glory
of the children of Israel."
This is Yahweh Sabaoth speaking.

⁴ On that day
the glory of Jacob will fade:
the fat of his flesh will waste away.

⁵ It will be as when a reaper
gathers the standing grain
and lops off the stalks,
or as when they gather the gleanings
in the Valley of Rephaim.



⁶ Yet some gleanings remain,
as when an olive tree is beaten—
two or three olives are left on the
topmost bough,
four or five on the fruitful branches,
— says Yahweh, the God of Israel.

⁷ On that day
man will look to his Creator.
his eyes turned to the Holy one of Israel.

⁸ He will not look to the altars,
to the work of his hand,
the sacred pole or the incense stand
which his fingers have made.

⁹ On that day
your cities will be like the cities
of the Hivites and the Amorites
which they abandoned to the Israelites,
as the neglected or forsaken boughs
are abandoned to thickets and under-
brush.

All will be desolation.

¹⁰ For you have forgotten the God of
your salvation,
you have failed to remember the Rock of
your refuge.

You may plant the finest plants,
you may plant vines from abroad,

¹¹ you may make them grow
on the day you plant them,
you may make them blossom
on the day you sow,
yet the harvest will be as nothing
in the day of trouble,
and on the day of grief and pain
the evil will be incurable.

The upsurge of nations

¹² Oh, the rage of many peoples—
they rage like the raging sea!
Oh, the thunder of many nations—
they thunder like the thundering of
mighty waves!

¹³ But God rebukes them,
and far away they flee,
swept away like chaff
on the hills before the wind,
whirled away like eddying dust
before the thunderstorm.

¹⁴ At eventide they sow terror;
before morning they are no more.
Such is the portion of our despoilers,
such is the lot of our plunderers.

Against Ethiopia

18 ¹ Woe to the land of whirling wings
beyond the rivers of Cush,

² which sends ambassadors by the sea
in papyrus boats over the waters!

Go, swift messengers,
to a people tall and bronzed,
to a nation feared far and wide,
a nation conquering and strong,
whose land the rivers divide.

³ All you inhabitants of the world,
all you who dwell on earth,
when a banner on the mountain is raised
look!

when a horn on the hill is sounded,
listen!

⁴ For thus Yahweh spoke to me:
"From where I dwell, I gaze untroubled,
like heat shimmering in the sunshine,
like a cloud of dew in the heat
of harvest."

⁵ For before the vintage,
when the flowers end,
and the blooms become ripened grapes,
I will shoot and prune
and hew away spreading branches.

⁶ They will be left to the birds of prey
and to the beasts of the earth.
The birds will feed on them all summer,
and the beasts all winter.

⁷ At that time, tall and bronzed people from
a country traversed by rivers — a conquering
and strong nation feared far and wide — will
bring offerings to the Lord, to Mount Zion, for
this is where the name of Yahweh Sabaoth
dwells.

Against Egypt

19 ¹ *An oracle concerning Egypt:*
Yahweh rides on a swift cloud and
comes to Egypt.

The idols of Egypt tremble before him;
the heart of Egypt melts within it.

² I will stir Egyptians against each other:
brother will fight against brother,
friend against friend,
city against city,
kingdom against kingdom.

³ The Egyptians will be demoralized for I
will confound their plans;

they will consult idols and sorcerers,
ghosts and necromancers.

⁴ I will deliver the Egyptians
into the hands of a cruel master,
and a tyrant will be their ruler.
It is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks.

⁵ The waters of the river will dry up;
the river bed will be parched

⁶ and the canals will become foul dry;
and the tributaries of Egypt's Nile cease to
flow and dwindle.



The reeds and rushes will wither.

⁷The plants on the banks
and at the mouth of the river,
and all the crops along the Nile will dry up.
blow away and be no more.

⁸The fishermen will mourn,
all who cast hook in the Nile will groan,
and those who throw nets upon the waters
will lament.

⁹The flax worker will be in despair,
the combers, too, and white cloth weavers;

¹⁰the spinners will be crushed;
the hired laborers despondent.

¹¹The princes of Zoan are utter fools,
and brutish is the counsel
of the wisest of Pharaoh's counselors.
How can you say to Pharaoh,

"I am one of the wise men, a disciple of
ancient kings?"

¹²Where are your wise men?
Let them come forward now,
let them explain to you
what Yahweh will do against Egypt.

¹³The princes of Zoan have become
fools;
the princes of Memphis have been
deceived;

Egypt is led astray by the chiefs of her
tribes.

¹⁴Yahweh has poured into them a spirit
which makes Egypt err in all her
undertakings,
as a vomiting drunkard errs.

¹⁵And Egypt will never succeed
in anything it undertakes
by head or by tail, by palm or by reed.

Egypt will be converted

¹⁶On that day the Egyptians will be like a
woman trembling in fear whenever they see
the hand of Yahweh Sabaoth raised against
them. ¹⁷Judah will be a terror to Egypt. When-
ever they come to think of Judah, the Egypt-
ians will be terrified because of the terrible
fate Yahweh Sabaoth has in store for them.

¹⁸On that day there will be five cities in the
land of Egypt speaking the language of Cana-
an, in which people will call upon Yahweh
Sabaoth. One of them is called the City of the
Sun.

¹⁹On that day there will be an altar to Yah-
weh in the center of the land of Egypt and a
sacred pillar to Yahweh at its border. ²⁰It will
be a sign and a remembrance of Yahweh
Sabaoth in the land of Egypt, so that they may
call to him when in oppression, and he will
send them a savior to defend and deliver them.

²¹Yahweh will reveal himself to the Egypt-
ians. They will acknowledge him on that day
and worship him with sacrifice and burnt of-
ferings. They will make vows to Yahweh and
perform them. ²²Yahweh will strike Egypt and
then cure it. When they convert to him, he will
heal them and heed their supplications.

²³On that day there will be a highway from
Egypt to Assyria. Assyrians will come to
Egypt, and Egyptians to Assyria, for the Egypt-
ians will serve the Assyrians.

²⁴On that day, Israel will be a third party
with Egypt and Assyria – a blessing on earth.
²⁵And Yahweh will bless them, saying,
"Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my
creation, and Israel my heritage."

Isaiah goes as a prisoner

+20 ¹In the year that the general
sent by Sargon, king of As-
syria, made an assault upon Ashdod,
capturing it, ²Yahweh gave a warn-
ing through Isaiah, the son of Amoz,
saying, "Hang the sackcloth from
your hips, take off your sandals and
go." He did so, and walked naked and
barefoot.

³Then Yahweh said: Just as my
servant Isaiah has walked naked and
barefoot for three years as a sign and
portent for Egypt and Ethiopia, ⁴so
will the king of Assyria lead away
captives from Egypt and exiles from
Ethiopia, both the young and the old,
naked and barefoot, their buttocks
uncovered, to the disgrace of Egypt.
⁵Those who pinned their hope upon
Ethiopia and made a boast of Egypt
will be frightened and put to shame.

⁶On that day the inhabitants of this

18. Jer 46, 26

22. Hos 6, 1

24. Gen 12, 2; Zac 8, 13

1, 2 K 18, 17

+ We can easily imagine the impact of this
symbolic gesture. Egypt was among the power-
ful of the time. Compared with Assyria, repre-
senting military power, Egypt was the richer

country, with a more refined civilization. The
Jews were counting on Egypt and were asking
for help: chariots and horses.

"Alas for those who trust in man" (Jer 17:5).



coastland will say, "Look at what happened to those we trusted and fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! What are we going to do now to save ourselves?"

Fall of Babylon

21 *¹An oracle concerning the Desert by the Sea:*

A fearful vision is shown to me:
As whirlwinds sweep over the Negeb,
coming in waves from the desert,
from the fearful land

² the traitor betrays,
the plunderer plunders,
"Go up, O Elam!
Lay siege, O Media!"

³ I have silenced all my groaning,
for this I am in anguish;
my body is wracked with pain
as a woman in travail.
I am so bewildered that I cannot hear,
I am so dismayed that I cannot see.

⁴ My mind reels,
my heart falters in fear:
the twilight I longed for
has become a horror.

⁵ They set the tables,
they spread the rugs,
they eat and drink.
Arise, O princes,
oil the shield!

⁶ For this is what Yahweh said to me,
"Go, post a watchman
and make him report what he sees.

⁷ If he sees riders:
horsemen in pairs,
men mounted on camels,
men mounted on donkeys,
let him observe diligently,
let him listen attentively."

⁸ Then the watchman shouted,
"On a watchtower, O Lord, I stand
through all the watches of the day,
and at my post I stay
through all the watches of the night.
⁹ and look, here come riders,
horsemen in pairs."
And he spoke up again:

Fallen is Babylon, fallen,
and all the graven images of her gods
lie shattered on the ground!"

¹⁰ O my people, threshed and winnowed,
I announce to you what I have heard
from Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel.

Against Edom and Arabia

¹¹An oracle concerning Dumah:
Someone calls to me out of Seir,
"Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?"

¹² The watchman answers,
"Morning comes, but soon
it will be night again.
Come back and ask,
if you want to ask again."

¹³An oracle concerning Arabia:
In the forest of Arabia lodge
the Dedanites' travelling companies.

¹⁴ Those who dwell in the land of Tema,
went to meet the fugitives:
bring bread for the hungry
and water for the thirsty.

¹⁵ These people have fled from the sword,
from the whetted swords,
from the bent bows,
from the fury of battle.

¹⁶ For thus Yahweh says to me, "In a year's
time, as a worker bound by contract would
reckon it, all the glory of Kedar will come to an
end. ¹⁷ Few of Kedar's archers and warriors
will remain." Yahweh God of Israel has spoken.

22 *¹An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision.*

What ails you now,
that you have all gone up to the
housetops,

² you with your hustle and bustle
a tumultuous city, a wanton town?
Your slain men

have not been killed by the sword
nor have they died in battle.

³ Together your leaders have fled;
they were captured under the threat of
the bows.

Your valiants were caught together,
they had fled far away.

⁴ That is why I say,

9. Jer 51, 8; Rev 18, 2

10. 41, 15

4. Jer 9, 17; 8, 19

■ *Against the Valley of the Vision*, namely, the cursed valley "Gehenna", bordering Jerusalem to the south. All the people went up to express their delight. Hezekiah's military victory or costly surrender to the Assyrians? Isaiah

knows that this meager success means tomorrow's defeat and humiliation. If they had listened to him instead of relying on their strength and their diplomacy, the Lord would have saved them.

"Look away from me.
I will weep bitterly.
Do not try to comfort me
over the ruin of the daughter of my
people."

This day of trampling and rout
is from the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth.
In the Valley of Vision they undermine
the walls
and the cries for help ascend to the
mountains.

⁶ Elam bears the quiver
with charioteers and horsemen;
Kir uncovers the shield.
⁷ Chariots are all over your choicest
valleys;
horsemen are stationed at the gates.
⁸ Judah is stripped of her defenses.

Let us eat and drink!

◆ On that day you turned your eyes
to the arsenal at the Palace of the
Forest. ⁹ You saw the many breaches
in the defenses of the city of David.
You gathered together the waters of
the lower pool.

¹⁰ You counted the houses of Jeru-
salem and tore down some of them to
strengthen the wall. ¹¹ You built a res-
ervoir between the two walls for the
water of the old Pool.

But you gave no thought to its
Maker. You had no regard for him
who had planned it long ago. ¹² On
that day the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth
called you to weep and mourn, to
shave your head and put on sack-
cloth.

¹³ But look, instead of all this, there
is wanton revelry; oxen are butchered

and sheep are slaughtered. You eat
meat and get drunk, saying, "Let us
eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

¹⁴ What you did and said has
reached the ears of Yahweh Sabaoth.
"Surely this sin will not be forgiven,
until you die," says the Lord Yahweh
Sabaoth.

Against a minister

¹⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth:
Go and talk to this man Shebna, who is the
palace steward. Ask him:

¹⁶ What are you doing here?
What right have you
to carve a resting place on the heights,
to cut out a burial place
for yourself here in the rock?
¹⁷ Look here, O you, strongman,
Yahweh will seize you;
He will carry you away in captivity
and take firm hold of you.

¹⁸ He will roll you up,
toss you like a ball,
then violently hurl you down
into a large open land.
There you will perish,
with the chariots of your glory,
O you, the shame of your master's
house!

¹⁹ You will be deposed, strongman.
I will hurl you down from where you are.

²⁰ On that day I will summon
my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah.
²¹ I will clothe him with your robe,
I will strengthen him with your girdle,
I will give him your authority,
and he will be a father
to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
and to the people of Judah.

²² Upon his shoulders I will place
the key of the House of David:
what he opens, no one can shut;

8. 1 K 7, 2 11. 7, 3; 5, 12; 30, 1 13. Ecl 3, 12; 1 Cor 15, 32 18. Am 7, 17 22. Rev 3, 7

◆ The Jews have been dragged into a new coalition against Assyria (705-701). Hezekiah reinforces Jerusalem's defenses before Sennacherib's arrival.

Isaiah looks at the restlessness of those men who refused to hear the call of Yahweh: he was asking them to stay out of fruitless struggles and to dedicate themselves to bringing about justice.

Neither Assyria nor Egypt is the saviour that Israel needs. Assyria and Egypt, fighting against each other for predominance, are not preparing a civilization for the future. In the days of Isaiah, no one knew that Assyria and Egypt were about

to disappear, or to lose their influence. People could not guess that the following centuries would be dominated by new cultures based on moral values (Buddhism) or on a new sense of man's creative personality (Greek culture). And Israel will also create one of these cultures thanks to its sense of responsibility, in response to the demand for justice and its obedience to God's word which Isaiah is proclaiming.

Seemingly Isaiah knows nothing about politics and forgets what is needed for the security of his country, too small to survive without help. But, in fact, he indicates the most pressing poli-

what he shuts, no one can open.

²³ I will fasten him like a peg
in a sure spot,
and he will be a seat of honour
in the house of his father.

²⁴ (Upon him will hang all the glory of his
father's house – offspring and descendants, all
the little vessels from bowls to jars.

²⁵ On that day, says Yahweh Sabaoth, the
peg fastened in a sure spot will give way; it will
be cut down and the load hanging on it will fall.
(Thus Yahweh has spoken.)

'Against Tyre

o23 ¹ *An oracle concerning Tyre:*

Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for Tyre is destroyed!

When you return from Kittim
you will hear the news and wonder.

² Keep silent, merchants of Sidon
all you inhabitants of the coast.
Your messengers passed over the sea;
the grain of Shihor,

³ came across the wide oceans,
the harvest of the Nile.

were your income
and became the wealth of the nations.

⁴ Be ashamed, O Sidon, refuge on the
sea,

for the sea has spoken.

"Have I not had labor pains
and brought forth children?

Have I not nourished young men
and brought up daughters?"

⁵ Those in Egypt will be in anguish
when they learn the fate of Tyre.

⁶ You who dwell on the coastlands,
wail as you pass over to Tarshish.

⁷ Is this the antique city, your pride,
whose feet had carried her afar
to found colonies in distant lands?

⁸ Who has planned this against Tyre,
the imperial city whose merchants
are princes, whose traders
are among the great ones of the world?

⁹ It is Yahweh Sabaoth who planned this,
to humble the pride of all majesty,
to bring down the glory
of the great ones of the world.

¹⁰ Till your land like the valley of the
Nile

O Daughter of Tarshish,
you have no more shipbuilding yard.

¹¹ Yahweh has stretched out his hand
over the sea to make kingdoms tremble.
He has ordered the destruction
of the fortresses of Phoenicia.

¹² He has said, "Rejoice no longer,
ravished virgin daughter of Sidon.
Arise, pass over to Cyprus;
even there you will find no rest.

¹³ Look at the land of the Chaldeans,
a people now of no account.
The Assyrians have destined the land
to be a place for wild beasts.

They have erected siege towers
and demolished her bastions,
razed her palaces, completely
reducing her to ruins.

¹⁴ Wail, O ships of Tarshish,
for your haven is destroyed.

¹⁵ On that day, Tyre will be forgotten for
seventy years, about the span of a king's life.
Then at the end of seventy years, it will happen
to Tyre as in a harlot's song:

¹⁶ Take a harp, go about the city, forgotten
harlot, sing your sweetest song, play your best
melody, that they may remember you.

¹⁷ At the end of seventy years, Yahweh will
visit Tyre. She will return to her hire and once
again play whore with all the kingdoms of the
world on the face of the earth. ¹⁸ But her wages
and activities as harlot will be dedicated to
Yahweh, instead of being stored or hoarded.
Her profits will go to those who live in the
presence of Yahweh, that they may have abundant
food and beautiful clothes.

The sentence

+ 24 ¹ See how Yahweh breaks
the land and makes it crack,

how he turns it upside down
and scatters its inhabitants.

² priest and people alike,
servant and master, maid and mistress;
buyer and seller, lender and borrower.

As it will be with the creditor,
so will it be with the debtor.

1. Ezek 26, 28

17. 45, 14; 60, 7

18. Dt 23, 19

2. Hos 4, 9

tical needs when he speaks of establishing national life on just and moral bases. This is the way to prepare for an unknown future, knowing that God is the one who has planned history long ago.

The people are having a good time in order to forget their tragedy. *Let us eat and drink, for*

tomorrow we die: Paul recalls these words in 1 Cor 15:32.

• The poems found in this chapter are not Isaiah's. They were written much later.

+ When Isaiah was announcing the coming of Emmanuel and a new "victory of Midian," he



³ Ravaged, ravaged is the land,
ruined, ruined is the world,
for Yahweh has spoken.

⁴ The earth mourns and withers,
the world pines and fades,
both heaven and earth languish.

⁵ The land lies polluted,
defiled by its inhabitants
who have transgressed the laws,
violated the ordinance,
and broken the covenant.

⁶ Therefore a curse consumes the land
and its people burn for their guilt.
Few of its inhabitants are left.

⁷ The new wine mourns,
the vine pines away,
all the revellers groan.

⁸ Stilled are the merry timbrels,
ended is the noise of the revellers,
silenced are the harps and lyres.

⁹ No more will they drink wine with a
song:

strong drink tastes bitter to the drinker.

¹⁰ Broken down is the city of confusion,
barred is the entrance to every house.

¹¹ In the streets there is a cry for wine:
all joy is gone,
all cheer has left the land.

¹² The city is left in distress
its ruined market is deserted.

¹³ So will it be on earth and among
nations,

as at the beating of the olive trees,
as at the gleaning of the grapes
at the time of the vintage.

¹⁴ But those from the west
lift up their voices
and sing the majesty of Yahweh.

¹⁵ Those from the west give glory to
Yahweh,
in the coastlands of the sea,
to the name of Yahweh, the God of
Israel.

¹⁶ From the remotest part of the earth
we hear songs of praise:
"Glory to the Righteous One."

But "Enough, enough," I say.
"I pine away, I pine away.
Woe to me! The traitors betray!
With treachery, the traitors betray!"

¹⁷ Terror, pit and snare
await you, inhabitants of the earth.

¹⁸ He who flees at the cry of terror
falls into the pit,
and he who climbs out of the pit
gets caught in the snare.
For the floodgates of heaven are opened
and the earth shakes to its foundation.

¹⁹ The earth is broken down,
the earth is in convulsion.

²⁰ The earth reels like a drunkard,
it sways like a hut in the storm,
weighed down by its transgression,
and it falls, never to arise again.

²¹ On that day Yahweh will punish
the host of the heavens above,
and the kings of the earth below.

²² They will be gathered together
as prisoners are gathered in the pit;
they will be shut up in a dungeon
and after a time, punished.

²³ Then the moon will be confounded
and the sun ashamed,
when Yahweh Sabaoth reigns
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and lets his Glory be shown to his elders.

Thanksgiving

25 'Yahweh, You are my God;
I exalt You and praise Your
name.

You have done wonderful things
faithful and true, planned long ago.

² You have made the city a heap,
the massively defended city a ruin.
The bastion of foreign domination
is a city no more
nor will it ever be rebuilt.

5. Num 35, 3; Gen 17, 7	6. Lev 26, 15	7. Am 6, 5	10. 25, 2	14. 12, 6	16. 45, 21;
Ps 7, 10	18. Am 5, 19;	19. Gen 7, 11	22. 2 Pet 2, 4	23. 4, 5; Mt 4, 7	1. Ps 118, 28

was expecting this soon. He could see that events were heading for a crisis in which God would give victory to his people.

However, after the exile and the return to Palestine, when nothing was happening, many Jews despaired because history was following its usual course. They lost trust in human power to bring about something really new and placed all their hopes in a divine intervention that would shake the world order.

This expectation is expressed in these chap-

ters 24-27 which were inserted into the book of Isaiah long after him, when the Jews returned to their land. The poems are interrupted by psalms and prayers.

- 25:6-9: *The banquet of the saved* after Judgment. John will use these images in Revelation 7:17 and 21:4.
- 27:2-5: *A song about the vineyard* in contrast with the threatening song of 5:1-7.
- 26:7-21: *Psalm of hope* which we highlight.



³ Therefore a strong people glorifies You; the head of a great nation holds You in awe.

⁴ For you have been a refuge to the poor, a haven to the needy in time of distress,
a harbor in the storm,
a shade from the heat.
For the blast from the ruthless is like an icy storm,
like the heat in a dry place.

You silence the noise of foreigners;
you subdue the singing
of the despot and the proud.

⁶ On this mountain
Yahweh Sabaoth will prepare
for all peoples a feast
of rich food and choice wines,
meat full of marrow,
fine wine strained.

⁷ On this mountain he will destroy
the covering cast over all peoples,
this very shroud
spread over all nations,

⁸ and swallow up death in victory.
The Lord Yahweh will wipe away
the tears from all cheeks and eyes;
he will take away
the reproach of his people
from all over the world;
for Yahweh has spoken.

⁹ On that day you will say: This is
our God;
we have waited for him to save us;
we hope and rejoice in his salvation.

¹⁰ For on this mountain
the hand of Yahweh rests.

Moab will be trodden down,
as straw trodden down on a dunghill.
¹¹ He will stretch forth his hands there,
as a swimmer spreads out his hands.
But Yahweh will strike down their pride
together with their falsehood.
¹² He will raze the high-walled fortress;
He will bring it down
to the level of the ground, as dust.

Song of victory

26 ¹ On that day
this song will be sung
in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city,
he himself has set it up in safety
with walls and fortification.
² Open the gates!
Let the righteous nation enter,
she who is firm in faithfulness.
³ You keep in perfect peace
the one of steadfast mind,
the one who trusts in You.
⁴ Trust in Yahweh forever,
for the Lord God, Yahweh,
is an everlasting Rock.
⁵ He brought down those who dwell
on high,
he layed low the lofty city,
he razed it to the ground,
to the level of the dust,
⁶ and there it is trampled
by the feet of the destitute,
by the footsteps of the oppressed.

Psalm of Hope

⁷ Let the righteous walk in righteousness; you make smooth the path of the just.

⁸ Walking in the way of your laws,

6. Pro 9, 2 7. 2 Sam 15, 30 8. 1 Cor 15, 54; Rev 21, 4 9. Ps 93, 1; 97, 1; 1 Per 1, 8

■ This psalm of hope was written long after Isaiah. It shows Jewish piety in the centuries after their return home, following the exile.

While they were in exile, they were subject to foreigners (13-14); they acknowledged their mistakes and they began to be more consistent in their faith (16). They hoped for their liberation (17). They believed that upon return, they would

build a better world, but this apparently did not happen (18), since the pagans remain in the Holy Land and they continue to make the life of believers difficult (10-12). And so the people pray to God for the time of their restoration. And God, being just, will not only grant them the liberation of the living, but he will also raise the innocent victims who trusted in him, so that they may also know God's peace (19-21).

O Yahweh, we hope in you; your name and your memory are all the desire of our hearts.

⁹ My soul yearns for you in the night; for you my spirit keeps vigil. When your judgment comes to earth, the world's inhabitants learn to be upright.

¹⁰ When favour is shown to the wicked, he does not learn to be righteous. He does evil in a land of integrity and fails to see Yahweh's majesty.

¹¹ Yahweh, your hand is lifted up, but they fail to see that. Let them see your zeal for your people, that they may be put to shame. Let your enemies be burned in the fire of your anger.

¹² Yahweh, please give us peace; for all that we accomplish is your work.

¹³ O Yahweh, our God, other lords besides you have ruled us, but it is your name alone that we honour.

¹⁴ They are now dead, never to rise again, for you have destroyed them. You have wiped out all remembrance of them.

¹⁵ You have enlarged the nation, O Yahweh; you have given glory to your name; you have widened the borders of the country.

¹⁶ Yahweh, we sought you in distress, while we cried out in anguish under your chastisement.

¹⁷ As a woman in travail moans and writhes in pain, so were we in your presence.

¹⁸ We conceived, we had labor pains, but we gave birth to the wind. We have not brought salvation to the land, and the inhabitants of a new world have not been born.

¹⁹ Your dead will live! Their corpses will rise! Awake and sing, you who lie in the dust!

Let your dew fall, O Lord, like a dew of light, and the earth will throw out her dead.

²⁰ Come, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a short time until his wrath is over.

²¹ For look, Yahweh is coming out of his dwelling to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their sins. The earth will reveal the blood shed upon her and will not conceal her slain any longer.

The vineyard of Yahweh

27 ¹ On that day, with his fierce, strong, and powerful sword,

Yahweh will punish Leviathan, the twisting serpent always fleeing; he will slay the dragon of the sea.

² On that day, he will say, "Praise my fruitful vineyard! ³ I, Yahweh, am its keeper; I water it every moment. So that no one will harm it, day and night I guard it."

⁴ "I have no wall, who will cleanse me from thorns?"

"I myself will march against them, I will burn them altogether. ⁵ Or if they come to me for refuge, let them make peace with me, yes, let them make peace with me."

⁶ In the days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and bear many a shoot

and fill the face of the earth with fruit.

⁷ Has Yahweh beaten them as he beat those who beat them?

Has he slain them as he slew those who slew them?

⁸ With expulsion and exile the city has been punished; with a blast as fierce as a storm from the east,

9. Ps 63, 2; 77, 3

21. Gen 4, 10; Job 16, 18

6. 11, 1; Hos 14, 4

10. Eccl 8, 11

1. 51, 9; Ps 74, 13

Job 26, 12

12. Phil 2, 13

Ezk 32, 2; Rev 12

3. 26, 1; 5, 1

18. 13, 8; Mt 24, 8

Rev 12

3. 26, 1; 5, 1



she has been pursued and carried off.

* By this, therefore, the guilt of Jacob will be expiated and he will atone for his sins when he pulverizes all the altar stones like chalkstones crushed to pieces. No more Asherah poles or incense altars!

¹⁰ For the fortified city is abandoned: it lies deserted now, a forsaken habitation left like a wilderness.

There the calves graze, there they lie down, and there they strip bare its branches.

¹¹ Its dry boughs are broken women come and make fire with them. This is a people without understanding; therefore their Maker will not spare them; he will not show compassion for them.

¹² On that day, between the Euphrates and the Wadi of Egypt,

Yahweh will thresh out the grain. One by one you will be gleaned O people of Israel.

¹³ On that day a great trumpet will blow, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will return to worship the Lord on the mountain in Jerusalem.

The irresponsible rulers

◆ **28** ¹ Woe to the drunkards of Ephraim proudly adorned, that fading flower of luxurious beauty on the head of a rich valley – all are dizzy with wine.

² Look, the Lord is sending a powerful and strong one. Like a downpour of hail, like a destructive tempest, like flooding water in torrential rain, He will cast it down to the ground ³ that proud ornament of the drunkards of Ephraim.

He will trample it underfoot – ⁴ that fading flower of glorious beauty on the head of a rich valley. It will be like an early fruit which ripened before summer: as soon as someone sees it he picks it, and while it is yet in his hand he eats it.

⁵ On that day, Yahweh Sabaoth will be a glorious ornament, a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of His people. ⁶ He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the enemies at the gate.

Scoffers beware

⁷ But they also have erred through wine, reeling and stumbling from strong drink. Priests and prophets stagger, befuddled with wine, reeling when seeing visions, stumbling when rendering decisions. ⁸ All the tables are full of vomit; there is not a spot without filth.

⁹ "Who does he think he is teaching? Who does he think listen to him? Babies just weaned from their mother's milk? Babies just taken from their mother's breast?"

9. 1st 7. 5 10. 25. 2; 1. 5. 22 4. Na 3. 12 5. 4. 2

◆ Chapters 28-35. In these chapters we find a mixture of many poems from very different sources.

- 28:1-14 *Oracles against Samaria*: spoken in the period immediately before its destruction (721); see commentary on 2:6-19. Note in verses 9-13: the priests and the false prophets make fun of Isaiah; they say that his words are no more than warnings to little children. Isaiah tells them: since you do not want to understand the Lord's clear message, he will speak to you loudly through events which will upset you (also in 29:14).

Two oracles recalled in the Gospel: 28:16 and 29:13.

Several oracles spoken during the 701 crisis.

- 28:14-15 and 28:18-19: against the king's evil advisers: they oppose God's will.
- 30:1-17: against Egypt.
- 29:1-12; 30:27-33 and 33:7-16: against Assyria and its king, Sennacherib: "Ariel" or "Lion of God" means Jerusalem.
- 30:18-26 and 32:15-20: about future prosperity.

Several poems from the days of the Exile or much later.

¹⁰ Who cares to hear his
Keep quiet, Keep quiet!
Wait a little, wait a little!"

¹¹ Yes, surely with stammering lips
and in a strange tongue,
he will talk to this nation,

¹² he who once said to them,
"This is rest, give rest to the weary";
and, "This is repose."
But they would not listen.

¹³ That is why Yahweh now says:
Keep quiet, Keep quiet!
Wait a little, wait a little!

so that when they have to go forward,
they will instead fall backward;
they will be injured and snared
and taken captive.

¹⁴ Therefore, listen to the word
of Yahweh, you scoffers
who rule these people of Jerusalem.

¹⁵ Because you make a boast;
"We have made a covenant with death;
we have made a pact with the nether
world.

When the flood passes by
it cannot harm us,
for we have made lies our refuge
and falsehood our hiding place."

o ¹⁶ Therefore the Lord Yahweh says this:
See, I lay in Zion a granite stone,
a precious cornerstone,
a sure foundation;
he who believes shall not be put to shame.
¹⁷ I will make justice the measure
and righteousness the plumb line.

Violent hail will sweep away the
refuge of lies
and raging waters will overflow the
hiding place.

¹⁸ Your covenant with death will not
stand,
your pact with the nether world will be
annulled.

When the overwhelming flood passes
you will be crushed by it.

¹⁹ Morning after morning,
by day and by night,

the scourge will seize and crush you.
If you understood this message,
you would be terrified.

²⁰ The bed is too short to stretch out on,
the blanket too narrow to wrap around
you.

²¹ Yahweh will arise as on Mount
Perazim,
he will rouse himself as in the Valley of
Gibeon,

to work his work – his singular work;
to do his deed – his strange deed.

²² Put an end to your mocking,
or your bonds will be tightened,
for I have heard the destruction decreed
against the whole earth
by the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth.

Parable of the farmer

²³ Listen to my words, pay attention and
understand what I say.

²⁴ Does the ploughman do nothing but
plow, loosen the earth, pulverize the clods
with a harrow?

²⁵ After levelling the soil, does he not begin
to sow caraway and scatter cummin, wheat
and barley in its place and spelt in the border.
²⁶ For his God instructs him on what to do, He
gives him guidance and discretion, too.

²⁷ For caraway is not threshed nor cummin
rolled, but caraway is beaten, and cummin also
with the stick.

²⁸ Is the wheat milled in the threshing
floor? Is it threshed without end? They put in
movement chariot and horses but do not grind
it.

²⁹ All comes from Yahweh Sabaoth whose
advice is excellent, whose wisdom is wonder-
ful.

Hurricane on Jerusalem

29 ¹ Woe to Ariel – Ariel,
the city against which David
encamped.

After a year or two,
after the feasts have made their full
round,

11. 33, 19; 1 Cor 1, 21; 14, 21
27. Jer 10, 24; 2 Sam 7, 14

15. 8, 19
29. Rom 11, 33

16. Ps 118, 22; 1 Cor 3, 11; Rom 9, 33; 1 Pet 2, 6
1. 2 Sam 5, 6

– 34: The Lord's Judgment upon Edom (see
introduction to chapter 24).
– 35: the return from Exile, similar to Isaiah
40-41.
– 33:17-22: Dream of an era of peace.

o The Lord builds the foundations of the new
Jerusalem. On the cornerstone we read: "He
who leans on it will not be shaken". The new
people of God will be a believing people and so
no power will dominate them. Even before

² I will lay siege on Ariel
and there will be grief and mourning.
To me she will be like an Ariel.
³ I will send warriors against you;
they will encircle you with outposts
and raise siegeworks against you.
⁴ Thrown down, you will speak from the
ground:
from the dust your words will come
muffled,
your voice will rise as a ghost's,
your speech will be a whisper in the
dust.
But in a flash,
⁵ the horde of your enemies will be like
dust,
the horde of tyrants, flying chaff.
⁶ For suddenly, Yahweh Sabaoth will
come
with thunder, earthquake and great
noise,
with whirlwind and thunderstorm
and flames of consuming fire.
⁷ The hordes of all nations
that fight against Ariel,
that attack and besiege her fortress,
will vanish like a dream,
like a vision in the night.
⁸ As when a hungry man dreams he is
eating
and awakens with an empty stomach,
or when a thirsty man dreams he is
drinking
and awakens with a parched throat,
so will the horde of nations
that make war against Zion.
⁹ Be irresolute, be stupefied,
lose your sight and remain blind!
Be drunk but not from wine,
stagger but not from beer.
¹⁰ For Yahweh has poured out on you
a spirit of deep sleep;
He has shut your eyes – the prophets;
He has covered your heads – the seers.

¹¹ The revelation of all this has become for
you like the words of a sealed scroll. When
someone gives it to another and says, "Read
this," the other one answers, "I cannot," ¹² it is
sealed." When the scroll is given to one who
cannot read and commanded, "Read this," he
answers "I cannot read."

6. 30, 27; 66, 15	7. 36-37	10. Rom 11, 8;	11. Rev 7, 1	13. 1, 11;
Ps 78, 36; Mt 15, 8; Mk 7, 6	14. 1 Cor 1, 19	16. 45, 9; Jer 18, 6; Rom 9, 21		
20. 28, 14	22. 45, 17			

Christ, the Jews understood this "cornerstone"
to refer to the Messiah (see Psalm 118:22).
Jesus applied the term to himself (see Mt 21:42
and Eph 2:21). Paul also recalls this new founda-
tion in 2 Tim 2:19.

+ Reproaches against those who only pay lip

This people honours me in words

+ ¹³ Yahweh has said; "These peo-
ple approach me in words; they hon-
our me with lip-service, while their
hearts stay afar. They worship me in
routine observance of men's precepts.

Now therefore, ¹⁴ I will perform
marvels on them once more: I will
make the wisdom of their wise men
perish; I will make the understanding
of their prudent men vanish.

¹⁵ Woe to those
who hide deep from Yahweh their plans,
who work in the dark and say,
"Who will know, and who will see us?"

¹⁶ You turn things upside down,
as though the potter were the clay,
and of him it could say,
"He did not make me; he knows nothing."

¹⁷ In a very short time,
Lebanon will become a fruitful field
and the fruitful field will be as a forest.

¹⁸ On that day
the deaf will hear the words of the book,
and out of the dark and obscurity
the eyes of the blind will see.

¹⁹ The meek will find joy
and the poor among men will rejoice
in the Holy One of Israel.

²⁰ For the tyrant will be no more
and the strongman gone forever,
and all who plan
to do evil will be cut down –

²¹ those who by a word make a man guilty
those who for a bribe can lay a snare
and send home the just empty-handed.

²² Therefore Yahweh, Abraham's
redeemer,
speaks concerning the people of Jacob:
No longer will Jacob be ashamed;
no longer will his face grow pale.
²³ When he sees the work of my hands,
his children again in their land,
they will sanctify my name,
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,
and stand in awe of the God of Israel.

service without deepening their faith. Against
religion passed on like past customs or taught as
a school program. God then will teach them
through unforeseen events which disturb their
short-sighted wisdom. See Mt 15:8 and 1 Cor
1:19.

²⁴Those who err in spirit will understand;
those who murmur will learn.

Do not rely on the great powers

30 ¹"Woe to the rebellious children,"
says the Lord;

"they make plans which are not mine,
they form alliances I did not inspire,
and thus add sin upon sin.

² They go down to Egypt without my
advice
to take refuge in Pharaoh's protection
and seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt.

³ Therefore Pharaoh's protection will be
your shame

and Egypt's shadow your confusion.

⁴ For when your officials reach Zoan
and your ambassadors come to Hanes,

⁵ they will all be put to shame
by a people who can do nothing for
them,
who can give neither help nor benefit
but only disgrace and reproach."

⁶ *An oracle concerning the beasts of the
Negeb:*

Through a distressed and troubled land
of lions and lionesses,
of vipers and darting snakes,
the envoys carry their riches upon the
shoulders of young asses,
their treasures upon the humps of
camels,

to a people that is of no use to them.

⁷ For the Egyptians will help in vain and
to no purpose.

Therefore I call Egypt
Scarecrow, the Do-Nothing.

Just tell us pleasant things

⁸ Now go, write it down as a record for
them, inscribe it on a scroll for them to keep, to
be an everlasting accusation against them:

⁹ "These are a rebellious people, their chil-
dren deceitful. They do not listen to Yahweh's
instruction.

¹⁰ To the seers they say, "See not," and to
the prophets, "Do not prophesy the truth. Just
tell us pleasant things, see illusions and proph-
esy deceits." ¹¹ Stray out of the path, out of your
way! Take away from us the Holy One of Is-
rael!"

¹² Therefore the Holy One of Israel says,
"Because you despise this word, and you trust
rather perverseness and oppression, choosing
to stay with it, ¹³ therefore this guilt of yours
will be like a breach on a high wall, cracked
and bulging, ready to fall; the crash will come
suddenly and instantly.

¹⁴ It will be like the breaking of a potter's
vessel, smashed so ruthlessly that among its
fragments not one shard remains big enough to
scoop cinder out of the hearth or ladle water
out of the cistern."

¹⁵ For thus said the Lord Yahweh,
the Holy One of Israel:
"Conversion and calmness are your
salvation,

quietness and trust will be your bravery."
But you would have none of these.

¹⁶ Instead you said,
"No, we will flee on horses!"
Very well then, flee!

And you added,
"We will ride on swift steeds."
Your pursuer will be swifter.

¹⁷ At the threat of one, a thousand will
flee,
at the threat of five all will flee,
till what is left of you will be
like a staff on a mountaintop,
like a banner on a hill.

The coming prosperity

o ¹⁸ Yet Yahweh waits to give you
grace; he rises to show you compas-

1. 5, 21; 28, 15; 29, 15

10. Jer 11, 21; Am 2, 12; 2 Tim 4, 3

13. Ex 13, 14

15. Mt 23,

37. 17. Dt 33, 20; Hos 14

■ A poem condemning the alliance with
Egypt.

Note in verses 8-15: Isaiah keeps quiet after
the failure of his mission, as in 8:11. A man of
faith is not impressed by dangers; he only trusts
in the word of God.

o God loves us and teaches us. This poem
speaks of all the marvels to be discovered when
meeting God through tears.

You will see that your idols are unclean.
They have become aware that they are serving
false gods. Idolatry does not mean only keeping

carved gods, but also trusting people, serving
institutions and envying the things that these
images represent. Following Ezekiel we can see:

- The idolatry of the Egyptians: confidence in
a super-organized state giving food to ev-
eryone, but depriving them of freedom.
- The idolatry of the Assyrians: worship of
power and male-centeredness.
- The idolatry of the Babylonians: the longing
for money and routine work have invaded
all of their lives. Men have no time to live
and they do not question the meaning of
their lives.

sion. For Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him.

¹⁹ O people of Zion, who dwell in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. When you cry, he will listen; when he hears, he will answer.

²⁰ When the Lord has given you the bread of anguish and the water of distress, he who is your teacher will hide no longer. ²¹ Your own eyes will see him, and your ear will listen to his words behind you: "This is the way, walk in it."

²² You will see the uncleanness of your idols and images overlaid with silver and gold. You will throw them out like menstrual cloth. "Away with you then!" you will say to them.

²³ He will then give rain for the seed you sow and make the harvest abundant from the crops you grow. On that day your cattle will graze in large pastures. ²⁴ Your beasts of burden will eat silage tossed to them with pitchfork and shovel.

²⁵ For on the day of the great slaughter, when fortresses fall, streams of water will flow on every mountain and lofty hill.

²⁶ The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times greater, like the light of seven days, when Yahweh binds up the wounds of his people and heals the bruises inflicted by his blows.

Assyria will be sacrificed

²⁷ Look, from afar
the Name of Yahweh is coming

burning in anger,
with a heavy hand
Filled with fury are his lips,
like a consuming fire is his tongue.

²⁸ Like a rushing torrent is his breath
rising up to the neck,
shaking the nations
as in a sieve of destruction,
putting the bit of his bridle
between the jaws of the peoples
and thus causing them to err and stray.
²⁹ You will have singing,
as on the night of a holy solemnity;
your hearts will rejoice
as when people go up with flutes
to the mountain of the Lord,
to the mighty One of Israel.

³⁰ Yahweh will make his majestic voice
heard

and show his arm descending
in devastating fury and consuming fire,
with sweeps of wind and bursts of
thunder.

³¹ At the voice of Yahweh,
Assyria will be battered;
at the blows of his rod,
it will be shattered.

³² Every beat of the punishing rod
will be in rhythm with timbrels and
lyres.

Yahweh will fight against him
with outstretched hand

³³ For the pyre has long been ready,
prepared for the king.
Broad and deep is its fire pit
piled up with dry grass and wood.
The breath of the Lord,
like a stream of brimstone,
will set it ablaze.

Look to the Holy One of Israel

31 ¹ Woe to those who go down
to Egypt for help, who pin
their hopes on cavalry, putting their
trust in chariots because they are
many, relying on horsemen because
they are strong.

Why did they not look to the Holy

18. Ps 1, 1; 2, 12; 31, 12. 19. 65, 24. 20. Jl
25, 35, 7. 26. Hos 6, 1. 27. 10, 5-19

2, 23. 24. Jer 31, 34. 25. 2, 20. 26. Lev 26
28. 8, 8; 37, 29. 32. 10, 24. 33. Gen 19, 24

◆ This text continues the poem of 30:1 and presents the three protagonists of political power. There are two "great powers" and between them, the small Jewish nation trying to survive. The kings call on Egypt against Assyria and then, on Assyria against Egypt.

Isaiah's teaching is firm: before getting in-

involved in dangerous political games, the king must be just and the people must be faithful to the commandments. Then, all will be able to rely on God, their Rock. The word of God continues to be meaningful today:

- for the dominated people of the third world.
- for the church when it feels threatened.

One of Israel or consult Yahweh?
²And yet he is very wise, and from him disgrace will come.

He does not go back on his word; he will rise against the evildoers, and cut off the help the wicked waited for.

³The Egyptians are men, they are not God; their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When Yahweh stretches forth his hand, the one who is helped and his helper will fall, and perish together.

⁴For thus the Lord has spoken: Just as a lion or a lion cub growls over its prey and is neither frightened nor disturbed by the noise of the shepherd, so will Yahweh Sabaoth descend to fight on Mount Zion.

⁵Like birds that hover, so will Yahweh Sabaoth shield Jerusalem:

he will protect and deliver, rescue and save.

⁶Return, O children of Israel, to him you have so wickedly betrayed.

⁷On that day each one of you will throw away the idols of silver and gold that his sinful hands have made.

⁸Assyria will fall by a sword not wielded by a man; he will be devoured by a sword not handled by a mortal; he will flee before the sword, his young men will be captured and put to forced labor.

⁹They will desert their post and the officers, in terror, will abandon the standard." It is Yahweh who speaks, whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

A king will reign with justice

32

¹A king reigns with justice and princes in righteousness.

²Each is like a shield from the wind and a shelter from the rain,

like streams of water in a dry, parched land,
 like the shade of a rock in a weary land.

³The eyes of those who see will not be shut; the ears of those who hear will not be stopped.

⁴The mind of the rash will not judge hastily; the tongue of stammerers will speak clearly.

⁵No more will the fool be taken as noble, nor the scoundrel be considered honorable.

⁶For the fool speaks folly and his mind thinks sinfully; he practises wickedness and takes pride in godlessness; he lets the hungry go without food, he lets the thirsty go without drink.
⁷The ways of the scoundrel are also evil, scheming wickedly against the poor, destroying the needy with lies when the cause they plea is just.
⁸But the noble man's plans are noble, and his deeds are noble also.

Tremble you idle women

⁹Rise up, women who are at ease; hear my voice, carefree daughters; give heed to my words.

¹⁰In a little over a year, you who feel complacent will be shaken, for harvest will not come and the vintage will fail.

¹¹Tremble, you women who are at ease; be troubled, you carefree ones.



Can my life be torn from you?
What do I live on?
Who will come to pull the wall down?
As for myself, be sure
I never shall feel defeated.
Whom have I to fear?

You have put to death
my people.

Saying this,
I haven't lost hope.

You know,
There is no land in sight now,
but there is sky everywhere.



Stop "giving to the poor." Give them the Word
that they may become and live as true persons.

¹⁵ He who walks uprightly
and speaks righteously,
who spurns profits from oppression,
who shakes his fists at graft and
corruption,
who stops his ears against suggestions of
bloodshed
and closes his eyes to opportunities for
committing evil deeds.
¹⁶ This is the man
who will dwell on the heights,
his stronghold a fortress of rocks;
bread is given to him
his water will not fail.

After the oppression

+ ¹⁷ Your eyes will behold a king in
his splendor and a land that stretches
afar.

¹⁸ Yet your mind may still dwell on
its old fears: Where is the oppressor
who counted and weighed the taxes
and enrolled our sons?

¹⁹ But you will see no more of those
fierce people with obscure speech
you cannot comprehend, with stam-
mering tongue you cannot under-
stand.

²⁰ Look to Zion, the city of our fes-
tivals, see Jerusalem, a peaceful
abode, a tabernacle never to be de-
stroyed. Not one of its stakes ever to
be removed nor any of its ropes to be
severed.

²¹ But there is Yahweh mighty for
our sake, in place of broad rivers and
streams. Here you see no galley with

oars; no stately sailing ship. ²² But
Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our
king; he will save us.

²³ The rigging hangs loose:
it cannot hold the mast firm,
it cannot keep the sail spread out.
Such are the prey and spoil
that even the lame carries it off.

²⁴ No one apologizes, "I am sickly."
The people who dwell there,
have been forgiven their sins.

The end of Edom

■ 34 ¹ Come, O nations, hear
and take heed, O peoples!
Listen, O earth and all that is in you:
listen, O world and all that comes from
you.

² The wrath of Yahweh is upon all
nations.

His fury is upon all their armies.
He has doomed them.
He has given them over for slaughter.

³ Their slain will be thrown away,
stench coming from the carcasses,
mountains will flow with blood.

⁴ The heavens will dissolve
and the skies roll up like a scroll,
all their host shall fall,
as the leaf falls from its vine,
as the fruit falls from its tree.

⁵ My sword waited in the heavens;
and look, it descends upon Edom,
to judge the people I have doomed.

⁶ The sword of Yahweh is bathed in blood,
and covered with fat –
the blood of goats and lambs,
with the fat of the saddle of rams.
For Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah,

15. Ps 15, 5

18. 37, 1

19. 28, 11

20. Ps 122; 46, 6

23. 2, 4; Ps 50, 6

4. 24, 23; Mk 13, 25; Rev 6, 12

6. Ex 21, 13; 2 S 1, 22; 63, 1; Jer 46, 1

9. Gen 19, 23

+ This poem, inserted in the book of Isaiah later, emphasizes the hope for peace when oppression will be only a memory.

Zion, Jerusalem, is the tent which will never be moved. It enjoys Yahweh's secret protection, already mentioned in 8:1 in the image of the waters of Shiloah. A silent presence, yet more powerful than the presence of the great nations. These are on the shores of large rivers (Babylon, Egypt and also Tyre, on the seacoast) and they are always proud of their large boats.

In Zion, the city without power or riches, but under the Law of God, believers feel secure in facing the events.

Look to Zion, the city of our festivals, the secure home. This is the way the believer looks at the church where he finds Christ. If he stays on the fringe of the church, without being committed with her, he can easily criticize. But if he really comes in and shares her life in depth, he discovers that only the church can communicate strength, peace and God's presence to everyone.

■ – 34:1. *Yahweh's judgment upon Edom.*
See the introduction to chapter 24.

– 35:1. *The return of the exiles and the announcement of the age of the Messiah.*
See commentary on Is 40:4.

a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

⁷ Wild oxen will fall with them
and young steers with the bulls.

Their land will be drenched with blood;
their soil will be enriched with fat.

⁸ For Yahweh has a day of vengeance,
Zion's defender has a year of recompense.

⁹ The streams of Edom will become pitch,
her soil will be turned into brimstone,
her land will be burning pitch.

¹⁰ Never will its fire be quenched, night
or day,

forever will its smoke go up.

From generation to generation the land
will lie desolate

and none will ever pass through it.

¹¹ It will be the haunt of pelican and wild
hog,

the dwelling place of the owl and the
hawk.

God has decided to make it empty,
he has destined it to be desolate.

¹² There will be no more kings to be
proclaimed.

no princes to be acclaimed,
for the nobility will vanish
in a kingdom doomed to perish.

¹³ Thorns will grow over the castles,
nettles and brambles over the citadels;
the place will be a haunt of reptiles,
an abode of owls and ostriches.

¹⁴ Wild beasts will meet there,
wild goats will call one to another;
there will the night creatures alight
to find for themselves a resting place.

¹⁵ There will the great owl make her nest
to lay and hatch and also find rest.
There will the vultures gather,
each with its mate.

¹⁶ Seek and read from the book of Yahweh:
not one of them will be missing,
for his mouth has given the order
and his spirit has brought them together.
¹⁷ He has cast the lot for them.

His hand has divided it among them.
They will possess the land forever,
and from generation to generation dwell
there.

The return of the exiles

35

¹ The wilderness and the arid land will rejoice;
the desert will be glad and blossom.

² Covered with flowers, it will sing and shout with joy,
adorned with the splendor of Lebanon,
the magnificence of Carmel and Sharon.
They, my people, see the glory of Yahweh,
the majesty of our God.

³ Give vigor to weary hands
and strength to enfeebled knees.

⁴ Say to those who are afraid:

"Have courage, do not fear.

See, your God comes, demanding justice.
he is the God who rewards,
the God who comes to save you."

⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unsealed.

⁶ Then will the lame leap as a hart
and the tongue of the dumb sing and shout.
For water will break out in the wilderness
and streams will gush forth from the desert.

⁷ The thirsty ground will become a pool,
the arid land springs of water.

In the haunts where once reptiles lay,
grass will grow with reeds and rushes.

⁸ There will be a highway
which will be called the Way of Holiness;
no one unclean will pass over it
nor any wicked fool stray there.

⁹ No lion will be found there
nor any beast of prey.

Only the redeemed will walk there.

¹⁰ For the ransomed of Yahweh will return:
with everlasting joy crowning their heads,
they will come to Zion singing,
gladness and joy marching with them,
while sorrow and sighing flee away.

Sennacherib's invasion

◆36 ¹In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ²From Lakish the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. They halted at the channel of the Upper Pool on the highway of the Fuller's Field. ³So Eliakim son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator, went out to him together with Shebna the secretary and Joah son of Asaph the recorder.

⁴The field commander said to them, "Give Hezekiah this message of the great king of Assyria: How can you be so confident? ⁵You thought that words replace strategy and military strength? On whom are you relying to rebel against me?"

⁶You rely on Egypt, a broken staff which pierces the palm of him who leans on it. Such

is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, for all who rely on him. ⁷Yes, you may say to me: 'We rely on Yahweh our God'. But isn't he the one whose altars and high places Hezekiah has removed when he commanded Judah and Jerusalem: 'You shall worship before this altar'?

⁸Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king. I will give you two thousand horses if you are able to supply riders. ⁹How could you ever repulse one of the least of my master's generals? And you rely on Egypt for chariots and horsemen! ¹⁰Do you think that I have come to attack and destroy this land without consulting Yahweh? He himself said to me: 'Go up to this land and conquer it!'

¹¹Then Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Speak to your servants in Aramaic, we understand it. Do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of these people on the walls."

¹²But the field commander said, "Do you think that my master sent me to speak these words only to your master and you. Isn't it also to the men on the walls who with you will have to eat their own dung and drink their urine?"

¹³Then the field commander stood and cried out with a loud voice in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king of Assyria: ¹⁴Do not let Hezekiah deceive you! No, he will not be able to help you! ¹⁵Do not listen to him

33, 33, 20

35, 30, 19; 1 K 11, 32

8, 37, 30

10, Job 17, 11

12, Job 7, 6

◆ The next two chapters repeat chapters 18 and 19 of 2 Kings, and relate the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib's army. The first story was taken up in the commentary on 2 Kgs 18:17.

Now, we look at the second event:

Isaiah encourages resistance even though there is no human hope of being able to resist. He promises an intervention from God which happens in the form of an epidemic wiping out

the Assyrian army. The angel of Yahweh went and struck one hundred eighty five thousand men in the camp.

In 22:8 we remarked on Isaiah's opposition to any compromise with the great powers – a seemingly negative attitude for a small nation unable to resist. Here he relies solely on the power of faith – as Elijah had done before – and he saves his nation.



when he tells you to trust in Yahweh, saying, "Yahweh will save us; this city will not be given over to the king of Assyria." ¹⁶ Do not listen to Hezekiah but to what the king of Assyria says, "Make your peace with me" ¹⁷ and surrender. So I will let each of you eat of your vine and of your fig tree and drink the water of your cistern until I come again. Then I will take you to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, of bread and vineyards.

¹⁸ Hezekiah is misleading you when he says that Yahweh will save you. Have the gods of the nations rescued their lands from the hands of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Shepharvaim? And have the gods delivered Samaria from my hand? ²⁰ Who among all the gods of these nations has been able to save his country from me? Do you think that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

²¹ The people were like deaf men and remained silent for the king had commanded them not to answer him.

²² Then Eliakim with Shebna and Joah came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him what the field commander had said.

King Hezekiah consults Isaiah

37 ¹ When King Hezekiah heard this he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went to the house of Yahweh. ² He sent Eliakim, Shebna and the elders among the priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz.

³ And they said to Isaiah, "This is what Hezekiah says: 'Today is a day of distress, rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to birth and there is no strength to deliver.' ⁴ Your God may hear the words of the field commander, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent. May Yahweh your God rebuke him for the words he said, insulting the living God. I therefore offer a prayer for the few of us that are left."

⁵ When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, ⁶ he said to them: "Tell your master this word of Yahweh: Do not fear because of what you have heard and how the servants of the king of Assyria have insulted me. Listen! ⁷ I will let him be disturbed by certain news, so he will return to his country and there I will have him slain by the sword."

⁸ The field commander returned and found

the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹ This was because King Sennacherib had heard that Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt, was going out to fight him.

Again Sennacherib sent messengers to Hezekiah with these words, ¹⁰ "Say to Hezekiah king of Judah that his God in whom he trusts might deceive him in saying that Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria. ¹¹ Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands they have destroyed! And will you be spared? ¹² Have the gods saved the nations that my fathers destroyed? Gozan and Haran, Rezeph and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivvah?"

¹⁴ Hezekiah took the letter from the messengers and when he had read it he went to the house of Yahweh where he unrolled the letter ¹⁵ and prayed saying, ¹⁶ "O Yahweh, God of hosts and God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim! you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth, give ear Yahweh and hear! ¹⁷ Open your eyes and see! Listen to all the words of Sennacherib who has sent men to insult the living God!

¹⁸ It is true, Yahweh, that the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries of the earth. ¹⁹ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not true gods but made of wood and stone by human hands. ²⁰ Now, O Yahweh our God, save us from his hand and let all the kingdoms of the earth know that you alone, Yahweh, are God."

²¹ Then Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent word to Hezekiah: "You have called upon Yahweh and he has heard your prayer regarding Sennacherib, king of Assyria. This is what Yahweh has spoken against him:

²² The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises and scorns you; the Daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head behind you.

²³ Whom have you insulted and blasphemed?

Against whom have you raised your voice

13. Ps 90, 5 14. Ps 88 16. Hos 17. Mi 7, 19 18. Ec 9, 10; Ps 88, 12; 115, 17

o It is important to underscore the following in Isaiah's prophecy:

– God cannot stand the pride of the powerful who, by despising the poor who trust in



and lifted up your eyes?

Against the Holy One of Israel!

²⁴Through your servants
you have insulted Yahweh.

For you have said:

With my numerous chariots,

I have ascended the heights of the
mountains,

the topmost recesses of Lebanon.

I have felled its tallest cedars

and its choicest fir trees.

I have reached the remotest

heights of its border,

the best of its forests.

²⁵I have dug wells and drunk
waters;

I dried up with the sole of my foot
all the streams of Egypt.

²⁶But have you not heard how I
decreed it long ago?

I have just brought to pass what I
planned from days of old:

to lay waste fortified cities,
to turn them into ruinous heaps.

²⁷Shorn of power, their inhabitants
have been dismayed and
confounded;

they have been as the grass
and green plants in the field,
as the grass on the housetops,
as corn blasted before it has grown.

²⁸I know whenever you rise or sit,
whenever you go out or come in;
and I know your rage against me.

²⁹Because of your rage against me
and of your arrogance that has
reached my ears

I will put my hook in your nose
and my bridle in your mouth,
and I will turn you back
on the way by which you came.

³⁰This will be a sign for you, O
Hezekiah: This year you will eat the
gleaning of the fields and next year
the self-sown grain, but in the third
year sow and reap, plant vines and eat
the fruit.

³¹A remnant of the people of Judah
shall take root below and produce
fruit above. ³²For a remnant will come
from Jerusalem and survivors from
Mount Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of
hosts will accomplish this. That is
why Yahweh has spoken concerning
the king of Assyria. ³³He shall not
enter this city nor shoot his arrows.

³⁴He shall not raise a shield to oppose
it or build a siege ramp against it. He
shall leave by the way he came and he
shall not enter the city, word of Yah-
weh.

³⁵I will protect this city and so save
it for my own sake and for the sake of
David, my servant.

³⁶That night the angel of Yahweh
went and struck one hundred and
eighty-five thousand men in the
Assyrian camp. When the people rose
early next morning there lay all the
corpses.

³⁷So Sennacherib, king of Assyria de-
parted, returned home and lived in Nineveh.

³⁸While he was worshipping in the temple of
his god, Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and
Sharezer slew him with the sword and then
escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhad-
don, his son, succeeded him as king.

Illness and cure of Hezekiah

+38 ¹In those days Hezekiah fell
mortally ill and the prophet
Isaiah, son of Amoz, went to him with
a message from Yahweh, "Put your

19. Dt 4, 9

1. 2 S 8, 9

6. 2 K 24, 1

1. 49, 13; 51, 12; 52, 9

2. Ex 22, 3;

God, are despising God himself.

– The promise of liberation includes the
promise of a national restoration. After
their trial, the survivors will be like a new
plant.

If we look carefully at world history we see
how God protects defenseless people and the

human groups who remain faithful to their mis-
sion. More than anyone else, the church expe-
riences this protection when it is reduced to a
persecuted minority.

+ This incident must have taken place before
the 701 siege. Here we see king Hezekiah sick
and very concerned about his health.



house in order for you shall die; you shall not live."

²Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh, ³"Ah Yahweh! remember how I have walked before you in truth and wholeheartedly, and done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah, ⁵"Go and tell Hezekiah what Yahweh, the God of his father David, says: I have heard your prayer and I have seen your tears. See! I am adding fifteen years to your life ⁶and I will save you and this city from the power of the king of Assyria. I will defend it for my sake and for the sake of David my servant. ⁷And this shall be for you a sign from Yahweh, that he will do what he has promised. ⁸See! I shall make the shadow descending on the stairway of Ahaz go back ten steps." So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had covered on the stairway.

²¹Isaiah then said, "Bring a fig cake to rub on the ulcer and let Hezekiah be cured!"

Canticle of Hezekiah

⁹Canticle of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery:

¹⁰Once I said: In the noontime of my life I go:

I am sent to the land of the dead,
where I am consigned

for the rest of my years.

¹¹I said: Never again shall I see Yahweh in the land of the living;
never again shall I look upon man among the inhabitants of the earth.

¹²Like a shepherd's tent, my dwelling has been pulled down and thrown away; like a weaver, he rolled up my life and cut it from the loom:
from day to night he made me waste away.

¹³I have cried for help until morning. Like a lion, he has broken all my bones.

¹⁴I have uttered shrill cries like a swallow or a crane,
I have moaned like a dove,
my eyes all the while are growing weary as I looked up to the heavens:
Come and help me, O Lord!
for I am troubled.

¹⁵But how can I speak and what shall I say to him if he himself is doing this to me?
I will have to walk all my years bearing this anguish of my soul.

¹⁶O Lord, give me back my health and give me back my life!

¹⁷My anguish has turned to peace; you have retrieved my life from the pit of corruption;
you have cast all my sins behind you.

¹⁸For the dead cannot give you thanks, death cannot give you praise;
those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your kindness.

¹⁹The living, the living alone can give you thanks and praise, as I do, fathers will tell their sons of your fidelity.

²⁰O Yahweh, come and save me!
We will sing, accompanied by harps, in the Temple of Yahweh all the days of our life.

Jer 16, 18	3. Lk 1, 76;	Mr 3, 1; 3, 16;	Mr 3, 3; Jn 1, 23	6. James 1, 10; 1	Per 1, 24
8. Ps 119, 89	10. 62, 11;	Rev 22, 12			

Isaiah offers to cure him on God's behalf and with the promise of protecting and defending the Holy City. Yahweh's perspective is much broader than that of the pious Hezekiah. If God cures him it is with a view to his own plan of salvation for all.

Hezekiah's canticle is a psalm of thanksgiving like those we find in the book of Psalms. It expresses the profound feelings of the believers of the Old Testament for whom dying meant losing everything and who tried to convince God that he would gain nothing in letting his faithful people disappear forever.

◆ This final incident related in the book of

Isaiah comes from 2 Kings 20. It emphasizes the meanness of Isaiah's own friends.

Isaiah continues to be God's servant, constant in his faith. As for Hezekiah, in spite of having been favored by God, he remains egotistical and irresponsible.

Hezekiah seems to have been moved more by fear than a man of deep faith. This may explain why his son, Manasseh, became the worst of all the kings of Judah: we know that, many times, those who are the worst enemies of faith, were born from families in which there was more external religious practice than deep faith and commitment to others.



Babylonian Embassy

39¹ At that time Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah after hearing that he was recovering from an illness.² Hezekiah was pleased and showed the envoys all that was in his treasure house, the silver, gold, spices and fine oil, his entire armory and all that was in his treasury. In fact there was nothing in his palace or in his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show him.

³ Isaiah the prophet came to Hezekiah and asked him, "What did these men say and from where did they come?" Hezekiah answered, "They came to me from a distant country – from Babylon."

⁴ And Isaiah said, "What have they seen in your palace?" Hezekiah replied, "They have seen everything in my palace; there is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them."

⁵ Isaiah then said, "Hear this word of Yahweh, the God of hosts: 'Behold the days are coming when all that is in your palace and which your fathers have treasured to this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left. ⁷ And some of your descendants, born of you, will be taken and become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"

⁸ Hezekiah then said to Isaiah, "The word of Yahweh which you have spoken to me is good!" For he thought: there will be peace and truth in my lifetime.

11. Est 34;	Lk 15, 5	14. Rom 11, 34;	1 Cor 2, 16; Job 21, 22	15. Ps 62, 10; Wis 11, 12
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BOOK OF CONSOLATION THE HOUR OF GOD THE REDEEMER

The following chapters refer to events which enabled the Jews exiled in Babylon to come back home. These events are related at the end of the book of Kings and the beginning of the book of Ezra.

This book apparently deals with a new liberation, a repetition of what happened at the beginning of sacred history when God brought his people out of Egypt. Yet, this time, it is fitting to speak of REDEMPTION because the word redemption, with its meaning of rescue, implies above all that someone, or some people who had become lost, are saved.

God the Liberator had come to seek a people who did not know him and did not know themselves. These men whom God brought out of Egypt were not even a people. God was new to them and they were new to him. While God the Redeemer is God leading a nation in ruins, a nation which had wasted its own wealth. He speaks to a sinful people who, having known God, disobeyed him to the point of losing themselves.

Thus, the word Redemption expresses the overflowing love of God who personally bends down towards his people rebellious and lost, old and sick through their own fault. He restores health to them, giving them hope, and teaching them the meaning of their sufferings. At the very center of this book dedicated to God the Redeemer, will be the portrait of CHRIST, THE REDEEMING MAN.

And so when the Jews returned to their own land with a clearer realization of their sins, they started to look towards new horizons which the forgiving God opened up for them. They were not only to restore their nation, but to become instruments for the UNIVERSAL RECONCILIATION of men with God and of men among themselves.

Book of Consolation



HISTORICAL DATA

The Jews, exiled in Babylon and enlightened by the teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, knew they were to be the remnant through whom God would uplift the people of Israel. But they could only hope for the hour of God.

As can be seen throughout the Bible, God sends prophets when important things are taking place. He sends them to explain the events and to show the way. For Israel in exile, "the" event was Cyrus, king of Persia. In 549 Cyrus rebels against the Medes to whom he had been subject. Five years later he gathers Medes and Persians under his authority, and in another five years he conquers Lydia. In competing for the leadership, he has one final alternative: confronting Babylon.

This is the time when, from among the Jews who had left their country, there appeared a great prophet, whose name is unknown. As the political scene was getting more disturbed, God revealed to him the time of liberation.

Besides this, God revealed a mysterious fact: the Lord had now forgiven his people and cancelled their past accounts and he announced that he was coming soon. There are the foundations of the happy message placed after the prophecies of Isaiah in chapters 40-55 of what is called "the book of Isaiah."

A CONSOLING MESSAGE

This is a message of Good News, which in Greek is translated as Gospel. To his companions, the prophet proclaims this first Gospel, a prelude to the Gospel which will come later. Briefly:

- He invites them to have faith. Yahweh has not been conquered in the defeat of his people. He is the only Lord of the universe and is in charge of present events.
- He calls them to hope. They must get ready to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it, since it is there that humankind will meet God.
- He never tires of showing them the love and tenderness of Yahweh, so similar to that of a mother.

Among the poems in this book those referring to the servant of Yahweh stand out: 42,12:50, 43:52:13. In these poems the prophet depicts how God reconciles the world through the faithfulness of a servant who represents at the same time Christ, the people of God, and the countless innocent victims of this world.

o ¹Be comforted, my people,
be strengthened, says your God.

²Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, proclaim to her
that her time of service is at an end,
that her sin has been paid for,
that from the hand of Yahweh
she has received double punishment
for all her iniquity.

³A voice cries,
"In the wilderness prepare the way for Yahweh
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every valley will be raised up;
every mountain and hill will be laid low.
The stumbling blocks shall become level
and the rugged places smooth.

⁵The Glory of Yahweh will be revealed,
and all men together will see it;
for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry."
and I say, "What shall I cry?"
"All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is as the flower of the field.

⁷The grass withers, the flower wilts,
when the breath of Yahweh blows upon it.

⁸The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will forever stand."

19. 44, 9	20. Jer 10	22. Num 13, 33; Ps 104, 2	23. Job 34, 18	26. Bar 3, 34
27. 49, 4	31. Ps 103, 5	2. 45, 1		

o The prophet very discreetly tells about his being called. As Isaiah, he is introduced in the Heavenly Council, where God, surrounded by his angels, makes his decisions. There, something mysterious is revealed to him:

Speak to Jerusalem and tell her that her guilt has been paid. Yahweh has forgiven his people, and because of this he is going to re-establish them in the Promised Land. They should not be overwhelmed by the prestige of the invincible Babylon where they live as exiles. *All flesh (all mortals) is like grass:* means that the famous city is only a human construction and it will pass like men's ambitions (see James 1:10); but God's promises will always be fulfilled.

Angels are told to prepare the return of the exiles. The arid and dangerous road of the desert will be levelled for them. They will have a triumphant return. To all people (*all flesh*) in the world, the wonders will be so obvious that they will discover the glory of the one God and they will recognize Yahweh.

Then, across time and space, the prophet addresses the new community which is going to be born, in order to announce the Good News to

them. This is the first time these words appear in the Bible.

Comfort is another new word. In the Bible, does not mean that God brings us to resignation or to passive observance, but rather encourages us so that we can continue our mission. Thus, in the following chapters, the prophet will encourage the Jews to return, in spite of difficulties. Paul's letters, we will find the words to *comfort* and *encourage* countless times. But like the other authors of the Bible, in recalling God's promises, Paul invites us to struggle against the forces of evil with perseverance.

in the desert prepare the way for Yahweh
The prophet saw Yahweh walking ahead of his people to guide them to their definitive homeland. But when the exiles returned to Palestine they realized that they had not found God nor a definitive homeland; something was still missing which would be fulfilled centuries later. In fact, at the appointed time, John the Baptist appeared preaching in the desert, and after him came God "so that all mankind would see him", as the Gospel points out (Luke 3:4).

⁹Go up onto the high mountain, messenger of Zion
lift up your voice with strength,
fear not to cry aloud when you tell Jerusalem
and announce to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!

¹⁰Here comes your God with might;
his strong arm rules for him;
here with him is his reward,
and here before him is his booty.

¹¹Like a shepherd he tends his flock:
He gathers the lambs in his arms,
he carries them in his bosom,
gently leading those that are with young.

The great God

+ ¹²Who has measured the waters of the sea
in a cupped hand,
or calculated the breadth of the sky in
the span of a hand?

Who has counted the dust of the earth?
Who has weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?

¹³Who has probed the spirit of Yahweh
or as a counselor advised him?

¹⁴Who has he consulted to enlighten him
to teach him to govern with justice
and make him know knowledge?

¹⁵The nations, surely, are like a drop of
water in a bucket,

or like dust on the scales.

The islands weigh no more than powder.

¹⁶Lebanon is not enough to burn as altar
fire,

nor will its animals provide a holocaust.

¹⁷All nations before him are as nothing,
all emptiness, all vanity in his eyes.

¹⁸To whom, then, will you liken God?

With whose image will you compare him?

¹⁹To an idol cast by a craftsman,
covered with gold by a goldsmith
and adorned with silver chains?

²⁰Or to a wood that will not rot, chosen and
fashioned by a skilled craftsman into an image
that cannot move?

4. 44, 6: Rev 1, 17; 22, 13
47, 4; 49, 7

15. 28, 28

7. 40, 19

16. Mt 3, 12

8. Lk 1, 54; Heb 2, 1

18. 35, 6; Ps 107, 35

14. 6, 3; 44, 6; 44, 24;

+ In later chapters, we will read other poems resembling this one, stressing the greatness of the Lord of creation. This insistence should not surprise us. The prophet repeats the same arguments against idols, not so much to convince us, as to delight in repeating the same praise of the one God.

In Babylon where the Jews did not have a temple or organized worship, they saw the splendor of pagan worship. The imperial city was calmly stating the superiority of its secular gods and its famous temples. It was then, when the Jews were dispersed among foreign nations, that they discovered that their faith could conquer the world: they alone knew where the world came from and where history was going.

At the beginning of this century, believers paid special attention to God, creator of the universe, who planned the laws of nature and society. They did not reflect much on the historical events to see the saving work of God in them. Thus, it was necessary to emphasize the fact that God reveals himself to men if they concern themselves with bringing justice to the world, and with saving their oppressed brothers. But

the Jews followed the reverse order. First, they experienced the presence of a God who was saving them and demanding a social life based on justice. Then, they understood that Yahweh, their God, was no other than the master of the world and its laws, the God of all people. From that time on, they felt the obligation to give to the world the light that would save it.

In this there may be a lesson which we still need since we can see that many people are very enthusiastic about the person of Christ, without caring to know who he is. They are not even concerned about the historical Jesus as the Gospels present him, and they are satisfied that his portrait stand out among all men. Yet, men taught by modern science know they are in solidarity with the whole universe; they know that the same movement, the same law governs the stars, the atom and even the very promptings of the heart. Such men cannot be satisfied with Christ, "the first revolutionary", nor with a Christ "great idealist", or a Christ "superman". They will not surrender to Christ if they do not see him greater than the world, and if they cannot adore him as the very Creator become man.



²¹ Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the
beginning?
Have you not understood the reality of the
earth?

²² He sits upon the circle of the earth,
its inhabitants like grasshoppers;
he stretches out the heavens as a curtain
and spreads them out like a tent where he
dwells.

²³ He reduces the princess to naught,
and the rulers of the earth to nothingness.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted or sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them, and they wither,
a storm sweeps them away like stubble.

²⁵ To whom, then, will you liken me
or make me equal? says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens
and see, who has created all this?
He has ordered them as a starry host
and called them each by name.
So mighty is his power,
so great his strength,
that not one of them is missing.

²⁷ How can you say, O Jacob,
how can you complain, O Israel,
that your destiny is hidden from me,
that your rights are ignored by Yahweh?

²⁸ Have you not known, have you not heard
that Yahweh is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth?
He does not grow tired or weary,
his knowledge is without limit.

²⁹ He gives strength to the enfeebled,
he gives vigour to the wearied.

³⁰ Youth may grow tired and faint,
young men will stumble and fall,

³¹ but those who hope in Yahweh
will renew their strength.
They will soar as with eagle's wings;
they will run and not grow weary;
they will walk and never tire.

Cyrus, liberator of Israel

41 ¹ Keep silent before me, O islands,
or be prepared to contend with me;
O nations, draw near and speak.

Let us meet together for judgment.

² Who has called from the east
one that victory hails at every step?
Who has given him the nations to rule
and their kings to subdue?

His sword makes dust of them
and his arrows scatter them like chaff.

³ Unharméd he pursues them through
paths

that his feet have scarcely touched.

⁴ Who really has done all this?

I, who call the generations from the
beginning.

I, Yahweh, who am the first
and will be with the last.

⁵ The islands have seen it and feared.
Afraid, the ends of the earth
draw near and come forward.

⁶ (Each helps the other and says to his
brother, "Bear up!" So the handicraft encour-
ages the goldsmith, and he who beats out with
the hammer assures the other who strikes the
anvil, saying, "It is ready for soldering"; and
he fastens the idol with nails to hold it in place.)

Hope for a new exodus

◆ But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
seed of Abraham my friend,

⁹ you whom I have taken
from the ends of the earth,
called from the remotest corners
and to whom I have said,
"You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast
you away,"

21. 43, 15 23. Jer 10, 5; Zep 1, 12 25. 41, 2; 45, 13 1. Mt 12, 18; 3, 16; Lk 23, 35;
Mt 17, 5; Jn 1, 32; Jer 50, 44; Is 11, 2 3. 61, 3 5. Ps 89, 9

■ The first verses of the poem (1 to 3) present
Cyrus, the conqueror who is progressing in his
conquest of the Middle East. In previous times,
pagan kings were sent by Yahweh to punish his
people. Now, one of them is chosen by God to
save his people. This is a lesson in humility for
believers: God is saving them through a non-
believer whom he makes his instrument. God
does not always pick saints or believers to liber-
ate nations.

Verses 6-7 concerning idolatry, are out of
place, just as occurred in 40:19-20.

◆ For centuries the Jews had looked upon
their past, always expanding the memory of the
wonders worked by God in their departure from
Egypt. Now, they must look to the future. This
time, a new departure is being prepared from
Babylon, and it will be accompanied by wonders
greater than those of the first Exodus.

What emphasis! The Bible continues to pre-
sent magnificent hopes in the midst of ordinary
events. In fact, the return to Palestine was going
to be in small groups and the only miracle would
be that of their persevering faith.



¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will give you strength,
I will bring you help,
I will uphold you
with the right hand of my justice.

¹¹ Surely, all who rage against you
will be put to shame and disgrace,
all who fight against you
will perish and come to nothing.

¹² You will seek but will not find
those enemies of yours;
those who took up arms against you
will be destroyed and brought to
nothing.

¹³ For I, Yahweh, your God,
take hold of your right hand

and say to you: "Fear not,
I will help you."

¹⁴ Fear not, Jacob, poor worm,
and you, men of Israel.
I am your redeemer, says Yahweh,
the Holy One of Israel, your helper.

¹⁵ I will make you a thresher,
new and with sharp double teeth:
you will thresh hills and mountains,
crushing them and reducing them to
chaff.

¹⁶ You will winnow them,
the wind will carry them off
and the storm will scatter them.
But you will rejoice in Yahweh
and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁷ The poor and the afflicted seek water, and find none.
Their tongues are parched, with nothing to drink.
But I, Yahweh, will hear them;
I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

¹⁸ I will open up streams over the barren heights
and let the rivers flow through all the valleys;
I will turn the desert into lakes and brooks
and the thirsty earth
into a land of springs.

¹⁹ I will plant in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle and the olive;
I will plant in the wasteland fir, cypress and pine –

²⁰ that all may see and know,
consider and understand,
that the hand of Yahweh has done this,
that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

o ²¹ Present your case, says Yahweh.
Produce your evidence, says the King of
Jacob.

²² Bring your idols and let them tell us
what is going to happen.
What have they foretold,

so that we may consider them
and reflect on the final outcome?

²³ Let them foretell what is to come
that we may know that they are gods.
Let them do good or do evil,
that we may be dismayed and terrified.

6. 49, 6; Mt 26, 28; Lk 2, 32;	Jn 8, 12	7. Ps 107, 10; Acts 26, 18; Lk 1, 79	9. 43, 19
10. Ps 33, 3; 96, 1; Jud 5, 13; Rev 5, 9	13. Ps 24, 8; Dt 10, 17; Zep 1,	20. 44, 18	

Thus, this text is also addressed to us, the believers of today, courageous enough to be more than passive hearers in the church. When we are united in small communities and try to revive a church with limited resources or when we commit ourselves in an effort to uplift society, God

himself invites us to be hopeful. Patience, hope and optimism.

o This passage celebrates Cyrus between two victories. When we read these verses, we understand that the prophet had anticipated the

²⁴ See, they are nothing,
their work is nothing,
and to choose them is foolishness.

²⁵ From the north I have called him, and
he comes;
from the east I have summoned him, for
he calls upon my name.

He tramples kings and princes down
as if they were mortar,
as if he were a potter working the clay.

²⁶ Has anyone announced this from the
beginning, so we might know,
or foretold it long ago, so we might say, "It
is true"?

No one among you foretold it,
no one proclaimed it.
No one heard a word from you.

²⁷ I was the first to announce to Zion:
"Look, here they come!"
and I sent a messenger to Jerusalem.

²⁸ But when I looked, there was no one,
there was not a single counsellor among
them
who, if asked, could give an answer.

²⁹ All of them are nothing,
emptiness are their works;
their images are wind and nothingness.

Here is my servant

+ 42

¹ Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight.
I have put my spirit upon him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.

² He does not shout
or raise his voice in the streets.

³ A broken reed he will not crush,
nor will he snuff out the light
off the wavering wick.

He will make justice appear in truth.

⁴ He will not waver or be broken
until he has established justice on earth;
the islands are waiting for his law.

21. Dt 4, 6	1. 41, 13	2. 48, 10; 1 Cor 3, 15	9. 41, 22	15. Lev 19, 2
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successes of the liberator when no one could foresee them. Thus, God revealed future events to his prophets as a proof that he himself was the real saviour of his people. He had planned that Cyrus should come from far away to restore freedom to the Jews.

+ Here we have the first of the *Songs of the Servant of Yahweh* (see the introduction to this book). This song may have celebrated Cyrus, chosen by God to save the Jewish people. This conqueror appeared when, for already two centuries, the people of the Middle East had endured sufferings impossible to describe: endless wars, repression, killings and torture, and almost constant hunger for the small nations crushed by Assyria and Babylon. Cyrus gathered them all into one empire and was able to earn their trust through his respect for the beliefs and customs of every nation.

In Cyrus, the prophet sees the initiator of a new age when God would reveal himself to humankind and he saw him as little less than the Messiah. All he says about Cyrus can be applied to Christ, the real Messiah, and when the age of

the Gospels arrives, the apostles will recognize the announcing of Jesus and his salvation in this poem (Mt 12:18).

Here is my servant. More than anyone else, Jesus was the servant of God, his Father, being the son of Mary who proclaimed herself the maidservant of the Lord (Lk 1:38).

My chosen one, in whom I delight. These are the very words which we will hear at the Baptism and the Transfiguration of Jesus (see John 1:19; Luke 3:22; Matthew 17:5).

I have put my Spirit upon him. See Is 11:2 and 61:1; Jn 3:34.

He will bring justice to the nations, namely, his decision to bring about justice in the world. *He does not shout or raise his voice.* To save the world, Christ will not use such human means as propaganda, demagoguery, violence; he will be humble of heart, the master to whom those seeking "rest" come (see Matthew 11:29).

In the text there is a play on the words *broken* and *waver*. The servant is understanding with those who are broken or who have doubts, but

⁵ Thus says God, Yahweh,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread the earth and all that comes from it,
who gives life and breath to those who walk on it:

⁶ I, Yahweh, have called you for the sake of justice;
I will hold your hand to make you firm;
I will make you a covenant to the people,
and as a light to the nations,
⁷ to open eyes that do not see,
to free captives from prison,
to bring out to light those who sit in the darkness.

⁸ I am Yahweh, that is my name
I will not give my glory to another;
or my praise to graven images.

⁹ See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things do I declare:
before they spring forth I tell you of them.

Song of victory

■ ¹⁰ Sing a new song to Yahweh;
sing his praise from the ends of the earth.
Let the sea and all that it holds,
let the coastlands and their inhabitants
resound with song and praise of him.
¹¹ Let the wilderness and the cities
lift up their voice,
together with the villages of Kedar.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing,
and shout from the top of the mountain.
¹² Let them give glory to Yahweh

and praise him in the far islands.

¹³ Yahweh comes like a mighty warrior,
he stirs up fury like a warlord.
He threatens, he raises the battlecry,
and he triumphs over his enemies.

¹⁴ "For a long time I have held my peace;
I have kept still and restrained myself.
But now I cry out like a woman in labor,
I will destroy and devour!

¹⁵ I will lay waste mountains and hills
and wither out all their vegetation;
I will turn rivers into wasteland

16. Ex 14	19. Jer 23, 7; Rev 21, 5	20. 35, 6	21. 1 Per 2, 9	2. 49, 1; Jer 1, 5
3. Ezk 39, 29; Jl 3, 1; Zac 12, 10	6. 41, 4; Rev 1, 7; 22, 13			

he, himself does not hesitate, nor does he allow himself to be broken: he is strong and understanding with the weak.

I called you to open eyes that do not see and to free captives from prison. The Servant of Yahweh will begin by saving Israel. He will give sight, that is, faith, to the blind who do not believe (see Is 35:5 and 32:3). He will bring captives out of prison, that is out of Babylon. And because God's first covenant with Israel on Sinai was broken by the rebellious people, now Yahweh prepares a new covenant for a people of believers: to reconcile my people (the text says more explicitly: so you will be a covenant of the people).

The light for the nations (see Luke 2:32). Recall what was said in the introduction and about 40:12. The Jews dispersed among foreign people are aware that the God of all people will not save them without at the same time achieving the reconciliation of all the nations.

■ Cyrus' steps are God's victory. Yahweh marches as a warring God (see Judges 5:4), but inspired by maternal love.

The poem recalls the mission entrusted to Isaiah (6:9): "Through you the hearts of these people will be hardened and their eyes blinded." Yahweh has forgiven and he wants to heal this people who do not know how to see and who are already called blind in 42:7. After their being liberated they will be the witnesses of the God who saves.

At times, it seems to us that the prophets were mistaken in announcing so many times God's coming as being very close, when they were still in an earlier stage of history. In fact, they were not very different from us, when we believe we have gained everything with the victory of one of our own people, whether in an election, or a sports event. We do not abandon Christ, the only saviour and the only hope, when we struggle for very human hopes and become



and dry up the pools.

¹⁶ I will lead the blind by ways which they do not know; along unseen paths I will guide them. I will turn darkness into light before them and make the rough ground smooth. These are the things that I will do, and I will not forsake them.

¹⁷ But those who trust in graven images, and say to idols, "You are our gods" will be turned back in utter shame.

o ¹⁸ Listen, O deaf, that you may hear; look, O blind, that you may see!

¹⁹ Who is blind, but my servant, or deaf as the messenger I send? Who is blind but the one I am lifting up, Who is deaf but the servant of Yahweh? ²⁰ You see many things without observing your ears are open but without hearing.

²¹ It pleased Yahweh, the Just One, that his Law receive glory and fame.

²² But this is a people robbed and plundered
all of them ensnared in pits or languishing in prison. They have become a prey, with no one to rescue them they have become a spoil, with no one to order, "Send them back."
²³ Who among you will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear for the time to come?

²⁴ Who handed Jacob to the spoilers and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not Yahweh, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey?

²⁵ Therefore he poured out on them the fury of his anger—the violence of war. It blazed round about them, and they failed to know what it meant; it burned and consumed them, and they remained in bewilderment.

**In the midst of the flames,
you shall not be burned**

43 ¹ But now, thus says Yahweh, who created you, Jacob,

who formed you, Israel:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name;
you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; neither will the flames consume you.

³ For I am your saviour, I, Yahweh, your God, the Holy One of Israel.

I give Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you

⁴ Since you are precious in my sight, and important – for I have loved you, I give men in exchange for you and people in return for your life.

⁵ Fear not, for I am with you: I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.

⁶ I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them!"

Bring back my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth,

⁷ all those called by name, all I have created for my glory.

⁸ Let go off my people – who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf.

⁹ Let the nations gather together, let the people assemble.

Who among them can foretell this or declare to us the things to come?

Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right;

Let others hear so that they may say, "It is true."

8. Dt 32, 4; Ps 18, 32

9. 41, 6; Jer 10, 3

17. 45, 20

22. Hos 14, 2; Lam 5, 21

excited about human saviours. We walk with them part of the way, and then, we let go of them to move forward, to wherever Christ calls us.

o This passage could be entitled: Exploited Peoples.

◆ The reliability of the triumphant God is even more obvious than in the previous poems: *I, I Am...* Someone said that this "I" is detestable on men's lips, but it does befit God: "I Am" was God's revelation to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3). And Jesus will also say many times: "I Am" to reveal who he is (John 8:12).

Such is the God who lifts our spirits. *When you walk through the fire you will not be burned.* Everything is possible, including living according to the Gospel in a materialistic environment.

In exchange for you, I will give many people. With this figurative expression, Yahweh's unique love for his children is re-affirmed. He is ready, at any cost, to be reconciled with this people whom he chose and who became lost through their own fault.

In the end, 43:16-21, we hear this once again: the new Exodus from Babylon will sur-



◆¹⁰ You are my witnesses, says
Yahweh.
you are my servant whom I have
chosen,
that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am He:
before me no god was formed,
neither will there be one after me.

¹¹ I, I am Yahweh,
there is no saviour but me.
¹² It is I who have foretold;
I have saved and made it known,
I, not any strange god among you.
Therefore you are my witnesses
– it is Yahweh who speaks,

¹³ I am God; this day too I am He:
There is no one who can deliver
from my hand,
and what I do no one undoes.

¹⁴ Thus says Yahweh,
your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
For your sake I send an army to Babylon
to bring down all their nobles.
The Chaldeans' shout of joy
will turn into lamentation.

¹⁵ I am Yahweh, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.

¹⁶ Thus says Yahweh,
who opened a way through the sea
and a path in the mighty waters,

¹⁷ who brought down chariots and
horses,
a whole army of them,
and there they lay, never to rise again,
snuffed out like a wick.

¹⁸ But do not dwell on the past,
or remember or the things of old.

¹⁹ Look, I am doing a new thing:

it springs forth now.

Do you not see?

I am opening up a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

²⁰ The beasts of the land will honour me,
jackals and ostriches,
because I give water in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert
for my chosen people to drink.

²¹ I have formed this people for myself;
they will proclaim my praise.

○ ²² You have not called upon me, O Jacob,
indeed you were tired of me, O Israel;

²³ neither have you brought me sheep for
burnt offerings

nor honoured me with your sacrifices.
I have not burdened you with offerings
nor wearied you asking for incense.

²⁴ You have not spent money on sweet
frankincense for me,

neither have you satisfied me with the
fat of your sacrifices.

Instead you have burdened me with your
sins

and wearied me with your offenses.

²⁵ I it is, I am he
who blots out your offenses for my own
sake,

and remembers your sins no more.

²⁶ Remind me about the past;
let us argue together.

Speak up and prove your innocence.

²⁷ Your first father sinned,
your mediators have rebelled against me.

²⁸ Therefore I have disgraced the
dignitaries of your temple,

I have consigned Jacob to destruction,
Israel to scorn.

44 ¹ But now listen, Jacob my servant,
Israel whom I have chosen.

² This is what Yahweh says –
he who made you and will help you,
he who formed you from the womb:

25. 1 Cor 1, 20 ... 28. 40, 11; Eze 1, 1 ...
*pass that of Egypt: you have done enough
looking at the past; now look to the future.*

○ People are ungrateful by nature. They usually manage so that serving God will not deprive them of time or money. Many people only think about God to complain to him. Yet, the love of God will be stronger than their lack of gratitude: *He will pour out his Spirit upon the human race.*

You have not brought me sheep as victims. The exiled Jews had neither temple, nor rituals in Babylon. On the basis of this, Yahweh tells them: "If I come to save, it is not because you

1. 42, 6, 8; 55, 10; Hos 2, 23; Ps 85, 12 ...

have bought my favors with your sacrifices". God saves them, though they have not given up anything for him, and they have not even called on him.

I am the one who blots out your offenses and no longer remember your sins. You burdened me with your sins. After what he said through Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God keeps declaring his love that is scorned by men. In spite of their differences, all the prophets use the language of passionate love. This allows them to better express what sin is: not just a fault against sacred laws, but rather a rejection of God's love.

Fear not, O Jacob my servant,
Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

³ For I will pour water upon the thirsty
land

and streams on the dry ground.
I will pour my spirit upon your race
and my blessing upon your offspring.

⁴ They will spring up like grass,
like poplars beside the flowing streams.

⁵ One will say, "I belong to Yahweh";
another will call himself by Jacob's
name.

On his hand another will write "Yahweh"
and take the name of Israel.

⁶ This is what the Lord says –
Israel's King and Redeemer, Yahweh
Sabaoth:

I am the first and I am the last,
and there is no other God besides me.

⁷ Who then is like me?

Let him stand up and speak,
let him argue it with me.

Who from the beginning has foretold the
future,

and revealed to us what was to come?

⁸ Do not be afraid or be troubled.

Have I not proclaimed
and foretold this long ago?

You are my witnesses:
Is there a God besides me
or another Rock? I would know him.

Mockery against those who worship idols

⁹ Good for nothing are all idol makers,
and useless are the works they prize so much.
Their witnesses, blind and ignorant, will be put
to shame. ¹⁰ Whoever fashioned a worthless
god or cast a useless idol? See how its devotees
will be ridiculed, for its craftsmen are but men.

¹¹ Let them all assemble, let them come to
court; they will be both terrified and scorned.

¹² The blacksmith works on an iron image
over the fire and beats it into shape with a
hammer. At the same time, he drinks no water
and gets hungry and exhausted.

¹³ In like manner, the wood carver takes the
measurement and marks the outline of an idol,
carves it with chisels, giving it a bodily form
and a human face that it may live in a shrine.

¹⁴ He cut down cedars or perhaps took an oak

or cypress from the forest or maybe he planted
a cedar which the rain caused to grow. ¹⁵ For
the common man, that means fuel which he
uses to warm himself and to cook his food. But
the craftsman carves out of the tree trunk an
idol which he worships and before which he
bows down. ¹⁶ The remaining portion he burns
to warm himself; over its live embers he roasts
meat and is satisfied. He says, "Well and good,
I feel warm and enjoy the light." ¹⁷ The other
portion which he has made into an idol he
worships and bows before it, praying "Rescue
me, for you are my god."

¹⁸ They have no knowledge, no discern-
ment. For they have shut their mind to under-
standing, their heart to all reason. ¹⁹ Not one of
them has the intelligence to reflect and the
sense to say, "Half of the log I burned, and on
its embers I baked bread and roasted meat.
Shall I then make an abomination of what
remains? Am I to worship a block of wood?"

²⁰ Only the one of deluded mind can hold
on ashes. Will he not save himself at least and
confess, "What I hold is only a lie?"

²¹ Remember this, Jacob,
for you are my servant, O Israel,
I have formed you to be my servant;
Israel, Do not forget me

²² I have blotted out
your offenses as a thick cloud;
I have brushed away
your sins as a mist.
Return to me for I am redeeming
you.

²³ Sing gladly, O heavens,
for Yahweh has done this.
Shout aloud, O earth below!
Burst into song, you mountains,
you forests with all your trees!
For Yahweh has redeemed Jacob
and shown his glory to Israel.

²⁴ Thus says Yahweh, your redeemer,
who formed you from the womb:
I am Yahweh who made all things.

9. 29, 16; Jer 18, 6; Rom 9, 20

23. Gen 22, 16; Rom 14, 11; Phil 2, 10

11. 64, 7

1. Jer 46, 7

19. 45, 15; Jn 18, 20; Acts 26, 26

+ The passage 9-20 – placed here, though
coming from someone else – should be read
separately: it ridicules the makers of idols. We
will find other similar examples of irony in the

Bible. They may still be of value today when
people who are proud of scientific discoveries,
maintain quite a few superstitions. See the
commentary on Is 30:22 and Jer 2:13.



I alone stretched out the heavens,
and spread out the earth. Who helped me?

²⁵ I am he who thwarts the omens of false prophets,
who makes fools of diviners,
who turns wise men back
and makes nonsense of their knowledge.

²⁶ I confirm the word of my servant
and carry out the plan announced by my messengers.

I am he who says of Jerusalem,
"It shall be inhabited,"
and of the towns of Judah,
"They shall be rebuilt; I will restore their ruins."

²⁷ I say to the ocean, "Be dry,
I will dry up your wellsprings!"

²⁸ I call on Cyrus, "My shepherd!"
and he goes to fulfill my will.
He will say to Jerusalem, "Be rebuilt!"
and see: the cornerstone is laid.

■ 45

¹ Thus says Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus:
"I have taken you by the right hand
to subdue nations before you
and strip kings of their armor,
to open the gateways before you
so that they will be closed no more.

² I will go before you to level the slopes,
I will break the gates of brass
and destroy the iron bars;

³ I will give you treasures hidden in darkness
and riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am Yahweh,
the God of Israel who calls you by your name.

⁴ For the sake of Jacob my servant,
of Israel my chosen one,
I have called you by your name
and given you your mission
although you do not know me.

⁵ I am Yahweh, and there is no other;
there is no God besides me.
I have armed you when you did not know me,

⁶ so that, from the rising
to the setting of the sun,
all men may know

that there is no one besides me;
 I am Yahweh, and there is no other.
⁷I form the light and create the dark;
 I usher in prosperity and bring calamity.
 I, Yahweh, do all this.

◆ ⁸Let the heavens send righteousness like a dew
 and the clouds rain it down.

Let the earth open and salvation blossom,
 so that justice also may sprout,
 I, Yahweh, have created it.

⁹Woe to him who argues with his Maker
 being but a pot among pots.

Will the clay say to him who fashions it,
 "What are you making? You have no
 skill."

¹⁰Woe to him who asks a father, "What
 have you begotten!"
 or a mother, "To what have you given
 birth?"

¹¹Thus says Yahweh, the Holy One,
 he who fashions Israel:
 Is it for you to question me about my
 children,
 or decide the work of my hands for me?

¹²I am He
 who made the earth
 and created man upon it.

I am He
 who stretched out the heavens
 with my own hands
 and gave order to their whole array.
¹³I have raised Cyrus for the sake of

justice
 I will direct his ways
 and make him rebuild my-city.
 He will send my exiles home
 without ransom or indemnity.
 It is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks.

+ ¹⁴Thus says Yahweh:
 The peasants of Egypt,
 the traders of Ethiopia
 and the tall men of Seba
 will pass near you in chains,
 and bow down facing you.
 In worship they will say,

6. 54, 8; Lam 1, 19

8. Rev 18, 29

1. Dt 6, 13; Jer 5, 2; Zac 8, 8

4. Ex 32, 9; Dt 9, 6

There is here something unique in the Bible: this pagan king is called the *anointed one of God*, just like the sons of David, and even Christ "the Anointed of God". An incredible thing for the Jews used to thinking that Yahweh was only their God! History tells us that Cyrus was a "father" to his people, and the Bible will remember that his first deed, after the capture of Babylon, was to restore freedom to all those living there in exile (see Ezra 1:1).

Thus, we are asked to see the work of God being fulfilled in the world by people who do not know him. Christ will also act through men who do not believe in him. Political and cultural changes, though they appear at times to be against the church, serve in the long run to destroy many superstitions and false gods.

◆ Here, we have a magnificent expression of the work of God, the saviour. As we said in reference to Is 11:1, it is not a question of opposing or separating the salvation coming from God from that which men can achieve. Rather, God's work and men's cooperation are joined in this unique endeavor of bringing us to the end of our labors.

Justice is man's total uprightness. We could express it briefly: a life according to truth and

love. Such justice must come from God, the only one who can create a new man. In fact, it will come in the person of Christ, *the Just One* (John 16:10), the one who is born among us as the first shoot of a renewed humanity. Christ will not break into the world, *coming down* in glory from heaven, but rather, he will be the blossom of our earth, being born a Jew to the Jews, true man born of a virgin mother. Neither will Christ alone accomplish the work of our salvation for it must be realized in the course of history: Justice and Salvation will be the fruits of humanity made fertile by divine mercy.

Salvation here means man's complete liberation.

This text is complemented by Psalm 85 where another image is used: two hands are joined, one coming down from heaven and another lifted up from the earth, to achieve the definitive covenant of God and men in *Love and Faithfulness* (see John 1:17).

• The same themes are continued with different expressions.

45:9-13: the Lord, free Creator of all, is also in charge of history. Let us note in Jeremiah 18:1 that the comparison of the potter and his clay is developed with a very different meaning.

"Surely God is with you.

There is no one else
There is no other god."

¹⁵ Truly you are the God who remains
hidden.

the God of Israel, the Saviour.

¹⁶ All idolmakers will be put to shame,
they will go away humiliated.

¹⁷ But Israel will be saved by Yahweh –
delivered with an everlasting salvation.
You will never be put in disgrace
for everlasting ages.

¹⁸ Yes, this is what Yahweh says,
He who created the heavens,
who is God Himself,
who formed the earth,
and made and established it,
who did not create it in vain
but formed it to be inherited:
I am Yahweh, and there is no other.

¹⁹ I have not spoken in secret,
nor from a dark place of the earth.
I have not said to the sons of Jacob:
"Seek me groping."

I, Yahweh, speak the truth.
What I declare is always right.

²⁰ Come, gather together,
fugitives from among the nations.
In ignorance, you have erected idols of
wood

and prayed to gods that cannot move.

²¹ Take counsel together,
come here and declare:
Who announced this from the beginning,
who foretold it in the distant past?
Am I not Yahweh?

There is no other God besides Me,
a Saviour, a God of justice –
there is no other one but Me.

Every knee will bend

²² Turn to me and be saved,
all you from the ends of the earth,
for I am God and there is no other.

²³ By my own self I swear it,
and what comes from my mouth is
truth,

a word that will not be revoked.
Before me every knee will bend,
by me every tongue will swear,
²⁴ saying, "In Yahweh alone
are righteousness and strength."
All who have raged against him
will come to him in shame.

²⁵ But through Yahweh there will be
victory
and glory to the sons of Israel.

Difference between God and the false gods

46 ¹ Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low,
their carriages weighed down with
load,

their idols borne by beasts of burden
and upon the shoulders of weary men.

² They cringe and crouch together,
powerless to save those who carry them,
as they themselves are taken captives.

³ Hear me, O people of Jacob,
and all who remain of Israel,
whom I have cared for since you were
conceived,

and carried since you were born.

⁴ Even to your old age, I am He
and I will sustain you
even when your hair turns gray.
It is I who have done this,
and who bear the burdens,
I will sustain and save you.

⁵ To whom will you compare me or
consider me equal?

Against whom will you match me,
as though we were alike?

⁶ Some pour out gold from their purses
and with silver weighed on the scales,
they hire a goldsmith to make an image

9. Eek 36, 22

14. 44, 28

16. 45, 19; 61, 1; Mi 3, 8

17. 41, 14

+ The prophet looks upon the powerful of yesterday, now conquered by Cyrus. The conquered Egyptians and Ethiopians go back to Palestine in chains along the same road by which they had proudly come. As they go by Jerusalem, they see it glorious and filled with God's favours, and falling to their knees facing Jerusalem, they beg God to save them too.

The liberation of Israel is God's way of revealing himself to the world; they will recognize

Yahweh by the way he restored a dead people. They will come to adore the Lord of the Universe "hidden" in a people without countenance.

The same thing can be seen in the church when it is scorned. One day those who mocked it discover God there. Some day, people will see that the church kept the fire of God in the world.

■ The prophet foresees the fall of Babylon. He imagines the Chaldeans carrying their idols in their flight. Israel, on the other hand, does not

before which they bow and worship.

⁷ They carry it upon their shoulders
and set it up in its place;
and there it stands, unmoving and silent.
They cry out to it, but it does not answer,
it delivers no one from distress and

disaster

⁸ Bear it well in mind, you rebels,

⁹ recall those things of long ago.

I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is more like me.

¹⁰ From the beginning I foretell the
outcome,

from ancient times, what is yet to come.

I say that my plan will stand;

and what I wish, I accomplish.

¹¹ From the east I call forth a bird of
prey,

from a distant land, a man to carry out
my plan.

Yes, I have spoken, it will be done;

I have planned, it will be executed.

¹² Listen to me, you without hope
you who are deprived of any right.

¹³ I am bringing my justice, it is not far
away;

my salvation will not delay.

I will make salvation appear in Zion,
upon Israel I will bestow my glory.

47

¹ Come down and sit in the dust,
O virgin daughter of Babylon!

You have no throne, sit on the ground,
O daughter of the Chaldeans,
no longer will you be called
dainty and delicate.

² Take the millstone and grind meal;
uncover your hair, bare your legs;
strip to the thighs and pass over the
rivers.

³ Your nakedness will be exposed,
your shame will be uncovered.

I will spare no man.

⁴ Our Redeemer – Yahweh Sabaoth is his
name –
is the Holy One of Israel.

⁵ Go creep into the shadows and sit in
silence, O daughter of the Chaldeans,

for no more will you be called
sovereign lady of the kingdoms.

⁶ Angry with my people, I had left my
inheritance;

I gave them into your hands, you showed
them no mercy.

You laid a very heavy yoke, even on the
aged.

⁷ You said, "I will be sovereign lady
forever:"

But you did not take this to heart
or ponder on what would be the
outcome.

⁸ Listen, therefore, you wanton woman.
lounging in security and deluding
yourself. "I am, and there is none besides
me. I will never be a widow or suffer the
loss of children."

⁹ But these two things will come to you
in a moment, on a single day –
loss of children and widowhood.

They will come upon you in full
measure,

in spite of all your witchcraft,
in spite of the power of your spells.

¹⁰ You have trusted in your wickedness,
saying, "Nobody sees me."

Your intelligence and knowledge
have perverted you, for you have said:
"I am, and there is none besides me."

¹¹ Evil, suddenly, will come your way
though you do not know it.
Disaster will fall upon you,
and no ransom will ward it off;
a catastrophe you cannot foresee
will come upon you suddenly.
¹² Keep on, then, with your magic spells
and with the multitude of your sorceries,
which you have laboured at since your
youth.

Do you think they will help you now?

Do you think they will cause terror
around you?

¹³ Yet you are wearied
with so many advisors.

Let your astrologers stand up, your
stargazers

who foretell each month what will
happen;

19. Gen 22, 17

20. Jer 51, 6; Rev 18, 4

21. Ex 17, 1

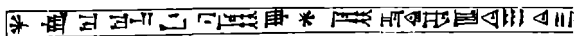
1. 41, 1; 44, 2; Jer 1, 5; Gal 1, 5

have to carry its gods: Yahweh is the one who
carries his people (46: 1-7). God gives life to his
people, whereas those who do not believe waste
their energy carrying idols.

◆ We stress 47:1-15 as a song of affliction
over Babylon which will become the image of
the impious city. This is why in the Apocalypse
(chapters 17-18) St. John calls the Roman em-

pire which persecutes the Christians, Babylon.

Virgin daughter of Babel is Babel (or Baby-
lon) according to the Hebrew way of designat-
ing capitals. It says: *I will never be a widow*; this
can mean: I will never be without my gods, or I
will never be without my famous kings; or I will
never know defeat. It thought it could assure its
future through its magicians, famous in Eastern



let them save you
from what is to come upon you.

¹⁴ Look, they will be like stubble
and the fire will burn them.
They cannot even save themselves
from the power of consuming flames.
Here are no embers to warm anyone,
no fireside to sit by.

¹⁵ That is your lot and of your wizards
with whom you have labored from your
youth.

Now each will go his own way –
powerless to save you.

o 48 ¹ Listen to this. House of Jacob
called by the name of Israel
and born out of Judah's womb,
you who swear by the name of Yahweh
and invoke the God of Israel
though not in truth or righteousness –
² calling yourselves after the holy city,
and relying on the God of Israel
whose name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

³ From long ago I revealed the former
things:
they went forth from my mouth;
I declared them. Then suddenly I acted
and the word came to be.

⁴ Because I know that you are stubborn,
your head as hard as iron,
your forehead as bronze,

⁵ So I foretold you about them;
before they took place
I let you hear of them,
lest you should say: "My idols did these,
my graven image, my molten image,
commanded them."

⁶ Now that you have heard,
look at all this.
Will you not admit it?

From now on I will tell you new things,
even hidden things you have not known
before.

⁷ They are created now and not long ago;
up to this day you have not heard of
them
lest you should say, "I already knew."

⁸ You have not heard nor understood:
nor were your ears opened before,
for I knew how treacherous you were –
from the womb you have been called a
rebel.

⁹ For my name's sake I delayed my
anger,
for my honour's sake I restrained it,
lest I destroy you.

¹⁰ Now see how I have refined you,
but not as silver
I have tested you in the furnace of
affliction.

¹¹ For my own sake I have acted, yes, for
my own sake.
For how could I let my Name be defiled?
Never will I yield my glory to another.

¹² Listen to Me, O Jacob,
Israel whom I have called,
I am the same, I am the first,
and I am also the last.

¹³ My own hand founded the earth
my right hand spread out the heavens.
When I call on the stars
they all stand forth together.

¹⁴ Assemble, all of you, and listen.
Who of them has foretold these things?
The beloved of Yahweh will do what
pleases him
with Babylon and the people of Chaldea.
¹⁵ I, yes, I myself have spoken;
and I have called him,
I have brought him.
He will prosper in his way.

If you had obeyed my law

¹⁶ Come near me and listen to this:
From the beginning I have not spoken
in secret; from the time that it happen-
ed there I am. Know then, that Yah-
weh, the Lord, with his Spirit sent me!

¹⁷ Thus says Yahweh, your Re-
deemer, the Holy One of Israel: I,
Yahweh, your God, teach you what is
best for you; I lead you in the way that
you must go.

2. Jer. 4, 12; Rev. 1, 16; Dt. 32, 34
47, 53, 54, 22, 15, 18, 2 Cor. 6, 2

4. Jer. 20, 7: 40, 27

6. 42, 6; Acts 13,

countries. They pretended to know the future
through their horoscopes.

This text can be adapted to materialistic
civilization, nations which pretend to achieve all
that they need through their technologies.

You laid a very heavy yoke upon the aged.
Prophets are always using this criterion to ex-

press the value of a civilization: they do not look
at the military power, nor the economic level,
but they ask rather: How do you treat people
when they can no longer serve?

o In 48:17-22 the prophet looks at Israel's
past. This resembles what we read about in the
lost Paradise. If they had obeyed, God's desi r to

¹⁸ Had you paid attention to my commandments, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their names never cut off nor blotted out from my presence.

²⁰ "Go forth from Babylon, flee

from Chaldea!" Declare this with shouts of joy, make this known to the ends of the earth. Proclaim: Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob!

²¹ Those he led through the desert were never thirsty. He made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out."

²² There is no peace for the wicked, Yahweh says.

Yahweh called me from my mother's womb

+49

¹ Listen to me, O islands,
pay attention, peoples from distant lands.
Yahweh called me from my mother's womb;
he pronounced my name before I was born.
² He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.
He hid me in the shadow of his hand.
He made me into a polished arrow
set apart in his quiver.

³ He said to me, "You are Israel, my servant,
in whom I am glorified."

⁴ But I thought, "I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing."
Yet what is due me is in the hand of Yahweh,
and my reward is with my God.

⁵ I am important in the sight of Yahweh,
and my strength has been my God.

⁶ And now Yahweh has spoken,
He who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob again to him,
to gather Israel to him.

⁷ He said: "It is not enough
for you to be my servant,
to restore the tribes of Jacob,

10. Rev 7, 16
22. 60, 4-16

14. Hos 11, 8; Lam 5, 22
23. Ps 25, 3

16. 44, 5 18. 60, 4

20. 54, 2

lavish his blessings upon them would have been fulfilled, as well as God's promises to Abraham.

But God will intervene again as the Redeemer of his people.

In 48:12-15, note that Cyrus is praised again. *The beloved of Yahweh will do what pleases him: I have called him.* As we remarked about 42:10, the prophet always goes beyond the present reality. The conqueror Cyrus is a saviour and thus, his mission and his person are somehow blended with that of the only Saviour, Christ.

+ This song, like 42:1-9, refers to a *servant* of God, but this time, he is called, *Israel* (49:3). It does not mean the people of Israel as a whole since in 49:5 it is given the mission of gathering this people. Perhaps this symbolic name Israel designates the most faithful minority of the Jewish people in exile, the communities which keep the hope in the Saving Lord alive in Babylon. They are the true Israel who will bring the *light* of salvation, first to their own people, and then, to the whole world (49:6).

However, as we already mentioned in 42:1,

my Lord has forgotten me."

¹⁵ Can a woman forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child of her womb?
Though she may forget, I will not forget you.

¹⁶ See, I have written your name
upon the palm of my hands;
your walls are ever before me.

¹⁷ Your sons hurry back,
and those who laid you waste
hasten to depart from you.

¹⁸ Lift up your eyes,
look around and see: your sons
are all assembling and coming to you.
As I live, says Yahweh,
you will wear them all as your jewels;
they will adorn you as brides are adorned.

¹⁹ Your lovely places and your ruins
your wastelands and devastated country,
will now be too small for your people,
while those who destroy you will be driven
off.

²⁰ The children you will have,
after those you lost,
will also say in your hearing,
"This place is too small for us.
Give us more space to live in."

²¹ You will then say in your heart,
"Who has borne me these?
I was bereaved and barren,
and who has brought these up?
I was left alone; but these –
where have they come from?"

²² Thus speaks the Lord Yahweh:
See, I am to make signs to the nations;
and to raise my banner to the peoples,
that they bring your sons in their arms,
your daughters upon their shoulders.

²³ Kings will be your foster fathers,
their queens your nursing mothers.
They will bow down before you

with their faces to the ground;
they will lick the dust of your feet.
Then you will know that I am Yahweh
and that those who hope in me
will not be put to shame.

²⁴ Can booty be taken from a warrior,
or captives be rescued from a tyrant?
But thus says Yahweh:

²⁵ Yes, captives will be taken from
warriors
and booty rescued from a tyrant:
for I will fight against those who fight
against you
and I will save your children.

²⁶ I will make your oppressors eat their
own flesh
and be drunk with their own blood, as
with wine.

All mankind will know
that I, Yahweh, am your saviour,
your redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

50 ¹ Thus says Yahweh:
Where is the writ of divorce
with which I dismissed your mother?
Or to which of my creditors
have I sold you?
It was for your sins that you were sold,
for your crimes that your mother was
dismissed.

² Why was there no one when I came?
Why did no one answer when I called?
Is my hand too short to reach out and save?
Have I not the power to deliver?
See how at my threat the sea dries up,
the rivers turn into desert,
their fish dying, for lack of water.

³ I clothe the heavens in mourning;
I make sackcloth their covering.

3. Ex 10, 21

4. 54, 13

6. Mt 26, 67; 27, 30

7. Jer 1, 18; Ezk 3, 8

6. Rom 8, 33; Job 13, 8

9. Jn 8, 46

having returned to their land, the Jews became missionaries of the One God in all the countries of the Greek and Syrian world. Later, these promises would take a new meaning for the church which Christ established as a *New Jerusalem*. At times, this new Jerusalem seems downhearted and lifeless, and it even disappears in some parts of the world. Yet, God brings it new children from other continents. He invites us to look beyond our communities to those who have not yet received the Kingdom.

The church experiences this fruitfulness wherever it lives in poverty and trust in God who

loves it with maternal love. There it can attract and convert adults instead of focusing on children. The church waits for people coming from afar, that is to say, the new layers of society which seem alienated; the technicians, scientists, artists who do not come near because little understanding was shown to them; the working classes that perhaps have found the Church indifferent to their just ambitions. Though Christians often increased their efforts in the promotion of the poor individually, few of them grasped the need to promote the working classes as such.

Yahweh has opened my ear

+⁴ The Lord Yahweh has taught me to speak
and I know how to sustain the weary.
Morning after morning he wakes me up
to hear, to listen like a disciple.

⁵ The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear.
I have not rebelled,
nor have I withdrawn.

⁶ I offered my back to those who strike me,
my cheeks to those who pulled my beard;
neither did I shield my face
from blows, spittle and disgrace.

⁷ I have not despaired,
for the Lord Yahweh comes to my help.
So like a flint I set my face,
knowing that I will not be disgraced.

⁸ He who avenges me is near.
Who then will accuse me?
Let us confront each other.
Who is no my accuser?
Let him approach.

⁹ If the Lord Yahweh is my help,
who will condemn me?
All of them will wear out like cloth;
the moth will devour them.

¹⁰ Let anyone among you who fears
Yahweh
listen to the voice of his servant.
Whoever walks in darkness
and has no light to shine for him,
let him trust in the name of Yahweh,
let him rely upon his God.

¹¹ All of you who kindle flames
and carry about burning torches,
go to the flames of your own fire
and in the sparks you have kindled.

This will befall you from my hand,
you will lie down in torment.

God will save the children of Abraham

51 ¹ Listen to me, you who pursue
justice,
you who go in search of Yahweh.
Look to the rock from which you were
hewn,
to the pit from which you were quarried.

1. Mt 5, 6; 6, 33

2. Dt 32, 18; Mr 3, 9; Rom 4, 11

3. Jer 33, 11

+ About whom is the prophet speaking: himself, someone else? Perhaps, *the servant* symbolically meant the minority among the exiled believers, as in 49:1-6. But, the prophet may have been speaking about himself.

Former prophets had met with the same opposition. Moses had had to endure a rebellious people; Jeremiah had been persecuted and imprisoned (see Jer 20:7 and 37). On the basis of these examples, we see the profile and the mission of the perfect *servant* of Yahweh. This

will be Jesus, but every one of his prophets can attribute all these words to himself.

Note the beginning of the poem. The *Servant* will be able to transmit the word and to encourage on behalf of God because he himself listens *every morning* and he keeps his ears open. To sustain those who are tired, we must be taught by God: the true prophet is a man of prayer, open to the Spirit of God. "No one knows the secrets of God except his Spirit and we have received this Spirit in order to know what comes from God" (1 Cor 2:11).



² Look to Abraham, your father,
and to Sarah, who gave you birth.
He was alone when I called him;
but I blessed and increased him.
³ Truly Yahweh's compassion is for

Zion.

His mercy is upon all her ruins.
He will make her deserts like Eden,
her wastelands like Yahweh's garden.
In her will be found joy and rejoicing,
melody and song of praise and thanks-
giving.

⁴ Listen to me, you peoples,
hear me, O nations.
I am to give you my law,
my justice will be a light to the nations.
⁵ Suddenly my justice will appear,
my salvation is on the way,
and my arm will bring

justice to the peoples.

The islands will wait in hope for me
and lay their trust upon my arm.

⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens
and look upon the earth beneath.
Like smoke, the heavens will vanish,
and the earth wear out like a garment:
its inhabitants will fall like flies.
But my salvation will last forever,
my justice will never fail.

⁷ Hear me, you who know righteousness,
you who have my law in your hearts:
do not fear the reproach of men
or be terrified by their mocking.

⁸ For they will be like garments eaten by
moths,
like wool consumed by grubs.
But my justice will last forever
and my salvation, for all generations.

Awake, Yahweh

o ⁹ Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of Yahweh!

Awake as in ancient days,
in times of generations long ago.
Was it not you who split Rahab in two
and pierced the dragon through?

¹⁰ Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep,
to make a way on the seabed
for the redeemed to pass over?

¹¹ The redeemed of Yahweh will return
and come to Zion singing with joy,
crowned with everlasting gladness,
while sorrow and mourning flee away.

¹² I, yes, I am who am your comforter.
How then can you be afraid of man who dies, of the son of man
whose fate is as the fate of grass?

¹³ You forget Yahweh who made you,
who stretched forth the heavens
and laid the foundations of the earth.

Why live every day in constant fear
of the fury of the oppressor
as if he might destroy you?
And where is the fury of the oppressor?

¹⁴ The captive exiles will soon be free;
they will not die in a deep prison,
nor will they want for food.



¹⁵ I am Yahweh, your God,
the one who stirs the sea,
making its waves roar.

My name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

¹⁶ I have put my words in your mouth;
I have shielded you in the shadow of my
hand,

as I stretched out the heavens,
laid the foundations of the earth,
and said to Zion: "You are My people."

¹⁷ Awake, awake!

Arise, O Jerusalem,
you who drank at the hand of Yahweh
the cup of his fury,
the cup which made you stagger
that you drank to the last drop.

¹⁸ Among all the sons she bore,
she has no one to guide her;
among all the sons she reared,
she has no one to take her by the hand.

¹⁹ These double calamities have befallen
you –

ruin and destruction, famine and sword.
Who is there to console you?

²⁰ Your sons lie helpless
at the corner of every street,
like wild bulls in a net.
They are filled with the fury of Yahweh,
with the wrath of your God.

²¹ Therefore hear this now,
you afflicted one,
you who are drunk but not with wine.

²² Thus says your Lord Yahweh,
your God, defender of your people's
cause:

See, I am taking

out of your hand the cup of trembling;
the cup of my anger –
you will drink of it no more.

²³ But I will put it
into the hands of your tormentors,
those who ordered you to bow down,
that they might trample over you,
while you laid your body as a pavement,
as a street for them to walk over.

52

¹ Awake, awake!

Put on your strength, O Zion,
put on your glorious garments, O Jerusa-
lem, holy city.

For never will the uncircumcised
or the unclean enter you again.

² Shake the dust off yourself
and rise up, O Jerusalem.
Loose the bonds from your neck,
O captive Daughter of Zion.

³ For thus says Yahweh:
You were sold for no amount,
you will be redeemed without money.

⁴ Thus says the Lord God:
In the beginning
my people lived as aliens in Egypt;
then Assyria oppressed them without
reason.

⁵ But now, what am I doing here? says
Yahweh,
my people have been carried off for no
money

and their masters make a boast of it;
all day long my name is scorned.

⁶ Therefore my people will know my
name;
therefore they will know on that day
that it is I who says: "Here I am!"

12. Jer 17, 5

16. 49, 2

17. Jer 25, 15; 25, 28; Ps 60, 5

19. Lam 1, 2-17; Jer 15, 5

23. Jos 10, 24

1. Eek 44, 9

3. 50, 1; 1 Per 1, 18

5. Rom 2, 24

6. 41, 4

o This poem is a double call to Yahweh and to Jerusalem that they may awaken. Yahweh is called as a hero asleep and Jerusalem as a humiliated and discouraged woman.

They are both called at the same time because the restoration of Jerusalem will be a joint endeavor:

- Yahweh is the one indicating the timing, preparing the historical conditions to make it feasible, and infusing hope in the hearts of men.
- First, the children of Jerusalem must want their own liberation and then they must go to rebuild the city.

God seems absent from the world as long as people manage it according to their own whims. God seems asleep until his hour comes. That does not mean that we are to be fatalists and think that problems will be solved when God so decides. The task of believers is to keep calling for God to *awaken*; and while we are active in

preparing the future, we ask God to bring about the necessary conditions to be able to move forward.

Who is God encouraging? Defeated men who are suffering the evil they deserve. He is not speaking to saints but to sinners and he tells them that by forgiving them their past sins, he is strengthening them to build the Holy City.

It is easy to criticize these realistic and primitive biblical expressions concerning Yahweh of Hosts. But, we must not replace the image of the Conqueror with that of a calm and unruffled God more in keeping with a conservative mentality. The events which were announced here were going to overturn the course of history.

Note the expressions *redeemed* and *sold* which were already used in 50:1. Man belongs to God and he finds his freedom in obeying him. If he rejects this dependence, he falls into another since man is not created to enjoy freedom apart from obedience and commitment. Christ



+⁷How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those
who bring good news,
who herald peace and happiness,
who proclaim salvation
and announce to Zion: "Your God
is king!"

⁸Your watchmen together
raise their voice in praise and
song;

they see Yahweh face to face
returning to Zion.

⁹Break into shouts of joy,
O ruins of Jerusalem
for Yahweh consoles his people
and redeems Jerusalem.

¹⁰Yahweh has bared his holy arm
in the eyes of the nations;
all the ends of the earth, in alarm,
will witness God's salvation.

¹¹Depart, depart
from that nation, come out!
Touch nothing unclean.
Purify yourselves, you who bear
all Yahweh's holy vessels.

¹²Yet not in escape, or in flight
will you come out,
you will not leave in headlong
flight;
for ahead is Yahweh, your vanguard,
and behind, the God of Israel, your
rearguard.

Through his punishment, we are made whole

■¹³See, my servant will succeed;
he will be exalted and highly praised.

¹⁴Just as many have been horrified
at your disfigured appearance:
Is this a man? He has no human likeness.

¹⁵So will nations be astounded,
kings will stand speechless,
for they will see something never told,
they will witness something never heard of.

53

¹Who could believe what we have heard,
and to whom has the strength of Yahweh been revealed?

²Like a root out of dry ground,
like a sapling he grew up before us,
with nothing attractive in his appearance,
no beauty, no majesty.

³He was despised and rejected,
a man of sorrows familiar with grief,
a man from whom people hide their face,

7. 40, 9; Rom 10, 15; Rev 14, 6 8. Ezk 43, 1 11. 2 Cor 6, 17; Rev 18, 4 12. Ex 14, 9 13. Acts 3, 13;
Jn 12, 32; Phil 2, 9 15. 49, 7; Mi 7, 16; Rom 15, 21 1. Jn 12, 38; Rom 10, 16 2. 11, 1 3. Mk 9, 12

"purchases" us, or rescues us from every slavery
as it is written in Isaiah 53:10. (Rom 6:15).

+ The prophets calling Jerusalem are pre-
sented as those messengers whom a new king
would send throughout the provinces to an-
nounce to everyone his coming to the throne.
Thus also, Paul will present the Christian
apostles as those who, on behalf of God, are
going to tell the world that now, Christ is Lord
(see Romans 1:1-5 and 2 Cor 2:14).

■ See how my servant will be exalted. This
is the fourth and last song about the Servant of
Yahweh. It may be loftiest Old Testament ex-
pression concerning Redemption.

This song develops and expands what was
sketched previously in 49:1-6 and 50:4-9. God
is saving the world through a savior who takes
upon himself the sins of others.

For thousands of years men used to sacrifice
animals – and at times human beings – thinking



spurned and considered of no account.
⁴Yet ours were the sorrows he bore,
 ours were the sufferings he endured,
 although we considered him as one
 punished by God, stricken and brought low.

⁵Forsaken because of our sins,
 he was crushed for our wickedness.
 Through his punishment we are made whole;
 by his wounds we are healed.

⁶Like sheep we had all gone astray,
 each following his own way;
 but Yahweh laid upon him all our guilt.

⁷He was harshly treated,
 but unresisting and silent,
 he humbly submitted.
 Like a lamb led to the slaughter
 or a sheep before the shearer
 he did not open his mouth.

⁸He was taken away by detention and judgment –
 what an unthinkable destiny!
 He was cut off from the land of the living,

4. Mt 8, 17; Heb 2, 10
 1 Cor 15, 3

5. 1 Pet 2, 24; 2 Cor 5, 21; Gal 3, 13; Rom 4, 25; Eph 2, 14
 7. Wis 2, 19; Mt 27, 12; Jn 19, 9; Jer 11, 19; 1 Pet 1, 19

6. Eek 34, 15;
 8. Acts 8, 32; Mt 9, 15

they could unload their own sins on them, and and so be rid of them. But these sacrifices or this getting rid of those thought to be responsible for God's anger never interrupted the cycle of violence. Here, however, we are presented with God's answer to our sins: he saves us through the suffering of the innocent and even more, through the willing sacrifice of the one who accepts to take the sin of the world upon himself.

In writing this, the prophet had in mind the small group of the faithful Jews exiled in Babylon: they were nothing more than despised people. Yet, they had not deserved their humiliation because of their own sins, rather they were carrying the sorrows of the violent, sinful world in which they lived. These believers were punished for the crimes of their people, Israel; but God would transform them into the seed of a holy people: *they would see their descendants and they would enjoy a long life.* This wonder of God would surpass all the others and, in seeing it, kings would stand speechless.

But this song is for our own amazement as well. The prophet, writing five centuries before Christ, was apparently referring to the humiliation of God's people who, then as now, are the instrument of salvation; but his poem outlined beforehand the image of God made man, who humbled himself even to death on the cross. When we read the Passion of Christ in the Gospel, we realize that the evangelists themselves were struck by the similarity between Jesus' trial

and death and what was announced by the prophet. And many times, in presenting Jesus, the apostles would refer to this text. See Acts 8:32; 1 Pt 2:24.

Who will believe what we have heard? How would the hearers of Peter, Paul or John accept their proclamation of Jesus, the crucified saviour? See Jn 12:38; 1 Cor 1:22; Rom 10:16. And in our day, perhaps many Christians do not understand why so many innocent people die as victims of injustice and Christians are especially persecuted.

In him there was no beauty or majesty. Some people came to the wrong conclusion that Christ was unattractive. All we are told is that the saviour is presented with none of the traits which seduce people.

You made his life as an offering for sin. In several passages of the Bible we are invited to adopt this same attitude when we suffer unjustly (1 Pt 1:20; 4:13). But Christ alone perfectly fulfilled this redemptive mission from the beginning to the end of his life (Heb 10; Jn 2:29; Rom 5:6).

My servant will justify many: that is to say, he will make them just and holy. *Many:* in Hebrew "the many" means the *multitude*. Jesus refers to this text at the Last Supper: "my blood poured out for many", or for everyone (Mk 14:24). There Jesus clearly says that his death is the free and perfect sacrifice foretold in this song.



stricken for his people's sin.

⁹They made his tomb with the wicked;
they put him in the graveyard of the oppressors,
though he had done no violence nor spoken in deceit.

¹⁰Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him with grief.

As you have made his life an offering for sin,
he will have a long life and see his descendants.

Through him the will of Yahweh is done.

¹¹For the anguish he suffered
he will see the light and obtain perfect knowledge.

My just servant will justify the multitude;
he will bear and take away their sins.

¹²Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong.

For he surrendered himself to death
and was even counted among the wicked,
bearing the sins of the multitude
and interceding for sinners.

Rejoice, O barren woman

•54

¹Rejoice, O barren woman who have not given birth;
sing and shout for joy, you who never had children,
for more are the children of the rejected woman
than the children of the married wife, says Yahweh.

²Enlarge the space for your tent,

9. Mt 27, 57

10. 1 Jn 2, 2; Rom 3, 25; Heb 2, 17; Mt 26, 42

12. Wis 2, 8; Phil 2, 7; Lk 22, 37;

1 Pet 2, 24; Heb 9, 28; Mk 10, 45; Lk 23, 34; Heb 7, 25

1. Gal 4, 27; Ps 113, 9; 1 S 2, 5

◆ This concludes the songs in which Isaiah addressed Jerusalem: 49:14; 51:17).

Jerusalem is a grandiose vision, the people of the future, the people reborn from the ruins of the love of God, our infidelity, our sin. The Bible describes the mistakes of men, and then the infidelity of the people loved by God. But the prophets announce the New Jerusalem, Yahweh's bride which will never again be abandoned. We know that the Church is this new People united to God in an eternal covenant.

I had abandoned you for a moment. Here we have the story of God's love for us: the total love of God, our infidelity, our sin. The Bible describes the mistakes of men, and then the infidelity of the people loved by God. But the prophets announce the New Jerusalem, Yahweh's bride which will never again be abandoned. We know that the Church is this new People united to God in an eternal covenant.

It is quite true that there are wrinkles on the face of the church: dull parishes, existing but not really alive; institutions where one would look in vain for the Spirit of Jesus; leaders of the church subservient to the powerful ... Somehow the New Jerusalem is in the church of Christ, but it is also true that we continue to look for it. Therefore, we are open to hearing and meditating upon this proclamation of the merciful love of God.

Shout with joy, you who have no children. The Jewish people collapsed as a result of their errors and they no longer have a future, humanly speaking. But this suits God. If they lack the means to be great, God is going to bend down to them.

Your Maker will marry you. The people of God have no self-assurance: they are not a church accepted and privileged by governments, they do not have a religion known and considered for its accomplishments; so Yahweh is going to be their husband to give them a new fruitfulness. The great and cold churches will be replaced by more fervent communities to which will come those new children seeking God.

All your children will be taught by Yahweh and fear will not come near you. This is the church founded on the Rock and taught by its profound fidelity to Christ, the Lord.

It is by meditating on these poems that we best understand how God makes virginity fruitful. It is not by accident that Jesus was born of a virgin mother; rather his birth came as the culmination of the expectation of "Jerusalem, the bride of God": see Is 17:14.



stretch out your hangings,
lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes,
³ for you will spread out to the right and to the left;
your descendants will take possession of the nations
and inhabit cities that have been abandoned.

⁴ Do not be afraid for you will not be deceived,
do not be ashamed for you will not be disgraced.
You will forget the shame of your youth;
no longer will you remember the disgrace of your widowhood.

⁵ For your Maker is to marry you:
Yahweh Sabaoth is his name.
Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel:
He is called God of the whole earth.

⁶ For Yahweh has called you back
as one forsaken and grieved in spirit.
Who could abandon his first beloved? says your God.

⁷ For a brief moment I have abandoned you,
but with great tenderness I will gather my people.

⁸ For a moment, in an outburst of anger,
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love
I have had mercy on you,
says Yahweh, your Redeemer.

⁹ This is for me like Noah's days
when I swore that Noah's waters
will no more flood the earth;
so now I swear not to be angry with you
and never again to rebuke you.

¹⁰ The mountains may depart and the hills be moved,
but never will my love depart from you
nor my covenant of peace be removed,
says Yahweh whose compassion is for you.

¹¹ O afflicted city,
lashed by storm and uncomforted,
I will set your stones with turquoise,
your foundations with sapphires.

¹² I will crown your walls with agate,
make your gates crystal,
and your ramparts of precious stones.

¹³ All your children will be taught by Yahweh,
and they will prosper greatly.

¹⁴ Justice will be your foundation;
tyranny and the fear of oppression
will never come near you.

2. Jer 10, 20
12. Rev 21, 10

3. Gen 28, 14

4. 45, 17

5. 49, 14

6. Mal 2, 14; Jer 31, 3

13. Jer 31, 34; Jn 6, 45; Is 1, 26; 16, 24



¹⁵ If ever you are attacked,
it will not be of my doing;
and your attacker will surely fail.

¹⁶ Look, it is I who created the blacksmith,
who fans the burning coals and forges his
weapons. But I have also prepared the one who
makes them useless.

¹⁷ No weapon forged against you will suc-
ceed, and all who speak against you will be
silenced. Such is the lot of the servants of
Yahweh, and such is the right I grant them –
says Yahweh.

Come to the water

55 ¹ All you who are thirsty, come
to the water. All who have no
money, come.

Yes, without money and at no cost,

come, buy and drink wine and milk.

² Why spend on what is not food
and labour for what does not satisfy?
Listen to me, and you will eat well;
you will enjoy the richest of fare.

³ Incline your ear and come to me;
listen, that your soul may live. I will
make with you an everlasting cove-
nant, I will fulfil in you my promises
to David.

⁴ See, I have given him for a witness to the
nations, a leader and commander of the peo-
ple. ⁵ Likewise you will summon a nation un-
known to you, and nations that do not know
you will come hurrying to you for the sake of
Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek Yahweh while he may be found;
call to him while he is near.

⁷ Let the wicked abandon his way,
let him forsake his thoughts,
let him turn to Yahweh for he will have mercy,
for our God is generous in forgiving.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
my ways are not your ways, says Yahweh.

⁹ For as the heavens are above the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

¹⁰ As the rain and the snow come down
from the heavens and do not return
till they have watered the earth,
making it yield seed for the sower
and food for the eater,

¹¹ so is my word that goes forth out of my mouth:
it will not return to me idle,
but it shall accomplish my will,
the purpose for which it has been sent.

1. Mt 5, 6; Rev 21, 6; Jer 2, 13; Jn 4, 45, 13; 52, 3; Dt 8, 3; Mt 4, 4 2. Pro 9, 3
3. Ezk 16, 60; Acts 13, 34 5. Ps 18, 44 6. Dt 4, 7; Ps 145, 18; 65, 1; Jer 29, 12
9. Ps 103, 11; 92, 6; Rom 11, 33 10. 2 Cor 9, 10

o The book concludes with a call to hope.
55:1-3: Are you not tired of all the happiness
you thought you would get effortlessly in the
place of exile?

God is the one who gives and he always gives
first. He only hopes that we will open the door
for him. Jesus will offer us rest (Matthew 11:28);
he will give us the bread of life (John 6) and he
will give himself as "the" friend (Rv 3:20).

55:4-5: A universal mission awaits Israel in
the homeland, after their return.

55:6-9: Allow yourselves to be conquered by
the love of the Lord who is forming you much
more than you can imagine. Paul will use a simi-
lar language in his letter to the Romans (5:1-11).

55:10-11: Here the word of God appears
powerful and even personified. It is already
much more than the words spoken by the pro-
phets. This word which comes from the Father
and returns to him will be presented by the
apostle John in the first chapter of his Gospel: it
is Christ. See also in 45:8.



¹² Yes, in joy you will depart, in peace you will be led forth: mountains and hills will break into song before you, trees of the countryside will clap their hands.

¹³ Instead of the thornbush, the cypress will thrive; instead of briers, the myrtle. This will make Yahweh famous and remain as an everlasting witness to him.

THIRD PART OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

The Jews have come home, but the miracles announced in chapters 40-55 of this book did not occur. A poor community tries to organize itself and to solve all kinds of problems stemming from the fact that during the seventy years of the exile, others had taken their place.

A prophet, whose name we do not know, witnesses these beginnings. He announces that God comes to take revenge on his enemies, both those within Israel who do not want to give up their sins, and those outside. Above all God comes to save those who return to him, not only the members of the Israelite community, but strangers as well. In his own style this prophet continues the enthusiastic description of Zion-Jerusalem, and the Messiah: she is God's beloved and the wedding feast will be soon. The Messiah will come with the Spirit of Yahweh to deliver his Gospel to the poor.

The poems of this prophet are in chapters 56-66 of the book of Isaiah, there is a metrical arrangement of the poems with the announcement of the new Zion at the center:

56:1-8	The people of God welcome everyone	66:18-24.
56:9-58	Reproaches, warnings and promises	65 and 66:1-17.
59:1-4	Confession of sins	63:7-64,11.
59:15-20	God's vengeance	63:1-6.
60	The new Jerusalem	62.
61	The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.	

God calls everyone

+ 56 ¹ This is what Yahweh says:
Maintain what is right
and do what is just,
for my salvation is close at hand,
my justice is soon to come.

² Blessed is the man who does this, and puts his trust in it, who does not defile the sabbath and who refrains from evil.

³ Let no foreigner say "Surely Yahweh will exclude me from his people." Neither let the castrated man say, "I have become a mere dry tree."

⁴ For this is what Yahweh says: To the castrated men who keep my sabbaths, who desire to do what pleases me and remain faithful to my covenant:

⁵ I will give them in my house and within its walls,

a memorial and a name that are worth more than sons and daughters;
I will give them a name
that will never die away or be forgotten.

⁶ Yahweh says to the foreigners who join him, serving him and loving his name, keeping his sabbath unprofaned and remaining faithful to his covenant:

⁷ I will bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. I will accept on my altar their burnt offerings and sacrifices, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.

⁸ Thus says the Lord God, Yahweh, who gathers the exiles of Israel: There are others I will gather besides those already gathered.

2. Ps 1

3. Dt 23, 2

4. Wis 3, 14

5. Wis 4, 1; Rev 3, 5

6. 1 K 8, 41

7. Mk 11, 17

8. Ps 147, 2; Jn 10, 16

Reproaches

o⁹ All you wild beasts, come and devour,
all you beasts of the forests!

¹⁰ Blind are Israel's watchmen:
they all see nothing.
they are dumb watchdogs
they are unable to bark.

Lying down and dreaming,
they love to slumber.

¹¹ Greedy dogs that are never satisfied;
shepherds of no discretion,
they all turn their own way,
everyone of them to his own gain.

¹² "Come, bring wine," they say,
and let us all get drunk,
and tomorrow will be as today,
or perhaps even a more enjoyable day."

57

¹ Righteous men perish,
and no one cares about it.

Devout men are taken off,
and no one gives it a thought.
No one understands that the righteous man
is taken off from the calamity that comes;
² he enters into peace.

Reposes on his bed
He who walked in the right way

³ But all you sons of a witch, come here,
you offspring of the whore and the
adulterer.

⁴ Whom are you mocking?
At whom are you making faces,
opening wide your mouth
and sticking out your tongue?
You are children of sin,
offspring of deceit and falsehood,
⁵ burning with lust among the bushes,
under spreading branches,
sacrificing your children by the streams,
in the clefts of rocks.

⁶ Your heart is with your idols,
the smooth stones of the wadis
to which you have poured out drink
offerings
and brought oblations of grain.

Can I tolerate this?

⁷ You have made your bed
upon a high and lofty mountain.
You went up there to offer your sacrifice.
⁸ You have set up your domestic idols
behind your doorposts and your doors.

Deserting me, you have uncovered your
bed,
climbed into it and spread it wide.
You have bargained yourself to those
whose bed you enjoy,
and you have gazed at their nakedness.
⁹ With perfumed oil, you made yourself
look your best for Molech;
you put up envoys far afield –
the children you sent to your pagan god
through a sacrificial death.
¹⁰ Although wearied with your misdeeds,
you have never given up;
you have never tried nor weakened,
but instead found your strength revived.

¹¹ Who was it you dreaded so much
that you should lie and disown me,
refuse me a place in your heart
and not remember me?

Have I held my peace so long
that you do not fear me any more?

¹² But now I will tell
your merits and your deeds,
it will not be for your advantage.

¹³ When you cry out in distress,
let your idols save you!
The wind will blow them all away;
a whiff of a breeze will carry them off.
But he who takes refuge in me
will take possession of the land,
my holy mountain his inheritance.

¹⁴ And it shall be said:
"Prepare, prepare, open up a way,
remove all obstructions from my people's
way."

¹⁵ For thus says the Most High,
he who is enthroned for ever,
he whose name is holy.

9. Jer 12, 9	11. Jer 23, 1; Ezk 34, 2	12. 5, 11; 28, 7	1. Mi 7, 2; Ps 12, 2	3. Ezk 16
5. Dt 12, 2; Jer 2, 20; 7, 31	7. Ezk 16, 15	10. Jer 2, 25	13. Ps 37, 9	14. 40, 3
				15. 66, 2

+ The Jewish law – reflecting the thinking of the times – excluded foreigners in certain circumstances, as well as eunuchs, that is to say, castrated men, from their religious assemblies. The prophet reveals that such exclusion means nothing to God.

o 56:9-57: Here we have poems against the leaders of Judah and against idolatry very similar to those of Jeremiah.

■ We are fasting and you are not. The people of Judah fast so that God may hear their pe-

titions. These may be public prayers to ask for rain. Those people resemble many people complaining today: "God does not exist, because there is so much misery".

Is it true that they seek me as a people that does what is right? In spite of having a clear conscience, they are concerned because of God's silence. They may have committed some sin without knowing it? Perhaps, God likes to see humiliated people ask for favors? And so, they lie in sackcloth and ashes. And they resemble



There is no peace without justice

"I reign exalted and holy
but I am also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit,
to give the contrite a heart revived
and the humble in spirit a new life.

¹⁶For I will not contend forever,
nor will I be always angry,
lest the spirit of man faint before me,
the very breath that I have created.

¹⁷His wickedness enraged me for a time,
I smote him and hid my face,
for he wanted not to hear but his own will.

¹⁸But from now on I will console,
I will heal and comfort him to the full,
and to those of his people who mourn,

¹⁹I will bring smiles to their lips. Peace!
Peace to him who is far and to him who is near.
I will indeed heal you," Yahweh says.

²⁰But the wicked are like a turbulent sea
that finds no rest
and whose waters cast up mire and slime.

²¹"There is no peace," says my God,
"for the wicked."

The kind of fast that pleases me

58

¹Cry out aloud for all you are worth;
raise your voice like a trumpet blast;
tell my people of their offenses,
Jacob's family of their sins.

²Is it true that they seek me
day after day, longing to know my ways,
as the people that does what is right
and has not forsaken the word of its God?

They want to know the just laws
and not to drift away from their God.

³"Why are we fasting" they complain,
"and you do not even see it?"

16. Ps 103, 9

1. Hos 8, 1; Mt 3, 8

18. Jer 3, 22; Hos 6, 1

3. Mal 3, 14; Mt 6, 18

19. Acts 2, 39; Eph 2, 13; 2, 17

20. 48, 22

many Christians satisfied with "being practicing" without seeing that the kind of practice that God seeks is efforts to bring about the liberation of all his people.

Is it perhaps just a matter of bowing the head? God neither wants the death of the sinner nor the humiliation of his creature. God loves people, but he loves them all and not only the little landowners of Judah fearful for their crops; he

also loves the laborers and the slaves of these little landholders. God's demands are clear: doing away with unjust chains and sharing with the rest.

To unfasten the thongs of the yoke. Here we have a glimpse of the tremendous effort demanded of all to end with every form of slavery: from the small privileges that working companions compete for to the laws keeping

We are doing penance and you never notice it."
Look, on your fastdays you do not lose anything
and you force your laborers.

⁴Yes, you fast but end up quarrelling,
striking each other with wicked blows.

Fasting as you do
will not make your voice heard on high.

⁵Is that the kind of fast that pleases me,
just a day for a man to humble himself?
Is fasting merely bowing down one's head,
and making use of sackcloth and ashes?

Would you call that fasting,
a day acceptable to Yahweh?

⁶See the fast that pleases me:
To break the fetters of injustice
and unfasten the thongs of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke.

⁷Fast by sharing your food with the hungry,
bring to your house the unsheltered needy,
clothe the man you see naked
and do not turn away from your own kin.

⁸Then will your light break forth as the morning
and your healing will come speedily.
Your righteousness will be your vanguard,
the Glory of Yahweh will be your rearguard.

⁹Then you will call and Yahweh will answer,
You will cry and he will say, I am here.

If you remove from your midst the yoke,
the threats and the wicked word,
¹⁰if you share your food with the hungry, —
and give relief to the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the dark,
your night will be like noon.

¹¹Yahweh will guide you always
and give you relief in desert places.
He will strengthen your bones;
he will make you as a watered garden,
like a spring of water
where the waters never fail.

5. 1, 11; Am 5, 21
8. Jer 30, 17

6. Dt 15, 12; Jer 34, 8
9. 52, 6; 65, 1

7. Ezk 18, 5; Mt 25, 34; Job 31, 19; Dt 22, 1
10. Ps 37, 6; Mt 5, 14

11. Jn 4, 14

entire groups marginalized. Breaking the yoke of the domination of husband over their wives, to the disputes between neighbours when nobody wants to take the first step.

To unfasten the thongs of the yoke. It is not enough to "convert" to God "from the heart", but conversion occurs by changing both structures and institutions. These make us share in the injustices and sins of the society in which we live. An incredible number of sins—corruption, prostitution, violence—are due to colonialism and the economic and cultural dependence that goes with it.

Sharing with the hungry. To achieve solidarity whereby everyone works for the good of all. *Your light will break forth as the morning.* We see the leaders of the nations get together, discuss and study in order to solve the urgent problems of humanity. But no light breaks forth. It is a known fact that the research of a scientist does not bring him directly to great discoveries. Rather, he often finds the solution suddenly where he did not expect it. In the same way, human problems resist theoretical solutions, but unexpected ways will be found when every nation and every segment of society accepts *sharing and no longer oppresses others.*

¹² Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt,
the age-old foundations will be raised.
You will be called the Breach-mender,
and the Restorer of ruined houses.

¹³ If you stop profaning the sabbath
and doing as you please on the holy day,
if you call the sabbath a day of delight
and keep sacred Yahweh's holy day,
if you honor it by not going your own way,
not doing as you please
and not speaking with malice,

¹⁴ then you will find happiness in Yahweh,
over the heights you will ride
triumphantly.

on the inheritance of your father Jacob you
will feast joyfully.

The mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

Penitential psalm

59 ¹ Yahweh's arm is not too short to
save nor his ear too dull to hear.

² It is your sins, rather,
that separate you from God.
It is your iniquities that veil his face,
so as not to hear you.

³ for your hands are blood-stained,
your fingers blotted with crimes;
your lips have spoken lies,
your tongues have uttered deceit.

⁴ No one fights for a right cause;
no one makes a truthful plea.
They all tell lies and rely on vanity;
they conceive mischief and bring forth

iniquity.

⁵ They hatch vipers' eggs
and weave spiders' webs.
Whoever eats their eggs dies;
and from an egg that is crushed
a venomous snake is hatched.

⁶ Their thread gives useless cloth
their works are of help to no one.
Their plans are evil plots
executed in deeds of violence.

⁷ Their feet rush to do evil;
they are quick to shed innocent blood.
Their minds are full of wicked thoughts,
leaving in their wake ruin and havoc.

⁸ They do not know the way of peace;
from them no one can expect justice.

They have made their roads tricky and
crooked

so that he who follows them is lost or
waylaid.

⁹ So, far away from us lies justice,
and beyond reach is righteousness.
We look for light but behold darkness;
we long for brightness but walk in gloom.

¹⁰ Like the blind we grope for the wall,
like those without eyes we feel our way.
We stumble at noon as at twilight;
We are dead in the midst of our sins.

¹¹ We are like bears that growl;
we are like doves that moan.
We look for justice and find none;
we wait for salvation that never comes.

¹² For our offenses before you are
numerous,
and our sins bear witness against us.
We acknowledge our offenses;
we know all our iniquities.

¹³ Yes, we have betrayed and deceived
Yahweh,

turning away from following our God.
We have planned violence and rebellion;
we have thought and murmured lies.

¹⁴ Justice has been withheld,
righteousness stands aloof
for truth has fallen in the public square
and integrity is not allowed to enter.
¹⁵ There is no sincerity and honesty.
The man who turns from evil is despoiled.

◆ Yahweh has seen this and is aggrieved
that justice does not exist.

¹⁶ Appalled at seeing that there was no one
to intervene,

his own arm brought about the victory,
his justice giving him its support.

¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and salvation as a helmet upon his head.
He wrapped himself in garments of
vengeance and put on a mantle of fury.

¹⁸ To each he will pay his due—
wrath to his enemy, reprisal to his foe.

¹⁹ Those in the west will fear the name of
Yahweh;

those in the east will see his glory.
For it will come like a pent-up stream
driven by the breath of Yahweh.

²⁰ But to Zion he will come as redeemer,
and to those of Jacob who turn from sin.
This is Yahweh speaking.

²¹ For my part, this is my covenant with
them, says Yahweh. My spirit which I have
poured out on you, and my words which I have
put in your mouth will never leave you, nor
your children, nor your children's children
forever and ever.

12. 61, 4 13. Ezk 20, 12 14. Dt 31, 17 15. Job 8, 4; Ps 58, 3; Mt 3, 7 16. Pro 1, 16;
Rom 3, 15 9. Am 5, 18 10. Dt 28, 29 16. 63, 5 17. Wis 5, 17; Eph 6, 14; 1 Thes 5, 8; 61, 10
19. Mal 1, 11 21. 48, 16; 51, 16; 61, 1

◆ The Lord appears as a warrior as in 63:1. with the weapons proper to his Rule:



The Glory of Yahweh rises upon you

60

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come.
The Glory of Yahweh rises upon you.

² Night still covers the earth
and gloomy clouds veil the peoples,
but Yahweh now rises

and over you his glory appears.

³ Nations will come to your light
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ Lift up your eyes round about,
and see: they are all gathered
and come to you together,
your sons from afar,
your daughters carried in arms.

⁵ This sight will make your face radiant,
your heart throbbing and full;
the riches of the sea will be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations will come to you.

⁶ A flood of camels will cover you,
caravans from Midian and Ephah.
Those in Sheba will come,
bringing with them gold and incense,
all singing in praise of Yahweh.

⁷ The flocks of Kedar will be gathered for you,
the rams of Nebaioth put at your service:
they are acceptable offerings on my altar
and will enhance the glory of my house.

⁸ Who are these as thick as clouds,
flying like doves to their cote?

⁹ Ah, they are ships, with those of Tarshish in the front,

1. Rev 21, 11
8. Hos 11, 11

2. Mt 2, 2; Ex 24, 16
9. 1 K 10, 22

3. Rev 21, 14

4. Bar 5, 5

6. Mt 2, 11

– Justice. Here it means the power of God who comes to bring justice on earth.

– Salvation. This is man's total liberation in order to make him holy.

– Zeal. This is the jealous love of God for his faithful people.

The book of Wisdom will use these words in 5:17 and so will Paul in Eph 6:14.

• The prophet looks at the humble Jerusalem which is barely rising from its ruins. Suddenly, the city is transfigured by the light of the future Jerusalem, filled with the Lord's riches, the city that will be the bride of the Lord.

It is there that all the aspirations of a humanity purified and gathered in the light of God will be achieved (see Rv 21). There, all people will delight in the fulness of all they longed for.

These promises point to the goals on which

the church must focus. It is in the church that all the real riches of humanity – faith, understanding, brotherhood – are and must be gathered.

"Raise your head, O Jerusalem. Contemplate the great multitude of those who are building and seeking. In laboratories and through studies, in deserts and in factories, in the enormous social melting pot.

"Do you see all these men who are working hard? Well then, all that is bubbling in them, in the arts, science and thoughts, all of this is for you! Come now, open your arms and your heart and welcome this surge, this overflowing of human vitality as your Lord Jesus! Welcome this sap because, without its baptism, you will fade without aspirations, like a flower without water; and save it because, without your sun, it will be scattered in sterile branches" (Teilhard de Chardin).



for the islands now trust in me.
They bear your sons from far away
and bring their gold and silver with them,
for the name of Yahweh your God,
for the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

¹⁰ Foreigners will rebuild your walls,
and their kings will attend to you.
For though in anger I have struck you,
in love I will have mercy on you.

¹¹ Your gates will forever be open
and never be shut by night or day,
that you receive the wealth of the nations,
their kings leading them in procession;

¹² for the nations and kingdoms
that refuse to serve you will perish;
yes, they will be utterly laid waste.

¹³ The glory of Lebanon will come to you,
the pine, the fir and the cypress, too,
to adorn the place of my sanctuary,
to give glory to the resting place of my feet.

¹⁴ The sons of those who oppressed you
will come bending low;
all who despised you will fall before your
feet.

They will call you the City of Yahweh,
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁵ Though you have been forsaken, hated
and avoided,

I will make of you an everlasting pride,
a joy for all generations.

¹⁶ You will suck the milk of nations
and be nursed at royal breasts.

You will know that I, Yahweh, am your
saviour,

• your redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

¹⁷ Instead of bronze I will bring you gold;
instead of iron I will bring silver;

instead of wood, bronze;
instead of stones, iron.
Peace will be your overseers,
justice your taskmasters.

¹⁸ Violence will no more be heard in your
land,
nor ruin and destruction within your
borders.

You will call your walls Salvation,
and your gates Praise.

¹⁹ No more will the sun give you light by
day,

nor the moon shine on you by night.
For Yahweh will be your everlasting light
and your God will be your glory.

²⁰ No more will your sun go down,
never will your moon wane.
For Yahweh will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning will come to an
end.

²¹ Your people will be upright;
forever they will possess the land—
they the shoot of my planting,
the work of my hand—
in them I shall be glorified.

²² The least among you will become a clan,
the smallest a mighty nation.
I Yahweh will do this,
Swiftly, in due time.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

+ 61

¹ The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me,
because Yahweh has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up broken hearts,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,

11. Rev 21, 25	14. Rev 3, 9; Ps 87, 3	18. Rev 21, 12	19. Lk 1, 78; Rev 21, 23
1. 42, 1; Lk 4, 18; Acts 10, 38; Lk 7, 22	2. 63, 4	5. Ex 19, 6; Rev 1, 6	

+ The prophet recalls the mission he received from God, similar to that of the author of the Book of Consolation (Is 40). His responsibility

is very clear: to announce to the Jewish pioneers who returned to Jerusalem that God will bless their efforts. The ruins will be rebuilt; the



freedom to those languishing in prison;
² to announce the year of Yahweh's favour
 and the day of vengeance of our God;
 to give comfort to all who grieve;
³ to comfort those who mourn in Zion
 and give them a garland instead of ashes,
 oil of gladness instead of mourning,
 and garment of praise instead of despair.

They will be called oaks of integrity
 planted by Yahweh to show his glory.

⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins
 and repair cities laid waste,
 left desolate for many generations.

⁵ Strangers will stand to feed your flocks,
 foreigners to be your ploughmen and
 vinedressers.

⁶ But you will be named priests of
 Yahweh,

you will be called ministers of our God.
 You will feed on the wealth of nations
 and bathe in the splendor of their riches.

⁷ Since my people's shame has been
 twofold

and disgrace has been their lot,
 they will possess a double portion
 of inheritance in their land.
 I will give them everlasting joy.

⁸ For I, Yahweh, love justice;
 I hate robbery and oppression
 I will give them their due reward
 and make an everlasting covenant with

them.

⁹ Their descendants shall be known
 among the nations
 and their offspring among the peoples.
 All who see them will acknowledge
 that they are a race Yahweh has blessed.

¹⁰ I rejoice greatly in Yahweh,
 my soul exults for joy in my God,
 for he has clothed me in the garments of
 his salvation,

he has covered me with the robe of his
 righteousness,

like a bridegroom wearing a garland,
 like a bride adorned with jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its growth,
 and as a garden makes it seeds spring up,
 so will the Lord Yahweh make justice
 and praise
 spring up in the sight of all nations.

Your God will rejoice in you

62 ¹ For Zion's sake I will not hold my
 peace,

for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep
 silent,

until her holiness shines like the dawn
 and her salvation flames like a burning
 torch.

² The nations will see your holiness
 and all the kings your glory.

You will be called by a new name
 which the mouth of Yahweh will reveal.

³ You will be a crown of glory
 in the hand of Yahweh,
 a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

⁴ No longer will you be named *Forsaken*;
 no longer will your land be called

Abandoned;

but you will be called *My Delight*
 and your land *Espoused*.

For Yahweh delights in you
 and will make your land his spouse.

8. 55, 3

10. Lk 1, 46; Rev 19, 8; 21, 8

2. Rev 2, 17; 3, 12

3. Ezk 16, 2

4. 49, 8

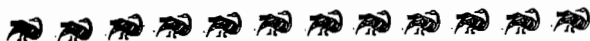
brothers will come back in great numbers from
 the countries where they were exiled; those who
 doubt or are discouraged must persevere be-
 cause, soon, God will come to visit his people.

Speaking in the synagogue of Nazareth,
 Jesus read this text and said: "Today it is being
 fulfilled" (Luke 4: 16). And the people who heard
 him were saying: "God has visited his people"

And yet, we who come after him wonder: If
 Christ brought God's salvation twenty centuries
 ago, why are so many people still waiting for the
 good news of their liberation?

It is because the Gospel is a seed and the
 Resurrection does not immediately bring about
 the transformation of the world. If the Jewish
 people endured fifteen centuries of searching
 and trials before their Saviour came, how will
 other people obtain the definitive Peace of the
 Kingdom of God without first passing through
 the great trials preceding Christ's return? We are
 already quite blessed to have him in our midst
 and his Spirit upon us.

To heal, console, sing happy songs: authen-
 tic liberation brings lasting happiness, and moti-
 vates people to live and hope.



⁵ As a young man marries a young woman,
so will he who made you marry you;
and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride,
so will your God rejoice in you.

He who sows reaps

⁶ Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have stationed watchmen;
all the day and throughout the night
they will not be silent.
O you, criers of Yahweh,
give yourselves no rest;
⁷ and give him no rest either
till he restores Jerusalem
and makes of it the pride of the earth.

⁸ Yahweh swears by his right hand
and by his mighty arm:
Never again will I give your grain
as food for your enemies,
nor will foreigners drink the wine

for which you have laboured.
⁹ But those who toil will eat the harvest,
and praise Yahweh;
and those working for the vintage
shall drink of the wine
in the courts of my sanctuary.

¹⁰ Pass through, pass through the gates,
prepare the way for the people.
Build it up, bank up the highway,
clear it of stones;
raise up a standard for the peoples.

¹¹ Yahweh proclaims to the ends of the earth:

Say to the daughter of Zion,
here comes your salvation!
Yahweh brings the reward of his victory,
his booty is carried before him.

¹² You shall be called the holy people,
the redeemed of Yahweh.
And you shall be called *The Sought*

After,
a city no longer abandoned.

Why are your clothes red?

•63

¹ Who is this coming from Edom,
majestically arrayed
in crimson garments from Bozrah,
marching in great strength?
"It is I, proclaiming justice,
I who am powerful to save."

² Why are your clothes red,
and your garments like those
of men who tread in the winepress?

³ "Alone I have trod the grapes;

8. Am 9, 14; Dt 28, 30

1. Rev 19, 13

■ What was said on the subject in chapter 60 can be applied here. In a new way, this song repeats what was said about the future Jerusalem in 4:2 and in chapters 40-55.

Jerusalem, the lasting city of the children of God, the bride of the Lord, filled with his riches and the delight of her God. Why does God remind us so many times of those wonders which have yet to happen?

– So that we may maintain hope in trials and dark times (this is how Paul encourages us in Rom 8:16). Also, when things are going well and we are filled with earthly hopes, the same wisdom must help us to be detached

from all this, in the knowledge that something much better still awaits us.

– On the other hand, the heavenly Jerusalem is already present. Those who have come into the church already have the favours promised to David and of which we have just spoken; they already enjoy them if they have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 13:34). These pages are an invitation to discover hidden riches in the church and to see God at work in the world through the Church.

◆ The poem beginning here is wildly beautiful. The neighbouring people of Edom had taken

not one of my people was with me.
 I trampled them in my anger,
 I trod them down in my wrath,
 their lifeblood spattering my garments,
 staining with crimson all my raiment.
⁴For I had decided a day of vengeance
 and my year of redemption had come.
⁵I looked about: there was no one to help.
 I was appalled: there was no one to give support.
 My own arm, then, brought about the victory,
 and I was supported by my own fury.
⁶I crushed the peoples in my anger,
 I trampled them down in my wrath,
 and on the earth I poured their lifeblood."

Rend the heavens and come down

^o ⁷I will sing praises of Yahweh's kindness and of the wonder of his glorious deeds, according to all that he has done for us, his great goodness to the family of Israel. He has granted us mercy in the abundance of his steadfast love.

⁸For he said: "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be disloyal." So he proved himself their Saviour ⁹in all their affliction.

It was not a messenger or an angel but he himself who delivered them. Out of his love and mercy, he re-deemed them, lifting them up and carrying them as in the days of old.

¹⁰Yet they rebelled, giving grief to his holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy, fighting against them.

¹¹His people then remembered the

days of old, the days of Moses. Where is he who brought out of the sea the shepherd of his flock?

Where is he who in the midst of them poured out his holy Spirit, ¹²who sent his own power to accompany Moses, who divided the waters before them winning for himself eternal renown, ¹³who made them go through the depths as easily as a horse in the wilderness? ¹⁴Like cattle going down the valley, they did not stumble.

The spirit of Yahweh led them to their rest; you guided your people, winning for yourself glorious renown.

¹⁵Look down from heaven, look down from your holy and glorious throne. Where is your zeal and your strength, the yearning of your heart and your compassion? How long will you ignore our pain? ¹⁶For you are our

3. Rev 14, 19	4. 34, 8; 61, 2	7. Ps 89, 2	8. Dt 32	9. Ex 33, 14; Mal 3, 17
10. Eph 4, 30	11. Heb 13, 20	12. Num 11, 17	14. Ps 77, 21	15. Jer 31, 20
				16. Dt 32, 6

advantage of the ruin of Jerusalem to join its wreckers and take part in the looting. And so, the simple mention of it was enough to arouse a desire for revenge in the Jews. The prophets did want the destruction of a nation in which sin was obvious and which had no mission in God's plans. This poem imagines God relating his victory over the pagans.

Believers reading this poem after Christ understood it in another, figurative sense: in the

hero rescuing his people, they saw Christ covered with his own blood (see Rv 19:13). This was God's real victory and his way of restoring justice.

o This passage 63:7-64 is a psalm asking the forgiveness of Yahweh. The wonders of the past are recalled, and the anxious expectation of new blessings is expressed. Note especially 63:19-64:3 which would be understood later as asking for the coming of Christ.

Father, whereas Abraham does not know us nor has Israel any knowledge of us. But you, O Yahweh, are our Father, from the beginning you are our redeemer: this is your name.

¹⁷ Why have you made us stray from your ways? Why have you let our heart harden so that we do not fear you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance.

¹⁸ Why have irreligious people invaded your sanctuary? Why have our enemies trampled it down?

¹⁹ For too long we have become like those you do not rule, like those who do not bear your name.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down! The mountains would quake at your presence.

64 ¹As when fire sets brushwood ablaze and causes water to boil, and make the nations know your name, and your enemies tremble.

² When you did terrible things that we could not expect ³ and that no one had ever perceived.

No eye has ever seen any God besides you who works for those who trust in him.

⁴ You come to the help of those who act righteously and keep your ways in mind. But You are angry, when they sin; how, then, shall we be saved?

⁵ All of us have become like the unclean; all our good deeds are like polluted garments; we have all withered like leaves, blown away by our iniquities.

⁶ There is no one who calls upon your name, no one who rouses him-

self to lay hold of you. For you have hidden your face, you have given us up to the power of our evil acts.

⁷ And yet, Yahweh, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our potter; we are the work of your hand.

⁸ Do not let your anger go too far, O Yahweh, or think of our sins forever.

See, we are your people: please consider this, we pray!

⁹ Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wasteland, Jerusalem a desolation.

¹⁰ Our holy and glorious house, where our fathers used to pray to you has been razed to the ground, and all that we treasure lies in ruins.

¹¹ Can you still remain unmoved, O Yahweh, before all this? Will you punish us further with your silence?

God's response

+ 65 ¹I have been sought by those who did not ask for me; I have been found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation who did not call on my name.

² I have stretched out my hands all day to a rebellious people who chose the evil way, following their own wishes.

³ These people provoked me face to face, continually, sacrificing in gardens, burning incense on bricks, ⁴ living in tombs and spending nights in dark places; a people who eat the flesh of swine and broth of abominable meat.

⁵ They cry out, "Keep off, do not come near, for I am too sacred to be touched." Such men and their acts arouse my anger like fire that burns all day.

⁶ Look, all this is written in my book, I will not keep silent till I have settled my account

Mt 23, 9	17. Ps 80, 15; Dt 32, 9	19. Jer 14, 9; Mk 1, 10; 15, 38	3. Dt 4, 32; 1 Cor 2, 9
5. Ezk 36, 17	11. Zac 1, 12	1. Rom 10, 20	3. Dt 32, 21
			4. Mt 5, 2

+ Chapters 65-66 announce the judgment of the Lord on the earth. He will create a new heaven and a new earth in which his servants

will experience happiness. Verses 13-14 are a prelude to the beatitudes and the woes expressed in Luke 6:20-26.

with them ⁷ for their crimes and the crimes of their fathers as well, Yahweh says. Because they burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed against me on the hills, I will pay them back to the full.

God saves and blesses the just

⁸Yahweh says, "When people find juice in a grape, they say: 'Do not destroy it, there is a blessing here.' So I will do with my servants; I will not destroy the whole of them.

⁹I will create a new race from Jacob and they will own the hills of Judah. My chosen people will inherit them, and my servants will dwell there.

¹⁰Sharon will be a pasture for flocks, the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds; they will be for my people who have sought me.

¹¹But as for you who have forsaken Yahweh, you who have forgotten my holy mountain, you who spread a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny, ¹²I have destined you to the sword. All of you will kneel for the slaughter.

For I called and you did not answer
I spoke and you did not listen.
Instead you did what was evil in my sight
and chose that in which I had no delight.

¹³Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh:
Look, my servants will eat
but you will go hungry;
my servants will drink
but you will be thirsty;
my servants will rejoice
but you will be disgraced;

¹⁴my servants will sing with gladness of heart,
but you will cry with grief in your heart
and wail in anguish of spirit.

¹⁵My chosen ones will use as a curse the name you will leave behind, as I strike you dead and give my servants a new name.

¹⁶Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will receive the blessing from the God of truth; whoever takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth. For the past troubles will be forgotten, and I will see them no more.

A new heaven and a new earth

■ ¹⁷I now create new heavens and new earth, and the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind again.

¹⁸Be glad forever and rejoice in what I create; for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. ¹⁹I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people.

The sound of distress and the voice of weeping will not be heard in it any more.

²⁰It will no longer know of dead children or of a grown man not completing his days. He who reaches a hundred years will have died a merciful youth, but he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant crops and eat their fruit. ²²No longer will they build houses for others to dwell in; no longer will they plant for others to eat the harvest.

For as the days of a tree will the days of my people be; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³Their labour will not be in vain, nor will they bear children destined for misfortune, for they will be a people blessed by Yahweh, and their descendants with them.

²⁴Before they call, I will have answered them; while they are yet speaking, I will have heard them.

²⁵The wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat straw like the ox, (but the serpent will feed on dust.) They will not destroy nor do any harm over all my holy mountain, says Yahweh.

13. Mt 25, 34; Lk 6, 20

15. Rev 2, 17

16. 2 Cor 1, 20; Rev 3, 14

17. 2 Pet 3, 13;

Rev 21, 1

24. 50, 2; 65, 12

25. 11, 7;

Gen 3, 14

■ No one could imagine the New Heaven that God is preparing for us (Mk 12:18). Yet, let us rejoice over the prophet's description in these concrete examples. In doing so, he shows us what we must do so that our earth can move

toward this transcendental goal:

- a world in which there are no under-nourished children.
- a world where man does not exploit man, a world without wars.

True worship of Yahweh

66

¹ Thus says Yahweh:
Heaven is my throne and earth my footstool. What house, then, could you build for me, and what could you offer as my resting place?

² My hands have made all this and it is all mine, but what I am looking for is the meek and contrite of heart, the one who has fear of my word.

³ They sacrifice an ox, then they murder a man. They sacrifice a lamb, then they break a dog's neck; They bring a cereal offering, then they offer swine's blood. They burn incense, but they burn it for idols. Since they have chosen their own ways and taken delight in their own abominations.

⁴ I will likewise choose afflictions for them that they fear and abhor.

For when I called no one answered,
when I spoke no one listened.
Instead they did what was evil in my sight
I will choose for them afflictions
and chose that in which I had no delight.

⁵ Hear the word of Yahweh, you who have fear of his word: Because of my name your brothers hate and reject you, saying, "Let Yahweh show his glory, that we may see your joy."

These mockers will be put to shame.

⁶ Listen, an uproar from the city, a voice from the temple! It is the voice of Yahweh avenging and paying back his enemies.

Birth of the new Jerusalem

⁷ Before being in travail,
she has given birth;
before having labour pains,

she has been delivered of a son.

⁸ Has anyone ever heard of such a thing?
Has anyone seen the like of it?

How could a land spring forth in one day?

How could a nation be formed in a moment?

Yet Zion had not so much as been in travail when she gave birth to her children.

⁹ Yahweh says, "Do I allow to conceive and yet not give birth? And can there be birth if I did not allow to conceive?"

¹⁰ Rejoice for Jerusalem and be glad for her,

all you who love her.
Be glad with her, rejoice with her,
all you who were in grief over her,
¹¹ that you may suck of the milk
from her comforting breasts,
that you may drink deeply
from the abundance of her glory.

¹² For this is what Yahweh says:
I will send her peace,
overflowing like a river;
and the nations wealth
rushing like a torrent towards her.
And you will be nursed
and be carried in her arms
and be fondled upon her lap.

¹³ As a son comforted by his mother,
so will I comfort you;

¹⁴ At the sight of this, your heart will
rejoice;

like grass, your bones will flourish.
For it shall be known
that Yahweh's hand is with his servant,
but his fury is with his enemy.

1. 1 K 8, 27; Mt 5, 35; Acts 7, 47
2. Ps 50, 10
7. Rev 12, 5 12. 48, 18; 60, 13

4. 50, 2; 65, 12 6. Rev 16, 17

◆ Announcing the day when Yahweh will conquer the pagan nations united against him, and that he will then save them by gathering them into his new people.

Be careful to understand the expression "I am going to gather". We already saw in Is 6:9 how the Jews spoke about God because they were convinced that God rules everything. When someone undertook something they would say that God had moved him to do it, and when someone was doing something evil that later God would use it for his own ends, they would say that God had driven him. Here, "I am going to gather" means "they will gather but I will use this to achieve the salvation of my people."

The nations unite against Jerusalem as in the days of Sennacherib (see Is 31:4-9) and they are

defeated in a miraculous way: but this time, the survivors, witnesses of the miracle, will reveal the true God everywhere. They will be admitted to God's people and they will share the privileges of the Jews ("from among them I will take priests and levites"). The poem concludes with the vision of a world judged by Yahweh:

- within the city, those who have dedicated themselves to his service and come to adore him in his temple;
- outside, the corpses of those who were exterminated; they will always remain as the sign of God's invincible justice.

What a tremendous vision! But it would be vain to seek escape by thinking that things may work out and that God, being so good, will not be able to condemn us definitely. Jesus refers to this text in Mark 9:48.

¹⁵ Look, Yahweh will come in fire,
his chariots like the whirlwind,
to release his anger with fury
and this threat with flames of fire.

¹⁶ For by fire will Yahweh execute
judgment,
and by his sword, against all mankind.
Those slain by Yahweh will be many.

¹⁷ As for those who sanctify and purify
themselves by going to the gardens and fol-
lowing the priestess in the midst – those who
eat the flesh of pigs, reptiles and rats – their
deeds and thoughts will suddenly come to an
end, says Yahweh.

The pagans enter the kingdom of God

◆ ¹⁸ Now I am going to gather the nations of
every tongue, and they will witness my glory,
¹⁹ for I will perform a wonderful thing on them.
I will send some of their survivors to the
nations – Tarshish, Put, Lud, Moscheck, Rosh,

Tubal, and Javan – to the distant islands where
no one has ever heard of me or seen my glory.
They will proclaim my glory among the na-
tions. ²⁰ They will bring all your brothers from
all the nations as an offering to Yahweh on
horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, on
camels to my holy mountain in Jerusalem,
says Yahweh, just as the Israelites bring obla-
tions in clean vessels to the house of Yahweh.
²¹ Then I will choose priests and Levites, even
from them, says Yahweh.

²² Yahweh says, "As the new heavens and
the new earth that I will make shall endure be-
fore me, so will your name and your descen-
dants also endure.

²³ From new moon to new moon, from
sabbath to sabbath, every mortal will come to
worship me, says Yahweh. ²⁴ And on their way
out they will see the corpses of those who re-
belled against me. Their worms shall not die,
nor their fire be quenched, and they will be
abhorrent to all.

17. 65, 4

18. Zac 14, 16

20. Zac 14, 18

22. 65, 17; Ps 65, 3

24. Jud 16, 17; Mk 9, 48

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH

THOSE WHO MAKE HISTORY

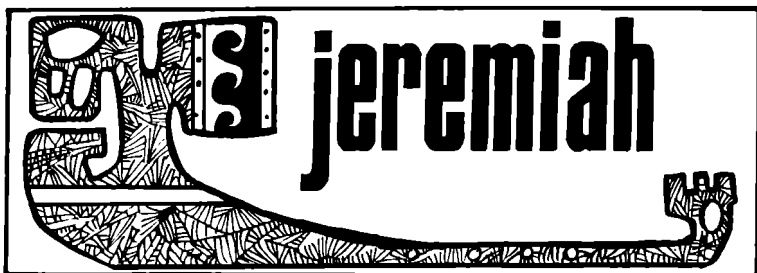
Kings and generals are busy on the political stage; priests and charlatans provide the people
with the kind of truth they want to hear; wars and famines have brought people to their knees:
who is carrying forward the mission of Israel, the instrument of God in the world?

God, then, looks for someone to whom he may *give authority* not over Israel, but over *all the
nations*, and he entrusts him, not with the mission to speak, but *tou-p-root and destroy, to build and
to plant*. In a word, God gives him the mission to speed history up. This man will be Jeremiah,
a boy from Anathoth, coming from a family of priests.

What matters is not that Jeremiah spoke the discourses found in this book, but rather that he
cooperated with God in his sovereign decisions about ruling over history.

If indeed history is made by workers, militants, thinkers and all kinds of responsible people;
it is God who draws everything together and guides events in such a way that one fails while
another succeeds. God is at work in history through the works, words, writings and prayers
of countless people. But he also stirs up more profound forces that shake up lifeless hearts and
strengthen the yearning for justice in the world. In the spheres of activity which God has
reserved for himself, only people of faith cooperate with him, especially the few ones who are
totally surrendered to him.

God's friends share in his sovereign rule over the events: Abraham (Gen 18:16), Moses (Ex
32:14), the martyrs (Rev 20:4). Jeremiah, the quiet and peaceful lad from Anathoth became one



f them because he was emptied of his own will to such an extent that God could reveal to him his *jealous love* for Israel and his *anger* over sin. So he was able to utter condemnations of Israel which would become reality and to foretell the times of the New Covenant.

The Jews of later times believed that, after his death, Jeremiah was present before God interceding for them (2 Mc 2:1 and 14:14). When prophets after him spoke of a suffering saviour, they remembered Jeremiah's trials.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Between Isaiah's last prophecies (690 B.C.) and Jeremiah's call from God (around 626) there is a span of sixty years, almost fifty of which correspond to Manasseh's reign. He had done what he could to destroy the faith of the Jews (2 Kgs 21). Then in 640 a child, Josiah, comes to the throne and, slowly, the embers of faith are rekindled.

This is the time when the discovery of the book of the Law brings about religious renewal, *Josiah's Reform* (2 Kgs 22). But, a few years before that, God had called Jeremiah.

Then, the events which followed and which Jeremiah witnessed, took a tragic turn. They are related in 2 Kgs 23, 25 and repeated in Jer 39.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah's words are not recorded according to the time at which they were proclaimed. The book has four parts:

Prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem: chapters 1-25.

Prophecies against the nations. Announced at the end of ch. 25, they form chapters 46-51.

Promises of happiness: chapters 29-35.

Jeremiah's sufferings: chapters 36-45.

1 ¹ These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. ² The word of Yahweh came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah. ³ It came again during the reign of Jehoiaquim son of Josiah, king of Judah, down to the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, five months after the people of Jerusalem had been deported.

The call of Jeremiah

⁴ A word of Yahweh came to me, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart, and appointed you a prophet to the nations!"

⁶ I said, "Ah, Lord Yahweh! I do not know how to speak; I am a child!"

⁷ But Yahweh replied, "Do not say: 'I am a child.' Go now to all those I send you; and say what I command you." ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you – it is Yahweh who speaks!"

⁹ Then Yahweh stretched out his

hand and touched my mouth and said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See! Today I give you authority over nations and over kingdoms

to uproot and pull down,
to destroy and overthrow,
to build and to plant."

¹¹ A word of Yahweh came to me again, "Jeremiah what do you see?" I said, "I see the branch of a watching tree." ¹² And Yahweh said to me, "You have seen well. I too am watching to fulfill my word." ¹³ The word of Yahweh came to me a second time, "What do you see?" I replied that I saw a boiling cauldron coming from the north. And Yahweh said to me,

¹⁴ "Disaster will boil down from the north on all the people of the land.

¹⁵ I am calling all the kingdoms of the north – it is Yahweh who speaks.

Each of them will come and encamp at the entrance to the gates of Jerusalem; against all its surrounding walls and against all the cities of Judah.

¹⁶ I will pass judgment on my people because of the evil they do in forsaking me and offering incense to foreign gods and worshipping gods their hands have made.

¹⁷ But you, brace yourself for action; stand up and say to them all that I command you. Have no fear of them or I will make you afraid in their presence!

¹⁸ See, I will make you a fortified city, a pillar of iron with walls of bronze, against all the nations, against the kings of Judah and their princes, against the priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you but shall not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue you – it is Yahweh who speaks."

10. Acts 9, 15

12. Am 8, 2; Dn 9, 14

16. 2 K 22, 17

17. Is 50, 7; Ezk 3, 8; Mi 3, 8

19. Acts 18, 9; 26, 17

o Jeremiah does not say much about his vocation. We have no flashing revelation from God. The two visions of the branch of the watching-tree (the almond tree), and the boiling cauldron seem quite ordinary for such a transcendental mission. It shows that what matters in this calling is something interior.

I put my words in your mouth. Jeremiah is made a prophet: from now on, he will proclaim the word of God. That does not mean that God will always tell him what he must announce, rather, since he now thinks and feels like the Lord, every time he speaks, he will be able to truly say "the word of Yahweh."

To all those I send you, you will go. From now on, Jeremiah will be guided by the power of the Spirit; he will obey, whatever the risks and in spite of the resistance of his timid nature. *Have no fear before them, or I will make you afraid in their presence.* This is the amazing revelation of the demanding love of Yahweh. He has decided to make this lad his chosen one and he forces him to overcome and to forget his human weakness.

I am with you to rescue you. Yahweh repeats what he said to Moses when he called him (Ex 3, 12) and what he will also say to Paul (Acts 26, 17). Moreover, Jeremiah is assured that the Lord destined him to this mission, of which he had never thought, and which frightens him:

Before you were born, I set you apart, I knew you from your mother's womb. Later, the same will be said of John the Baptist (Lk 1:15), of Christ (see Is 49) and of Paul (Gal 1:15).

These words spoken to Jeremiah are, somehow, also meant for us: we are not the product of chance. In Eph 1, Paul praises this foreknowledge of God who called us from eternity to know Christ and to have a share in the divine riches. But what is said to Jeremiah urges us to reflect that God in his eternal designs, clearly sees those – next to Christ, who are given a more transcendental mission. It will be difficult for them to escape God's irresistible call.

God appears to force Jeremiah's freedom, but he does it as the one who gives him that very freedom. Yahweh's tremendous demands will break down all Jeremiah's hopes for happiness, but they will also lead him to transcendent greatness.

I give you authority over the nations; you will uproot and destroy. From now on, Jeremiah will carry Yahweh's creative word. In the first years, this word seems rather destructive. Jeremiah knows that when he pronounces a condemnation, he expresses God's judgment which will shortly take place.

Jeremiah's mission: "To uproot and destroy to build and to plant" will be the mission of any worker in the Lord's vineyard. There can be no

The infidelities of Israel

2 ¹ A word of Yahweh came to me, ² "Go and shout this in the hearing of Jerusalem. This is Yahweh's word:

I remember your kindness as a youth,
the love of your bridal days,
when you followed me in the wilderness,
through a land not sown.

³ Israel was holy to Yahweh,
the first-fruits of his harvest.
All who ate of it had to pay
and misfortune fell on them –
it is Yahweh who speaks.

⁴ Hear the word of Yahweh, people of Jacob,
all you families of the nation of Israel.

⁵ What wrong did your fathers find in me
that they strayed far from me?
Why did they pursue what is worthless
and become worthless themselves?

⁶ And they did not say: 'Where is Yahweh
who brought us out of Egypt
and led us in the wilderness,
through a land of deserts and pits,
a land of drought and darkness,
a land still untrodden and without inhabitants?'

⁷ I brought you to a fertile land

2. Esk 16, 60; Dt 2, 7; 8, 4 3. Hos 2, 20; Ps 105, 14 5. 2 K 17, 15; Wis 13, 1 6. Dt 32, 10-18

compromise between a semblance of Christian life and authentic faith; the genuine apostle must testify in order to build.

■ Chapters 2-6 except for 3:6-18 contain Jeremiah's preaching in the first years following his call. After the godless kings Manasseh and Amon, there was very little concern for religion: Jeremiah daringly opposes the general indifference. His language resembles that of Hosea who, a century before, had spoken in similar circumstances in the northern kingdom. For the Israelites, Yahweh is God, or a God, but not someone who lives close to us. But for Jeremiah he is both Father and Husband.

I still remember your kindness as a youth. You will note the longing for the time of the desert, the days of Moses, when the people were wandering and poor, but trusted in Yahweh who helped them. But as they built their houses, planted their vineyards and had children, the Israelites became rich and they forgot their benefactor: "No one can serve two masters". Yahweh appears as the jealous husband: those men, so easily satisfied, have not discovered God's passionate love.

My people have exchanged their glory for what is worthless. Jeremiah is thinking about his contemporaries who are unable to discover the invisible God and who feel secure with statues of gods made according to the whims of men. His words are really addressed to people of all times, men who only trust their own plans.

They have forsaken me, the source of living waters. Abandoning God has taken three forms:

- They stopped seeking his will just as did their leaders ... The three categories of authority in Judah are named: priests, shepherds (governors) and prophets
- They restored the worship of false gods, to whom they offer sacrifices and vows
- They formed alliances with powerful nations like Assyria and Egypt with the idea of guaranteeing their own security, but without seeing that such alliances were making them just other peoples. Their vocation was to keep their faith in Yahweh knowing that he would never abandon them if they carried out justice among the people.

See also the commentary on Isaiah 30:32.
Know and see that it is bitter and evil to



to eat of the choicest fruit.
As soon as you came you defiled my land
and dishonoured my heritage!

⁸ The priests did not ask, 'Where is Yahweh?'
The masters of my teaching do not know me;
the pastors of my people betrayed me;
the prophets followed worthless idols
and spoke in the name of Baal.

⁹ Therefore I contend with you –
it is Yahweh who speaks –
and I will contend with the sons of your sons!

¹⁰ Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see,
or send to Kedar and observe with care
if there has ever been such a thing!

¹¹ Has a nation exchanged its gods,
false though they be?
But my people have exchanged their Glory
for what is worthless!

¹² Be aghast at that, O heavens!
Shudder, be utterly appalled –
it is Yahweh who speaks –

¹³ for my people have done two evils:
they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water,
to dig for themselves leaking cisterns
that hold no water!

¹⁴ Did I make Israel a slave
or was he born in bondage?
How then did you become the spoil of others?

¹⁵ The lions have roared against you,
loudly indeed have they roared,
making your country a wasteland,
your cities in ruins without inhabitants.

¹⁶ Even the Egyptians of Memphis and Tahpanhes have humbled you!

¹⁷ Didn't you bring this on yourself,
by forsaking Yahweh, your God,
even as he led you in the way?

¹⁸ Now why call to Egypt?
Will the water of the Nile heal you?
And why go to Assyria?

What good will the water of the River do you?

8. Lev 10, 11; Num 27, 21; Exk 7, 26; Hos 4, 6; Mi 3, 11
12. Is 1, 2

13. Hos 10, 10; 17, 13; Jn 4, 10

11. Dr 4, 16; Ps 106, 20; Rom 1, 23

forsake Yahweh, your God. Maybe Jeremiah and the prophets had an overly simplistic vision of the justice of God in this world. We know that prosperity or misfortune are not the sure proof of our leading good or evil lives. Nevertheless, those who meditate on their lives and on history

do verify Jeremiah's words: sin always brings it punishment.

The blood of the innocents (36). In many parts of the Bible we find reference to children sacrificed to the idols.



¹⁹ Your own wickedness chastises you
and your own unfaithfulness punishes you!
Know, and see that it is bitter and evil
to forsake Yahweh your God
and no longer to fear me –
it is Yahweh, the God of hosts, who speaks!

²⁰ It was long ago that you broke your yoke
and burst your bonds,
saying: 'I will not serve!'
On every high hill
and under every green tree
you played the harlot!

²¹ I planted you a choice vine, a shoot of wholesome stock;
why have you become degenerate, a wild vine?

²² Even if you wash with soda
and use soap in abundance,
the stain of your sin is always before me –
it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks.

²³ How do you dare say: 'I am not defiled,
I have not gone after the Baals'?
See your foot-prints in the valley,
admit what you have done,
O restive young she-camel, running here and there.

²⁴ Wild ass of the desert,
sniffing the wind in her desire,
who can restrain her lust?
Those who pursue her, need not tire themselves,
at mating time they will find her.

²⁵ Run if you wish until your feet are sore,
and your throat is dry!
But you say: 'It's no use,
I love foreign gods, it is them I follow.'

The crimes of Jerusalem

²⁶ As a thief is shamed when caught,
so is the house of Israel,
they, their kings, their princes,
their priests and their prophets!

²⁷ To a tree they say: 'You are my father!'
and to a stone: 'You gave me birth!'
For they have turned their back on me
instead of their face!

In the day of misfortune
they will call me: 'Rise and save us!'

²⁸ Where, then, are the gods of your own
making?

Let them rise and save you if they can,
in the time of your distress,
for your gods, O Judah! are as many
as your cities.

²⁹ Why argue with me? You have all be-
trayed me – it is Yahweh who speaks.

³⁰ In vain did I strike your sons,
they did not learn a lesson!
And your sword, like a destroying lion
devoured your prophets!

³¹ All you of this generation, hear what
Yahweh says:

Have I been a desert for Israel,
a land of darkness?



Why do my people say:
'We will depart from you
and no more return to you?'

³² Does a virgin forget her ornaments, or a
bride her sash?

But my people have forgotten me
for days without number!

³³ How well you direct your steps in your
search for lovers,
even to walking along with crime!

³⁴ Look at your garments
stained with the blood of the innocent
poor, although you did not catch them break-
ing in!

³⁵ I know you say: 'I am innocent, Why
does his anger not turn away from me?'

I will accuse you: Yes, you have sinned!

³⁶ How lightly do you change your way!

You will be put to shame by Egypt as you
were by Assyria.

³⁷ You will also leave that place with your
hands on your head,
for Yahweh has rejected those you trust,
and they will not help you!

Are you really returning to me?

3 ¹ If a man divorces his wife and
she leaves him and marries an-
other man, should he come back to
her? Wouldn't it be a scandal? But
you, you are a harlot with many lov-
ers, and would you return to me? – it
is Yahweh who speaks.

² Lift your eyes to the hills and see:
Where have you not been violated?
By the wayside you sat waiting for
your lovers, like an Arab in the wil-
derness, and you have dishonoured
the land with your evil and your har-
lotry!

36. Is 30, 3

37. 2 S 13, 19

2. Gen 38, 14; Ezk 16, 25

4. Dt 28, 23; Am 4, 7

8. Is 50, 1

◆ This is the beginning of the poem which will
continue in 3:19-4:2.

If a man divorces his wife. We cannot under-
stand sin if we have not known love. Jeremiah
declares that this hard-hearted people is the "the
bride" of Yahweh who has behaved like prosti-
tutes. An adulterous woman who abandoned
her husband and sacrificed her children, to go
after other men.

Contrary to what usually happens, the aban-
doned husband looks for the guilty woman.
Judah does not deserve Yahweh's return and the
people cannot complain when misfortunes be-
fall them. Yet, Yahweh's love urges him to look
for these unfaithful people.

³ The showers held back and there
was no spring rain for you, yet you
have a harlot's brow and refuse to be
ashamed! ⁴ Worse still you called to
me: 'Father, guide of my youth! ⁵ Will
you always be angry? Will your wrath
last forever?' That is what you said
and then did evil and went your own
way."

Comparison of the two sisters

⁶ During the reign of King Josiah, Yah-
weh said to me, "Have you seen what faithless
Israel has done? She has gone on every high
hill and under every green tree and there
played the harlot!" So I thought: After all this
she will return to me; but she did not return.

Her perverse sister, Judah, saw ⁸ that for
all the adulteries of that unfaithful Israel, I sent
her away with a certificate of divorce. Yet I
saw that the disloyal Judah had no fear and that
she too went and played the harlot! ⁹ Because
Israel's harlotry mattered so little to her, she
dishonoured the land, sinning with stones and
trees. ¹⁰ And even after that her sister, the un-
faithful Judah, did not come back to me with
all her heart. It was only pretence. It is Yahweh
who speaks."

¹¹ And Yahweh continued, "Faithless Is-
rael has been less guilty than false Judah. ¹² Go
and shout this message to the north:

Come back, unfaithful Israel – it is Yah-
weh who speaks – I will not let my anger fall
on you for I am merciful, I will not be angry
forever.

¹³ Only acknowledge your guilt; you have
rebelled against Yahweh your God, and have
scattered your favours among strangers under
every green tree, and you have not obeyed my
voice – it is the word of Yahweh.

○ This part begun in 3:1 is interrupted by two
paragraphs.

3:6-13: these verses were written when Jo-
siah recaptured part of the northern kingdom
(Kingdom of Israel). See the commentary on 2
Kings 23:15. After so many threats, the hope of
conversion is never lost.

3:15-18: These words were proclaimed by
Jeremiah after the destruction of Jerusalem in
587 and they contain promises of restoration.
They were inserted here in the book to tone
down the pessimistic impression caused by so
many condemnations. In fact, these threats of
punishment had to be completely carried out
before God would offer new hopes.



¹⁴ Come back, faithless people – it is Yahweh who speaks – for I am your master. I will choose one from a city and two from a family and bring you to Zion. ¹⁵ Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and prudence. ¹⁶ And when you have increased and multiplied in the land in those days – it is Yahweh who speaks – men will no longer speak of the ark of the covenant of Yahweh; it will not be remembered or missed, nor shall it be made again!

¹⁷ Then they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of Yahweh' and all the nations will gather there to honour the name of Yahweh and no longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts.

¹⁸ In those days the people of Judah will unite with the people of Israel and together they will come back from the north to the land that I gave in heritage to their fathers.

Continuation of the poem for conversion

¹⁹ And I thought: How gladly would I have placed you among my sons and given you as your heritage a beautiful land, the most splendid among all the nations! And I thought you would call me 'my father' and not turn from following me!

²⁰ But, like a woman unfaithful to her husband, you have been unfaithful to me, O people of Israel! – it is Yahweh who speaks.

²¹ A cry in the barren heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of the sons of Israel, because they have perverted their way and have forgotten Yahweh their God!

²² Come back, faithless people, I will cure you of your rebellion!

'Yes, we come to you, for you are Yahweh our God!

²³ Truly the temples on the heights and the feasts on the hills serve for nothing; only Yahweh our God can save Israel.

²⁴ The infamous god has devoured all for which our fathers laboured since our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. ²⁵ Let us lie down in our shame and let our confusion cover us, for it is against Yahweh our God that we have sinned, we and our fathers from our youth until this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God!

Disaster foretold

4 ¹ 'If you return to me, O Israel – it is Yahweh who speaks – if you convert to

me and put your monstrous idols out of my sight, you will have no need to hide from me; ² if you swear by Yahweh's life in truth, justice and honesty, then in him all nations will bless themselves and in him they will glory."

³ For thus says Yahweh to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, "Break up deeply your fallow land and do not sow among the thorns. ⁴ O men of Judah and Jerusalem! circumsise yourselves for Yahweh and purify your hearts, lest my wrath spread like a fire that cannot be quenched because of the evil of your actions.

⁵ Announce this in Judah, proclaim it in Jerusalem. Sound the trumpet through the land; cry aloud and say:

"Assemble and go to the fortified cities!

⁶ Raise a standard towards Zion!

Flee for safety, do not delay, for from the north I will bring evil and great disaster."

⁷ The lion has gone up from his thicket and a destroyer of nations has set out to make your country a wasteland and your cities a ruins without an inhabitant!

⁸ Because of this, wrap yourselves in sackcloth; lament and groan, for the fury of Yahweh's anger has not turned away from us.

⁹ In that day – it is Yahweh who speaks – the courage of the king and leaders will fail, the priests will be terrified and the prophets amazed. People will say, ¹⁰ "Ah! Lord Yahweh, you have truly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying: 'You will have peace' even as the sword is at our throat."

¹¹ When the time comes it will be said to the people of Jerusalem:

"A hot wind from the heights in the desert is coming to the daughter of my people, not to winnow or cleanse!

¹² A strong wind comes from there. Now I will declare my judgments to them."

¹³ See! Someone comes like the clouds, his chariots are like a whirlwind, his horses swifter than eagles!

Woe to us for we are ruined!

¹⁴ Cleanse your heart of every evil, Jerusalem, that you may be saved! How long will you nurse wicked thoughts within your breast?

¹⁵ A voice comes from Dan and tells of disaster from Mount Ephraim! "Give warning to the nations. ¹⁶ Let all know in Jerusalem and Judah that enemies are coming from a distant land." ¹⁷ They surround Jerusalem like men

16. Dt 6, 3; 2 Mac 2, 5

17. Ezk 43, 7; Rev 22, 3

19. Ezk 20, 6; Is 63, 16

22. Hos 14, 5

25. Ezr 9, 6

2. Dt 6, 13

3. Hos 10, 12; Mt 13, 22

10. 4, 10; Ezk 13, 10

11. 1, 14

14. Is 1, 16; Ezk 18, 31; James 4, 8

guarding a field, because she rebelled against me – it is Yahweh who speaks.

¹⁸ Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. How bitter is your punishment and how it touches your heart because you rebelled against me!"

Barren soil

¹⁹ I am in anguish! I tremble in the depths of my being; my heart beats wildly. I cannot remain silent for I hear the sound of the trumpet and the clamour of war!

²⁰ Disaster after disaster; all the land is laid waste; my tents are suddenly destroyed and in a moment all that shelters me is gone. ²¹ For how long must I see the standard raised and hear the sound of the trumpet?

²² "This happens because you are foolish and do not know me. You are wayward sons without intelligence, shrewd in doing evil but not knowing how to do good!"

²³ I looked at the earth and found it formless and void, and then at the sky but it was without light.

²⁴ I looked at the mountains and they were quaking, and all the hills were swaying.

²⁵ I looked and saw that there were no people and that all the birds had fled.

²⁶ I looked and saw that the fruitful land was a desert and that all the towns were in ruins because of Yahweh and his anger.

²⁷ Yes, thus speaks Yahweh, "The whole land may be desolate but I will not destroy it completely! ²⁸ This is why the earth shall mourn and the skies be darkened: because I have

spoken and will not relent; it is my decision and I will not go back on it."

²⁹ At the sound of the horseman and archer, every town takes flight; some go to the thickets and climb among the rocks. All the towns are deserted and no one is left.

³⁰ And you, desolate one, what will you do? Even if you dress in scarlet and wear jewels of gold and put make-up on your eyes, in vain do you beautify yourself, for your admirers despise you and are ready to take your life.

³¹ For I hear a cry as of a woman in labour, anguish as of one giving birth to a first child. It is the cry of the daughter of Zion, gasping for breath with outstretched hands: "Woe is me! I am fainting away surrounded by murderers!"

Not one is upright

+ 5 ¹ Go through the streets of Jerusalem: observe carefully and take note. Search throughout her squares to find, if you can, even one man who is honest and seeks the truth. Then I will pardon this city. ² Even though they say, "As surely as Yahweh lives" their swearing is false.

³ Do not your eyes, Yahweh, look for truth? You struck them but they did not feel it; you crushed them but they refused correction. They set their faces harder than a rock and refused to repent.

⁴ Then I thought: "Only poor people are foolish because they know nothing of the way of Yahweh or of the law of their God! ⁵ So I will go to the cultured people and speak to them for they know Yahweh and the law of their God." But they, too, have broken their yoke and burst their bonds!

⁶ That is why the lion of the forest will slay them and the wolf from the desert will destroy them, while the leopard lurks around their cities. Whoever ventures out is torn to pieces, for great is their sin and their rebellions are without number!

23. Gen 1, 2 30. 2 K 9, 30; Eek 23, 22 31. Js 1, 8 1. Gen 18, 20; Eek 22, 30; Mi 7, 2; Ps 14, 2

+ This passage referring to an invasion from the north was begun in 4:9.

Search throughout the squares to find even one man who is honest. Yahweh would forgive everything for the sake of one "just man", just as we saw in Genesis 18. But the search is in vain, and Jeremiah also looks in vain for someone

who would understand. After so many others this invasion is the sounding of the alarm announcing the final destruction. But, this is how people and nations remain deaf until they perish. In the New Testament, John the Baptist and then Jesus and his apostles will try to arouse their compatriots and they will issue the same call: be converted because the judgment is at hand.

⁷ Why should I pardon you? Your sons have forsaken me and sworn by false gods. I gave them all they needed and yet they became adulterers trooping to the harlot's house. They are well-fed, ⁸ lusty stallions, each one neighing for his neighbour's wife.

⁹ Shall I not severely punish them for that – it is Yahweh who speaks – should I not avenge myself on such a nation?

¹⁰ Go up, nations, through her vineyards and ravage them, but do not entirely destroy my vine. Tear away her branches for they are not Yahweh's. ¹¹ For truly the people of Judah and Israel have been utterly unfaithful to me – it is Yahweh who speaks.

¹² They have spoken falsely of Yahweh, saying, "He does not exist; misfortunes will not come our way; we shall see neither the sword nor famine!" ¹³ As for the prophets, they are but wind. God doesn't speak to them. Let their threats fall upon themselves!

¹⁴ But Yahweh the God of hosts speaks to me, "Because this people has said this I will place words in your mouth which will be like a fire, and this people will be the wood it devours."

¹⁵ People of Israel! against you I will bring a nation from afar – it is Yahweh who speaks – an invincible and ancient nation, whose language you do not know. ¹⁶ Their arrows sow death; they are all valiant!

¹⁷ They will devour your harvest and your food,

devour your sons and daughters,
devour your flocks and herds,
devour your vines and your fig trees.
They will destroy with the sword
the fortified cities in which you trust.

¹⁸ But even in those days – it is Yahweh who speaks – I will not completely destroy them. ¹⁹ And when they say, "Why has Yahweh done all this to us?" you shall say to them, "Just as you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so shall you serve strangers in a land that is not your own."

²⁰ Declare this to the people of Jacob and make it known in Judah, saying,

²¹ Hear this, foolish and thoughtless people!

who have eyes and do not see,
who have ears and do not hear!

²² Do you not fear me? –

it is Yahweh who speaks –

Will you not tremble in my presence?

I who set the sand as a limit to the sea,

an everlasting barrier it may never pass;
its waves toss but cannot prevail;
they roar but are unable to go beyond it.

²³ But this people whose heart is rebellious and stubborn, has turned aside and gone away!

²⁴ They do not say in their hearts, "Let us fear Yahweh our God who sends in season the spring rain and the autumn rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest."

²⁵ Your crimes have put disorder in all this, your sins have deprived you of these blessings, ²⁶ for among my people are wicked men; they watch like fowlers and place snares, but it is men they catch.

²⁷ Like a cage full of birds

so are their houses full of booty.

It has made them rich and powerful;

²⁸ they are fat and sleek.

There is no limit to their evil;
there is no justice in their judgment,
for they do not uphold the rights of the orphan or plead the cause of the poor!

²⁹ Should I not severely punish them for such things? – it is Yahweh who speaks – Will I not avenge myself on such a people?

³⁰ Something terrible and abominable has taken place in the land. ³¹ prophets prophesy lies and priests teach what pleases them, and my people like it to be so. But what will you do soon?

Jerusalem is besieged

6 ¹ Sons of Benjamin! Seek safety beyond Jerusalem.

Sound the trumpet in Tekoa,
raise a signal in Beth-hacherem,
for from the north comes misfortune
and an immense disaster.

² Shall I not compare you, daughter of Zion, to a delicious pasture. ³ Shepherds with their flocks are coming to her, pitching their tents around her, each one pasturing in his own part.

⁴ Declare a holy war against her,
attack her at midday.

Woe to us! For the day declines
and the shadow of evening lengthens!

⁵ Rise up in the night
and destroy her palaces!

⁶ For Yahweh the God of hosts has spoken:
"Cut down trees and build a siege-ramp
against Jerusalem, the city that is full of lies
and oppression. ⁷ Evil springs from her as
water from a well. In her you hear only of

8. Eek 22, 11

14. Is 10, 17

17. Dt 28, 33

19. 1 S 7, 3

21. Is 4, 2-20; Mt 13, 15

22. Job 38, 11

24. Dt 11, 14

26. Ps 10, 9

28. Ps 73, 7

31. Mi 2, 11

violence and destruction, and my eyes continually see suffering and cruelty.

Jeremiah's threats

⁸ Take warning, Jerusalem, lest I turn away from you and make you a desolation, a land without people."

⁹ Yahweh said to me, "You shall glean thoroughly as a vine, what is left of Israel. You shall do what the gatherer of grapes does when his hand goes over the branches again."

¹⁰ To whom shall I speak? Who will listen, that they may understand? Their ears are closed and they pay no attention. They have only contempt for what Yahweh says and do not want to hear it.

¹¹ I am full of the anger of God and I can bear it no longer!

"Then pour it out on the children in the street and on the circle of young men, for the disaster will befall both husband and wife, both the elderly and those weighed down by years. ¹² Their houses will be passed to others, together with their fields and their wives, when I stretch out my hand over the people of the land – it is Yahweh who speaks.

¹³ All of them – the least to the greatest – are greedy for gain; prophet and priest alike are deceitful. ¹⁴ They treat lightly the disaster of my people saying, "Peace, peace," but there is no peace.

¹⁵ They should be ashamed of their abominable deeds. But they have no shame and do not know how to blush. And so they will stumble and fall with the others when I come to visit them – it is Yahweh who speaks.

¹⁶ This is what Yahweh says to you, "Stand in the roads and look. Question the paths of former times. Ask where the good way is and take it and find peace for your soul." But you said, "We will not take it." ¹⁷ Then Yahweh set sentinels over you: "Pay attention to the sound of the horn!" But you said, "We will not listen."

¹⁸ Hear nations; know what will happen to them! ¹⁹ Listen earth! I am bringing disaster on this people! It is the fruit of their rebellion, because they paid no attention to what I said and despised my Law. ²⁰ I have no use for incense from Sheba or for fragrant cane from a distant land. Your burnt offerings are not acceptable to me nor do I find your sacrifices pleasing."

²¹ This is what Yahweh says, "I will place obstacles before this people to make them stumble, fathers and sons, neighbours and friends together."

²² It is Yahweh who speaks, "See, a people comes from the north, a powerful nation from the ends of the earth. ²³ Armed with bow and spear they are cruel and pitiless. Their voice roars like the sea. Mounted on horses, in battle formation they come like one man against you, daughter of Zion."

²⁴ When we heard this our hands went limp, anguish seized us like the pain of a woman in labour. ²⁵ "Do not go to the fields or onto the roads, for the enemy's sword brings terror on every side."

²⁶ Daughter of my people! Wrap yourself in sackcloth and roll in ashes; prepare to mourn with bitter lament as for an only son, for the destroyer is coming against us.

²⁷ I have placed you as an inspector among my people, that you may examine them and know their ways.

²⁸ They are all rebels and slanderers. They are like bronze and iron and all are corrupt.

²⁹ The bellows blow to burn away the lead with fire, but the smelter works in vain for the evil elements remain. ³⁰ They are called 'refuse silver' for Yahweh has rejected them.

I can destroy this temple

7 ¹ These are the words spoken to Jeremiah by Yahweh,

² "Take your stand at the gate of Yahweh's house and proclaim this in a loud voice: Listen to what Yahweh

10. Acts 7, 51

26. Am 8, 10; Zac 12, 10

11. 20, 9

27. Eek 22, 18

13. 4, 10

16. Mt 11, 29

30. Is 1, 22; Jer 25

20. Is 1, 11; 43, 23; Heb 10, 5

■ Seeing that for four centuries Yahweh had been protecting Jerusalem, the Jews are convinced that there is a blessing for them and for the Temple, which is the dwelling place of Yahweh, where he is present, and from where he blesses his people.

Temple of Yahweh, temple of Yahweh! They come there and confident in Yahweh's gifts, they think that they do not need to change their lives. It is true that Yahweh ordered the sacrifices, but can people be reconciled to Yahweh at the cost of a sacrificed animal? What

is the value of these rituals if there is no change of behavior?

What I did in Shiloh, I will do with this temple. Yahweh will destroy the Temple if he needs to, so that the Jews will stop trusting in such easy ways to be reconciled with their God.

Here, Jeremiah speaks of the Temple. In 3:16 he also speaks of the Ark of the Covenant: they will no longer exist in the time of the New Covenant. In 4:4, Jeremiah mentions *circumcision*: it is not enough to have received that sign to be acknowledged by God.

says, all you people of Judah who enter these gates to worship before Yahweh. ³ Yahweh the God of Israel says this:

Amend your ways and your deeds and I will stay with you in this place. ⁴ Do not count on empty words such as: "Look, the Temple of Yahweh! the Temple of Yahweh! This is the Temple of Yahweh!"

⁵ Far better for you to amend your ways and act justly with all. ⁶ Do not abuse the stranger, orphan or widow or shed innocent blood in this place or follow false gods to your own ruin. ⁷ Then I will stay with you in this place, in the land I gave to your fathers in times past and forever.

⁸ But you trust in deceptive and useless words. ⁹ You steal, kill, take the wife of your neighbour, swear falsely, worship Baal and follow foreign gods who are not yours. ¹⁰ And then, after doing all these horrible things, you come and stand before me in this temple which houses my Name and say, "Now we are saved."

¹¹ Is this house on which rests my Name a cave of thieves? I have seen this myself – it is Yahweh who speaks. ¹² Go to the sanctuary at Shiloh in Israel, where I first let my Name rest, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.

¹³ You have done all this and have not listened when I repeatedly warned you, nor have you answered when I

called you. ¹⁴ What I did in Shiloh, I will do to this temple which houses my Name, this holy place in which you trust and which I gave to you and to your ancestors.

¹⁵ As for you, I will drive you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsmen of the north, the entire race of Ephraim.

¹⁶ Do not plead for this people. Make no prayer or supplication for them; do not press me on their behalf because I will not listen.

¹⁷ Don't you see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸ The children gather the wood and the fathers light the fire. The women knead the dough to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven and pour drink offerings to foreign gods. ¹⁹ They do this to annoy me. But is it me they annoy? asks Yahweh. Is it not themselves they annoy and to their own confusion?

²⁰ Because of this Yahweh has spoken, "The fury of my anger will be poured out on this place, both on man and beast, on the trees in the fields and on the produce of the earth; it shall burn and not be quenched."

True religion

+ ²¹ This is what Yahweh, the God of hosts, says to you, "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat the flesh. ²² When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt I did not command them concerning sacrifices and burnt offerings. ²³ One thing I did command them: Listen to my voice and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in the way I command you and all will be well with you. ²⁴ But they did not listen and paid no attention;

4. Am 5, 14
21. Am 4, 4

11. Mt 21, 23
22. Hos 6, 6

12. Dt 12, 11
23. Ezk 19, 25

13. Is 50, 2; 65, 11
Dt 6, 3

16. 11, 14

18. 44, 17

Following this text, we have three more texts, dealing with worship:

- the people of God are reprimanded for worshipping Yahweh and other gods at the same time;
- they practise rituals but they are not concerned about heeding the word of God, doing what is pleasing to God.

We could easily relate all of this to our own times. Even in the Church the same confidence that the Jews had in their rituals can exist:

- the *Temple*: our parishes which have existed for centuries;
- *Circumcision*, we are baptized and we go to mass, what more do we need?
- *Jerusalem*: our pride in being part of the Church.

How many believe that because they are Catholics, they can continue in their evil ways and remain indifferent to the word of God or to the renewal of the Church!

+ True religion consists in listening to the Word of God.

they preferred to follow the inclination of their stubborn heart, and they turned away.

²⁵ From the time I brought their ancestors out of Egypt until this day I have continually sent them my servants, the prophets, ²⁶ but this stiff-necked people did not listen. They paid no attention and were worse than their fathers.

²⁷ You may say all this but they will not listen; you will call them but they will not answer. ²⁸ Say this to them: 'This is a nation that did not obey Yahweh nor take correction; all truth has perished and is gone from their lips.

²⁹ Shave off your hair and throw it away. Intone a lament on the bare heights, for Yahweh has rejected these people and abhors them.' This is Yahweh's word.

³⁰ The people of Judah have done what disgusts me; they have placed their idols in the sanctuary that houses my Name and defiled it.

³¹ They have built the temple of Topheth in the valley of Hinnom where they burn their sons and daughters, something I never commanded or even thought of.

³² That is why the time will come when it will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth for lack of space elsewhere. ³³ And the corpses of this people will be food for the birds and the beasts; and no one will frighten them away.

³⁴ In the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem I will destroy all expressions of joy and happiness, the songs of the bride and bridegroom, for the country will become a wasteland.

8 ¹ When that times comes – it is Yahweh who speaks – they will bring from the tombs the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of their leaders, priests, prophets and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ² They will expose them to the Sun and Moon and all the gods of the skies, because they have loved and served them, and they have followed and worshipped them. These bones will not be gath-

ered up to be replaced in tombs but will remain like refuse on the soil.

³ Death will be preferable to life for the survivors of this perverse race who remain in places to which I have driven them."

Sin and punishment

⁴ This is what Yahweh told me, "You will say to them: Doesn't the one who falls get up? And the one who goes away, doesn't he come back? ⁵ Why then does this people turn away in perpetual rebellion? They make a habit of deceit and refuse to repent.

⁶ I listened attentively; they did not speak truthfully nor did they repent of their wickedness. No one says: 'What have I done!' They all follow their own course like horses plunging into battle. ⁷ Even the stork in the sky knows her times; the dove, the swallow and the crane know the time to come back, but my people do not know Yahweh's ruling.

⁸ How can you say: 'We are wise and the Law of Yahweh is with us' when the false pen of the scribe has turned it into a lie?' The wise will be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and caught in a trap. Since they have despised the word of Yahweh, in what then lies their wisdom?

¹⁰ That is why I will give their wives to other men, their fields to conquerors, for all of them, the smallest to the greatest, are greedy for gain. All, from the prophet to the priest, practise deceit. ¹¹ They treat lightly the wound of my people saying 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace.

¹² Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? They have no shame and do not know how to blush. That is why they will stumble and fall along with the others, when I punish them.

¹³ I will finish with them – it is Yahweh who speaks – for the vine has no grapes, the fig tree no figs, even the leaves are withered. I will hand them over to the passersby."

¹⁴ "Why do we sit still? Get up! We shall go to the fortified cities to die there.

29. Num 6, 5; Jdg 13, 5; 1 S 1, 11

9. Rom 2, 17; 1 Cor 1, 19

31. 2 K 21, 6

10. 6, 12-15

1. 1 K 13, 22

13. Mk 11, 13

3. Rev 9, 6

◆ These three chapters combine several of Jeremiah's oracles which were delivered in the days of King Jehoiakim.

Our Bible did not yet exist in those days. The parts of it which were already written never left the Temple library. And so the people would hear the word of God:

– from the lips of the priests who were teaching God's Law.

– from the lips of the prophets who communicated the living words of God.

However, these two sources of faith had been corrupted: it was no longer possible to know the meaning of the events which the nation was experiencing.

In 8:10-12 we have a repetition of what was said in 6:12-15.

In 8:21 and 8:13 we see Jeremiah's sensitivity before the misfortunes of his people.



²⁰ "Death has come through our windows
and invaded our palaces,
cutting down the children in the street
and young men in the squares!

²¹ The bodies of men lie
like dung in the fields,
like sheaves cut by the reaper
with no one to gather them!"

True Wisdom

o ²² It is Yahweh who speaks:
"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom,
nor the valiant one of his valour
nor the rich because of his wealth!

²³ But whoever wants to boast,
let him boast of this:
of understanding and knowing me.

I am Yahweh, the merciful;
I do justice
and rule the world with righteousness.
This is Yahweh's word:
In such things I delight."

²⁴ "The time is coming," Yahweh says,
"when I will punish ²⁵ Egypt, the sons of Am-
mon, Moab and all the Arabs of the desert, for
all these nations are not circumcised. But I will
also punish Judah, because the people of Israel
are not circumcised in their heart."

and great in power is your Name!
⁷ Who would not fear you, King of nations?
You are to be feared,
for among the wise of the nations
and in all their kingdoms
there is no one like you.
⁸ They are all brutish and stupid;
their idols are proof of their foolishness.

Idols and the true God

10 ¹ Hear the word which Yahweh speaks
to you, people of Israel.

² "Do not learn the way of the pagans and
do not fear signs in the sky as they do. The
Terror of the nations is unreal. ³ It is nothing
more than wood cut from a tree in the forest
and shaped by a craftsman's chisel. ⁴ They
adorn it with silver from Tarshish and gold
from Ophir and then fasten it with hammer and
nails to keep it from falling. ⁵ Their idols are
like scarecrows in a cucumber patch; they
cannot speak. They have to be carried because
they cannot walk. Have no fear of them; they
can do no evil nor are they able to do any
good."

⁶ No one is like you, Yahweh,
you are great

¹⁰ But Yahweh is the true God,
the living God and eternal King.
His anger makes the earth quake;
the nations cannot endure his wrath.

¹¹ You will say this to them, "The gods who
did not make either the heavens or the earth
shall disappear from the earth and from under
the heavens."

¹² In power he made the earth,
and in wisdom he established the world;
in understanding he extended the heavens.

¹³ When he raises his voice
the waters pile up in the heavens.

He calls the clouds from the ends of the
earth;
he sends lightning with the rain

20. J1 2, 9

23. Jn 17, 3; 1 Cor 10, 17; Mi 6, 8

2. Is 8, 12; Rom 12, 2

3. Is 40, 19; W1s 13-14

5. Bar 6

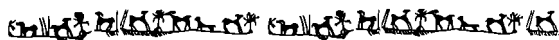
7. Rev 15, 4; Rom 16, 24

12. Ps 104, 24

o We put a great deal of emphasis on what
young people may study. Many parents make
sacrifices throughout their lives to have one of
their sons become a good technician or go to the
university. Jeremiah reminds us that this alone
does not give true wisdom. We should be
ashamed when we compare the time we spend
learning useless things, looking at television with
the time we dedicate to knowing God.

Knowing Yahweh, the merciful, who does
justice and rules the world with righteousness
is the means whereby we remain steadfast in the
face of evil: it will also make us desire to imitate
God and to dedicate ourselves to bringing kind-
ness, law and justice into this world.

+ Correct us, Yahweh, with prudence.
Here, suddenly, the heart of Jeremiah manifests



and from his storehouse sends out the wind.

¹⁴ At this all men feel stupid and without knowledge. Every goldsmith is ashamed of his idol which is a fraud without breath. ¹⁵ They are worthless, ridiculous objects, destined to disappear when the time comes for punishment.

¹⁶ Not such he who is the portion of Jacob; for he has formed the universe and Israel as well, the tribe of his inheritance.

Yahweh, God of hosts is his name.

¹⁷ Gather up your belongings and leave the land, you who are the victims of siege.

¹⁸ For thus says Yahweh.

"Far away am I hurling the inhabitants of this land, and I will let them be pursued and captured."

¹⁹ Alas for me! What suffering!

My wound is incurable!

But I said, "So far my pain is bearable."

²⁰ But my tent is destroyed,

all its cords are snapped.

My children have left me and are no more; no one is left to pitch my tent or to set up my shelter.

²¹ It is because the pastors are senseless and have not looked for Yahweh; they have not prospered

and all their flocks are scattered.

²² Heed the news! Pay attention!

A great commotion in the north is heard; they are coming to make a desert of the cities of Judah, a haunt of jackals.

Jeremiah's prayer

+ ²³ You know, Yahweh, that man's life is not within his own control and it is not for him to direct his steps! ²⁴ Correct us, Yahweh, with prudence, not in anger, lest you destroy us completely.

²⁵ Keep your anger for the nations that do not know you, for the people who do not call on your Name. See

how they are devouring Jacob and they eat him to the end; his homeland is already laid waste.

Jeremiah supports Josiah's reform

11 ¹ This is the word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh. ² "Cursed be the man who does not heed the terms of this covenant ⁴ which I ordained for your fathers the day I freed them from that cleansing furnace that Egypt is. I said to them: 'If you obey my voice and do all that I command you, you will be my people and I will be your God. ⁵ Then I will fulfill the promise I swore to your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey,' (as it is today)."

I replied, "Amen, Yahweh."

⁶ Yahweh said to me, "Publish what I say in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. 'Hear the terms of this covenant and keep them. ⁷ When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt, I solemnly warned them and have continued to tell them: 'Obey me.' ⁸ But they did not listen to me or heed what I said; each one followed his own stubborn heart. So I fulfilled against them all the words of this covenant that I had commanded them, but which they did not follow."

⁹ Yahweh said to me, "There is a conspiracy among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ They have returned to the sins of their forefathers who refused to obey me; they have followed and served foreign gods. The nation of Israel and the nation of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their fathers."

¹¹ That is why Yahweh says to you, "I will bring upon them a disaster from which there will be no escape. When they cry to me I will not listen. ¹² Then the cities of Judah and the people of Jerusalem will go crying to the gods they worship, but these will not help them in the time of misfortune. ¹³ For you, Judah, have as many gods as there are cities; as numerous as the streets in Jerusalem are the altars you have raised to Baal."

¹⁴ For your part, do not intercede for this people, nor offer a plea or petition because I

16. Ps 16, 5	17. Eek 12, 3	23. Pro 16, 1	24. Ps 38, 2	14. Eek 32, 10
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itself. He does not forget he is an Israelite and he asks God to restore justice, to punish those powerful nations that come to destroy Judah whenever they feel like it. After repeating so many times that those enemy nations were sent by God himself against Judah, he now rebels.

■ This chapter is one of the few offering us the preaching of Jeremiah in the years follow-

ing the "discovery of the Law" and Josiah's reform (see 2 Kgs 22). For a while, wishing to do his best to serve Yahweh, king Josiah aroused a new fervor. Yet, when we read what Jeremiah says here, we see that the conversion of the people was not, nor could be in depth.

Jeremiah knew that in order to be faithful to God, one must be moved and transformed by him.



will not listen when they cry to me in the time of their distress.

¹⁵ What is my beloved doing in my House?

She is plotting evil deeds.

Will your vows and the meat of your

victims

cleanse you from your wickedness

and allow you to rejoice?

Yahweh had called you

¹⁶ 'Beautiful Green Olive Tree' –

fair and fruitful!

But with the roar of a storm,

its foliage took fire

and its branches were broken.

¹⁷ And Yahweh, God of hosts, who planted you, has condemned you to shame. Indeed the nation of Israel and the nation of Jacob harmed themselves when they worshipped Baal and aroused my anger.

Plot against Jeremiah

¹⁸ Yahweh made it known to me and so I know! And you let me see their scheming: "Take care, even your own brothers and family are false with you and behind your back they freely criticize you. Do not trust them when they approach you in a friendly way."

¹⁹ But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me that they were plotting. "Let us feed him with trials and remove him from the land of the living and let his name never be mentioned again."

²⁰ Yahweh, God of hosts, you who judge with justice and know everyone in his heart and in his intentions, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause.

²¹ This is what Yahweh has to say against the people of Anathoth who threatened me with death and said, "Do not prophesy any more in the name of Yahweh and we will spare your life."

²² Yahweh says to them, "This is how I will punish you: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and daughters shall die of hunger. ²³ No one will survive when I bring disaster on the people of Anathoth in the year of their punishment."

Why do the wicked prosper?

12

¹ Yahweh, you are always right when I complain to you;

nevertheless, where is your justice?

Why do the wicked prosper?

And why do traitors live in peace?

² You plant them and they take root;
they grow and are fruitful;
they honour you with words
but their heart is far from you.

³ But you, Yahweh, you know me and see me;
you search my heart – it is close to you.
Send them off like sheep to be butchered;
put them aside for the day of slaughter.

⁴ How long will the land be in mourning
and the grass of the fields remain withered?

16. Hos 14, 7
21. Am 2, 12

18. 12, 6

19. Is 53, 7; Ps 109, 13
1. Heb 1, 13; Ps 73, 3; Job 12, 6

20. 1 Per 2, 23; 1 Thes 2, 4; Rev 2, 23

2. Is 29, 13; Mk 7, 6

3. Ps 139

◆ For the first time, Jeremiah questions the prosperity of evil men; as will psalms 73 and 49

and, above all, the book of Job. It is not without reason that Jeremiah wonders: for he is con-



The birds and the beasts have perished
because of the wickedness of the inhabitants,
for they say: 'God does not see what we do.'

⁵ "If you tire when running with those on foot,
how can you compete with horses?

If you do not feel secure in a peaceful land,
what will you do in the thickets of the Jordan?"

⁷ I have abandoned my house,
I have given up my own people;
I have given over those I most cherished
into the hands of their enemies.

⁸ My own have been for me like a lion in
the forest;
they have roared against me – now I hate
them.

⁹ My own have become for me like a bird
of prey.

Let all the birds of prey attack them.
Come here, all you wild beasts and devour
them!

¹⁰ Many shepherds have ravaged my vine;
they have trampled my beloved field
and made it a desolate wasteland,

¹¹ parched and mournful in my sight.
But no one cares!

¹² To every height in the desert destroyers
have come.

for Yahweh has a devouring sword.
It reaches from one end of the land to the
other;

no one is safe!

¹³ They have sown grain and reaped
thorns

they have toiled for nothing.

Your harvests bring shame on you because
of Yahweh's anger.

¹⁴ Yahweh declares, "Because of all my
wicked neighbours who have laid hands on the
land I gave my people Israel, I will uproot
them from their own land, and I will uproot the
people of Judah from among them. ¹⁵ But after
I have done this, I will have compassion on
them and bring them back to their possession,
each one to his own land.

¹⁶ If then they learn the ways I taught my
people and call upon my name when taking an
oath, they who once taught my people to swear
by Baal, then they may settle among my peo-
ple. ¹⁷ But if then any nation does not obey me,

I will uproot and destroy it - it is Yahweh who
speaks."

The linen belt

13 ¹ This is what Yahweh said to
me: "Go! Buy yourself a linen
belt and put it around your waist; do
not put it in water." ² So I bought the
belt as Yahweh ordered and put it
around my waist.

³ The word of Yahweh came to me
a second time, ⁴ "Take the belt you
bought, the one you put around your
waist, and go to the torrent Perah; hide
it there in a hole in the rock." ⁵ I went
and hid it as Yahweh instructed me.

⁶ After many days Yahweh said to
me, "Go to the torrent Perah and get
the belt I ordered you to hide there." ⁷ I
went to the torrent and dug up the belt
but it was ruined and good for noth-
ing, ⁸ and Yahweh said to me, ⁹ "In
this way I will destroy the pride and
great glory of Judah, ¹⁰ this wicked
people who refuse to heed what I say,
this stubborn people who go after
other gods to serve and worship them.
And they shall become like this belt
which is now good for nothing.

¹¹ For just as a belt is to be bound
around a man's waist so was the peo-
ple of Israel and Judah bound to me –
it is Yahweh who speaks – to be my
people, my glory and my honour; but
they would not listen.

4. Hos 4, 1

15. Is 19, 18-24

stantly persecuted.

*If you tire when running with those on foot,
how will you compete with horses?* Yahweh's
answer seems harsh: only predicts more cruel
trials for Jeremiah (that is the meaning of the

refrain). When his true friends hesitate, God
does not comfort them: he knows that by pro-
posing new sacrifices to them, he will once
again, bring about their generous surrender.



The broken wine jars

¹² You will say to them this word of Yahweh the God of Israel, "Every pitcher should be filled with wine." And they will say: 'Don't we know that a pitcher should be filled with wine?'

¹³ You will reply, "You are the pitchers that Yahweh will fill until you are drunk. I am going to fill with drunkenness all who live in this land – kings who succeed David, the priests, the prophets and all who live in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ I will dash them one against another, father and sons together.

I will have neither compassion nor mercy: I am going to destroy them."

A vision of exile

¹⁵ Hear and pay attention; do not be proud, for Yahweh has spoken!

¹⁶ Give glory to Yahweh your God before he brings darkness and your feet stumble in the darkening hills.

You were hoping for light, but he will turn it into the darkness of death and deep gloom!

¹⁷ If you do not heed this warning I will weep in secret because of your

pride and I will shed tears when Yahweh's flock has been taken captive.

¹⁸ Say to the king and the queen mother, "Humble yourselves, for the crown of glory has fallen from your head.

¹⁹ The cities of the Negeb have been shut and no one comes to open them, all Judah is deported, completely carried off."

²⁰ Look up Jerusalem and see those who come from the north. Where is the flock that was entrusted to you and where are your beautiful sheep?

²¹ What will you say when those you let take liberties with you come back to oppress you?

Won't your pain be like that of a woman giving birth? ²² And if you ask yourself, "Why has all this disgrace fallen on me?" It is because of your great wickedness that they have torn away your clothes and dealt violently with you.

²³ Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard his spots? And can you do good, you who are accustomed to doing evil?

²⁴ I will scatter you like straw blown by the desert wind; ²⁵ that is your reward – it is Yahweh who speaks – because you have forgotten me and trusted in falsehood.

²⁶ I myself will pull your skirts over your face and your shame shall be seen. ²⁷ Your adultery, your neighing, your brazen prostitution, all this abomination I have seen on the hills and in the fields."

Woe to you Jerusalem! When at last will you be cleansed?

The great drought

+ 14

¹ The word of Yahweh concerning drought came to Jeremiah:

² Judah mourns, the cities languish, desolate, they sink to the ground.

From Jerusalem a cry is heard.

³ The rich sent the poor for water, but they found none at the cisterns, and returned with empty vessels.

⁴ The soil is cracked because there is no rain in the land; the farmers are dismayed and have covered their heads like mourners.

⁵ Even the doe in the fields



abandons her newborn calf
because there is no pasture.

⁶ The wild donkeys stand on the heights
sniffing the air like jackals
and languish as they find not even a thistle!

⁷ Even if our faults accuse us,
you Yahweh, work for the glory of your Name.
In truth, many have been our rebellions
and great is our sin against you.

⁸ O Yahweh! Hope of Israel,
you who save in the time of distress,
why are you as a stranger in this land,
or like a traveller who stays only a night?

⁹ Why should you be as if bewildered,
like a warrior unable to save?
But you are in our midst Yahweh,
and on us your Name has been invoked.
Do not abandon us!

Do not intercede for this people

¹⁰ This is what Yahweh says about this people, "They like to wander here and there, not stopping for a moment, so Yahweh takes no pleasure in them; he remembers their wickedness and will punish their sins."

¹¹ And Yahweh said, "Do not pray for the well-being of this people!" ¹² If they fast I will not listen to their cry; if they offer me burnt offerings and oblations, I will not accept them. Instead I am going to make an end of them with sword, famine and plague."

¹³ And I said, "Ah, Lord Yahweh! You know what the prophets are saying to them: 'You will not see the sword nor suffer famine for I will give you true peace in this place.'"

¹⁴ But Yahweh said, "These prophets have proclaimed untruths in my name. I did not send

them, nor did I command them or speak to them. False visions, worthless divinations and delusions of their own imagination – that is what they prophesy.

¹⁵ And Yahweh added, "These prophets whom I did not send and who prophesy in my name, saying that the sword and famine will not touch this land – these same prophets will perish by the sword and famine.

¹⁶ As for the people listening to them, their corpses will be thrown into the streets of Jerusalem. There will be no one to bury them or their wives, their sons or daughters, when they die of famine and by the sword. For I shall make their own malice fall upon them.

¹⁷ This you will say to them: Let my eyes shed tears night and day without ceasing! For with a great wound has the virgin daughter of

7. Dn 3, 34 9. Ex 29, 45; Dt 28, 10; Js 43, 7

13. 4. 10; Ezk 13, 10

17. Is 22, 4

• Those who refuse to see, God will make blind (John 9:39). Those who scorn him, God bring to disgrace through their own evil ways (Rom 1:24). Those preferring to follow foolish ways, God will make drunk so that they will lose themselves because of their own foolishness.

+ The passage beginning here concludes in 15:4. Jeremiah appears before Yahweh as the Jews used to do in the Temple to publicly confess the sins of the people, in the hope that the priests would give them an encouraging answer on behalf of the God who forgives. Jeremiah stands in solidarity with his people and with their sins. But God does not want to listen to him.

Do not abandon us, O Yahweh! Jeremiah is

distressed over his people's situation. Maybe, God cannot forgive; maybe he cannot save? Here, man is confronted by the mystery of God. Jeremiah does not get an answer: God does not answer Job either; and Jesus does not get an answer in his agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

Heed what the prophets say: you will not fear the sword. There are plenty of false prophets reassuring a society based on false principles. Compared with them, Jeremiah appears weak and bitter, as the one who does not give Yahweh's answer. A true prophet is not accepted by his own people whereas those who provide opium for the people are praised.



my people been wounded, a most grievous wound.

¹⁸ If I go into the country, I see those slain by the sword. If I enter the city I see the ravages of famine. For the prophet and the priest did not understand what was happening in the land.

¹⁹ Have you then rejected Judah forever? Do you abhor Zion? Why have you wounded us and left us with no hope of recovery?

We hoped for salvation but received nothing good; we waited for healing, but terror came!

²⁰ Yahweh, we know our wickedness and that of our fathers, and the times we have sinned against you.

²¹ For your name's sake do not despise us; do not dishonour the throne of your glory. Remember us. Do not break your covenant with us!

²² Among the worthless idols of the nations, are there any who can bring rain, or make the skies send showers?

Only in you, Yahweh our God, do we hope, for it is you who do all this.

15 ¹ Yahweh answered me, "Even if Moses and Samuel came in person to plead for this people, my heart would have no pity. Send them away from my presence! Let them go! ² And if they say: 'Where shall we go?' tell them: Yahweh says this: Those destined for the plague, to the plague; for the sword, to the sword; for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.

³ For I shall send them four kinds of destroyers: the sword to slay, dogs to ravage, birds of the sky and beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. ⁴ I shall make them an object of horror for all the kingdoms of the world

because of what Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem.

The horrors of war

⁵ Who will take pity on you, Jerusalem?

Who will feel sorry for you?

Who will turn to ask how you are?

⁶ It was you who rejected me – word of

Yahweh –

you turned your back on me,

and because of that I have stretched out my hand to destroy you.

I was weary of showing mercy!

⁷ I winnowed them with a fork in the cities of the land,

I left my people without children;

I brought them to ruin,

but they did not change their ways.

⁸ Their widows are more numerous than the sand of the seas. On the mothers of young men I have brought a destroyer who ravages in broad daylight. Suddenly terror and fear grips them.

⁹ The mother who had seven sons is confused and discouraged as if breathing her last. Although it is still day her sun has set.

As for those who remain, I shall let them be slain by the sword in sight of their enemies – it is Yahweh who speaks.

¹² Can you break iron that comes from the north, or bronze?

¹³ I will let your wealth and your treasures be handed over to plunderers,

not for a price

but because of all your sins

within your frontiers.

¹⁴ You shall be slaves of your enemies

among a people you do not know,

for the fury of my anger is on fire and will burn you up.

20. Dn 9, 4

1. Ps 99, 6; Ezk 14, 14

2. 14, 12; Rev 13, 10

3. Ezk 14, 21

6. Am 7, 8

10. 11, 18; 17, 14; 20, 7

◆ An amazing text where Jeremiah reveals his own personal crisis.

Being a prophet is not easy at all. God's word is not welcomed. Any militant struggling for the truth is surrounded by people wishing evil on him and trying to bring him down: he is rarely understood even in his own home. The situation is even worse for God's prophet. The Lord shares with him his own way of seeing and feeling things. The prophet can no longer share in the cheap joy and the meaningless conversations that fill so many lives.

Your words were my happiness. God's word brings the taste of truth and something of the very presence of God. The price of this joy is being condemned to live alone. Today, the prophet feels the presence of God who helps

him, but as a man, he begins to doubt: What if God keeps himself aloof tomorrow? And he becomes faint.

God does not approve of his prophet's weakness: *Draw the gold from the dross*, namely, let what is good and noble in you speak out, and silence these fears and these complaints which come from a weak nature.

◆ *Do not take a wife.* The prophets discover that God is the true Spouse. God's passionate and faithful love for his people is the model for married love. Since prophets become the mouthpiece and the representative of God, all they do becomes a sign. Thus, they cannot seek a happy marriage as long as Israel, Yahweh's bride, turns her back on her God.

And so, before Jeremiah, another prophet.



Yahweh, remember me!

- ◆ ¹⁰ Woe is me, Mother, why did you bring me to the light?
A man of dissension throughout the land!
I owe them nothing, neither do they owe me,
yet they all curse me!

- ¹¹ Tell me Yahweh, if I have not served you well!
Did I not plead with you for my enemies
in the time of their shame and disgrace?

¹⁵ You know I have.

Yahweh! Take care of me, defend me;
take vengeance on my persecutors.
Remember! For you I have suffered great humiliations.

- ¹⁶ I devoured your words when they came.
They were my happiness
and I felt full of joy
when you made your Name rest on me.

Never did I associate with worldly people,

- ¹⁷ amusing myself with scoffers!
When your hand was upon me I stood apart
and you filled me with your anger.

- ¹⁸ Why is there no end to my sorrow
or healing for my wound?
Why do you deceive me,
and why does my spring suddenly dry up?

- ¹⁹ Then Yahweh spoke to me,
"If you return I will take you back
and you will serve me again.
Draw the gold from the dross
and you will be as my own mouth.
You must draw them to you and not go over to them.

- ²⁰ I will make you a fortress
and a wall of bronze facing them;
if they fight against you
they will not overcome you;
²¹ I am with you to free you and save you.
I will redeem you from the wicked
and free you from the hands of tyrants."

Do not take a wife

16 ¹ Yahweh said to me: ² "Do not take a wife and have sons and daughters in this place. ³ For this

is what Yahweh says about sons and daughters born here, about their fathers and the mothers who bring them to light in this country:

15. Ps 69, 8

16. Ps 19, 9; Jn 4, 34

18. Mi 1, 9

Hosea, only knew the suffering of the betrayed husband in his home and he had to be constantly forgiving his adulterous wife (Hosea 3, 1).

Ezekiel sees his wife die suddenly (Ez 24, 15). Jeremiah will have neither wife nor children; it is not fitting for him to marry at the very time the

⁴ All will die of deadly illness; no one will mourn them or bury them, and their bodies will be as dung on the ground. They will perish by the sword and by starvation and their corpses will be food for birds of prey and wild beasts."

⁵ And Yahweh insisted, "Do not go to share a funeral meal; do not weep with them or loudly lament. For from now on I will not give my peace, my pity or my mercy to this people." ⁶ In this country the great and the lowly will die with no one to mourn them or to bury them. Nor shall anyone gash their skin or shave their hair in homage to the dead. ⁷ There shall be no breaking of bread to comfort the mourner or to console him on the death of a mother or father.

⁸ Do not go to a house where there is a celebration, to sit with them and eat and drink, ⁹ for Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel has this to say:

In this place and before your very eyes, I will silence every sound of pleasure and joy, even the song of the newlywed.

¹⁰ When you announce all these things to the people, they will ask: 'Why will Yahweh bring such terrible disasters on us? What wickedness or sin have we committed against Yahweh our God?'

¹¹ And you will say to them: 'It is because your fathers turned away from me and went after other gods to serve and worship them. They despised me and refused to obey my Law. ¹² And you have behaved worse than your fathers. Each of you goes his own way and does not obey me but follows his evil and stubborn heart instead.'

¹³ So I will drive you far from this land to a place which is strange to your fathers and to

you; and day and night you will serve other gods, for I shall no longer spare you.'

¹⁴ However the days are coming – it is Yahweh who speaks – when people will no longer say: 'Yahweh is a living God for he brought the Israelites out of Egypt,' ¹⁵ but rather: 'Yahweh is a living God for he brought the Israelites out of the land of the north and out of all the countries to which he had banished them.' Yes, I will bring them back to the land I gave to their fathers."

¹⁶ But Yahweh says, "Now I am sending many fishermen who will catch them; and then I will send many hunters who will hunt them out from every mountain, hill and cave in the rocks. ¹⁷ For I see all their ways and their sin is not hidden from my eyes. ¹⁸ I will repay them double for their wickedness and sin, for defiling my land with the corpses of their idols and filling it with their abominations."

Will man make his own gods?

¹⁹ Yahweh, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of distress!

From the furthest limits of the earth nations will come to you and say,

"Our fathers possessed only falsehood, worthless idols empty of power."

²⁰ Will man make his own gods?

Then they are not gods!

²¹ That is why this time I will show and let them know

my hand and my power.

And they will know that Yahweh is my name.

17 ¹ The sin of Judah is engraved with a tool of steel, with a point of diamond. It is written on the tablets of their hearts as on the horns of their altars. ² Let their children remember! Let them not forget those altars and sacred poles beside every green tree, ³ on the high hills and in the open country! For I will give away your wealth and your treasure as plunder because of your sin in the high places of your land.

⁴ Through your own fault you will lose the land I gave you. I will give you as slaves to your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled the fire of my anger and it will burn forever.

2. Ezk 24, 16; Mt 19, 12	3. 1 Cor 7, 26	6. Ezk 24, 23	9. 24, 8	13. Dt 4, 28	14. 23, 7-8
16. Ezk 12, 13	18. 2, 13	19. 2 S 22, 3	1. Job 19, 24	2. Is 1, 29	4. Dt 28, 48

first covenant is being destroyed. Later, neither John the Baptist, nor the apostle John, nor Paul will marry: this will become a sign. Thus, they will give us to understand that they only live for the coming marriage of Christ and his Church, of which marriage is only an image.

+ Following we have parts of discourses that Jeremiah made on very different occasions.

– You will notice in 17:5-11: that similar content is found in several psalms, and especially in psalm 1.

– The prayer 17:14-18.



Words of wisdom

⁵ This is what Yahweh says,

Cursed be the man who trusts in human beings and depends on a mortal for his life, while his heart turns away from Yahweh!

⁶ He is like a bunch of thistles in dry land, in parched desert places, in a salt land where no one lives and who never finds happiness.

⁷ Happy the man who trusts in Yahweh and whose confidence is in him! ⁸ He is like a tree planted near water, that thrusts its roots towards the stream.

He has no fear when the heat comes, his leaves are always green: the year of drought is no problem and he can always bear fruit.

⁹ Most deceitful is the heart. What is there within man, who can understand him? ¹⁰ I, Yahweh, search the heart and penetrate the mind. I give to each one according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds.

¹¹ Like a partridge hatching eggs it did not lay is the man who piles up unjust riches.

When his life is half over, his wealth deserts him, and in the end he is nothing but a fool.

¹² What a glorious and exalted throne is our Sanctuary! ¹³ Yahweh, hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame and those who turn from you will be cast out from your land, because they have rejected Yahweh, the fountain of living water.

¹⁴ Heal me, Yahweh, and I shall be whole; save me and I shall be safe, O you, my hope!

¹⁵ People say to me, "Where are Yahweh's threats? Let them happen!"

¹⁶ But I did not urge you to send evil, nor did I ask to see the fatal day, and you well know my wish; my prayer is in your hearing.

¹⁷ Let me not fear you, be my refuge in the day of disaster.

¹⁸ Let my persecutors be humbled, rather than me!

Let them be terrified but not me! Let the day of misfortune fall on them! Crush them twice over!

Observance of the Sabbath

■ ¹⁹ This is what Yahweh said to me,

"Go and stand at the gate they call the People Gate, where the kings of Judah come in and go out; ²⁰ and say to the king and to all the people of Judah: This is what Yahweh says:

²¹ If you want to live, take care not to carry a load on the sabbath, or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem.

²² Carry nothing out of your houses and do no work on the sabbath. Make it holy as I commanded your fathers.

²³ They did not obey me or pay attention to what I said. Stiff-necked as they were, they would not hear or accept my warnings.

²⁴ But if you pay attention – it is Yahweh who speaks – and keep the sabbath holy, not working or carrying loads ²⁵ through the gates of Jerusalem, then you will see kings of David's family entering through these gates, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes with the people of

5. Ps 146, 3	6. Job 20, 17	8. Ps 1, 12	10. Job 34, 19; Heb 4, 12	13. 15, 18
15. Is 5, 19; 2 Pet 3, 3	19. Ex 16, 23; Ne 13, 15			

■ *Take care not to carry on the Sabbath.* Jeremiah often denounces the religious practices which are not accompanied by an upright life; but that does not mean that he minimizes the respect towards God which is manifested externally.

The Law of Rest (such is the meaning in

Hebrew of the word *Sabbath*) is a way for man to allow room for God in his life. Not working on that day is a way to state that people will not be happier by becoming slaves to work, but rather by giving something to God which God will give back a hundredfold (see Gen 2:3; Ex 20:8; Lv 25:20).



Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall last for-ever.

²⁶ People will come from the cities of Judah and from the region around Jerusalem, from the territory of Benjamin, from the Lowland and the hill country and from the Negeb, bringing victims for sacrifice, incense and offerings in thanksgiving to the House of Yahweh.

²⁷ But if you do not listen and do not keep the sabbath holy, if you work and carry loads through the gates of Jerusalem, then I will set fire to those gates. It will burn the city and will not be quenched."

At the potter's house

◆18 ¹ This is the word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah: ² "Go down to the potter's house; there I will let you hear what I have to say."

³ So I went to the potter's house and found him working at the wheel. ⁴ But the pot he was working on was spoiled; so, as the clay was at hand, the potter made it into another pot giving it the form he chose.

⁵ Meanwhile Yahweh sent me his word, ⁶ "People of Israel, am I not able to do with you what this potter does? As clay in the hand of the potter so are you in my hands.

⁷ At times I warn a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot or destroy it.

⁸ But if they change their ways and reject the evil I denounce, I then relent and refrain from doing the harm I had intended to do.

⁹ At other times I declare that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted ¹⁰ but then they do what displeases me and do not listen to me, so

I repent of the good I had promised to do."

¹¹ And Yahweh added, "Now tell the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem: Yahweh says to you, 'Listen, I am planning disaster for you and preparing a plot against you! Repent of your evil ways; reform your conduct and your deeds.' ¹² But you reply: 'It's no use! We shall follow our own plans'; and each one goes on obeying his stubborn heart."

My people have forsaken me

¹³ Because of this Yahweh has to say: Ask among the nations,

'Has anyone heard the like of this?

The Virgin Israel has done what is appalling.

¹⁴ Does the snow of Lebanon ever leave the rocks of the snowfields?

Do the fresh waters of great rivers ever dry up?

¹⁵ Yet my people have forgotten me, offering incense to empty idols that made them stumble on their way when they followed the ancient paths; now they have taken the wrong way, the crooked way that leads nowhere.

¹⁶ Their land will be left desolate, an object of lasting scorn.

All who pass by will be astonished and shake their heads.

¹⁷ Like the east wind I will scatter them before their enemies and turn my back to them, not my face, in the day of their disaster!

Do not forgive their sin

¹⁸ They said, "Come, let us plot against Jeremiah, for the Law's teaching will not perish for want of a priest, nor will there be a lack of wise men to give counsel, or prophets to proclaim the word. Come, let us accuse him and strike him down instead of listening to what he says."

¹⁹ Hear me, O Yahweh!

Listen to what my accusers say.

²⁰ Did good have to be repaid by evil?

2. Gen 2, 7; Is 64, 7

10. Gen 6, 6

◆ In several parts of the Bible, the comparison with the potter serves to show that God is absolute master and directs the life of all according to his will: individuals as well as nations (see Is 29:16 and Rom 9:30). Here, the same com-

parison is used to provide another teaching: which complements the first: namely that man is free.

If they change their ways, I will then refrain from doing the harm I planned. At any time,



How is it that they dug a pit for me?
Remember how I stood by you
to speak well on their behalf,
to turn your anger away from them.

²¹ Now let their children starve;
hand them over to the sword!

Let their wives be childless and become
widows!

Let their men be victims of the plague
and their young men slain in battle!

²² Let cries be heard in their houses
when suddenly you bring bandits against
them,

for they have dug a pit to trap me
and hidden snares for my feet.

²³ O Yahweh, you know all of their plots to
take my life!

Do not forgive their crime or forget their
sin:

crush them on the day of your anger.

The broken jar

19 ¹ This was an order of Yahweh to
Jeremiah, "Go and buy a jar from the
potter. Take with you some elders of the peo-
ple and a few senior priests. ² Then leave by the
valley of Ben-Hinnom at the entrance to the
Potsherd Gate and there proclaim what I tell
you.

³ This is what you will say: Hear the word
of Yahweh, kings of Judah and citizens of
Jerusalem! It is Yahweh the God of hosts and
the God of Israel who speaks. I am about to
send a disaster on this place that will make the
ears of those who hear it tingle. ⁴ Here they
have forsaken me, offering incense to foreign
gods that neither they, their fathers nor the
kings of Judah have known; they have pro-
faned this place filling it with innocent blood.
⁵ They have built high places to Baal where
they burn their children in fire, something I did
not command or mention or ever think of.

⁶ That is why the days will come – word of
Yahweh – when this place will no longer be
called Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom,
but the Valley of Slaughter.

⁷ In this place I will destroy the plans of
Judah and Jerusalem and let them be slain by

their enemies, by the hands of those who seek
their lives. Their carcasses shall be the food of
birds and beasts. ⁸ I will make this city deso-
late, an object of scorn, a sight that will appall
the passersby and make them whistle to see so
many wounds!

⁹ I will make them eat the flesh of their
children; they will eat one another in the time
of distress, in the disaster brought on them by
their enemies who seek their lives.

¹⁰ Then you shall break the jar in the pres-
ence of those who have gone with you ¹¹ and
you will say to them: This is what Yahweh the
God of hosts says:

I will smash the people of this city just as
a potter's jar is shattered to pieces beyond
repair. They will bury the dead in Topheth for
want of room elsewhere. ¹² This is what I will
do to Jerusalem and its inhabitants, making
this city like Topheth. ¹³ The houses of Jerusa-
lem and those of the kings of Judah will be
defiled, all the houses where they burned in-
cense on the roofs to the army of the skies, and
poured libations to foreign gods."

Confrontation in the temple

¹⁴ Jeremiah then returned from
Topheth where Yahweh had sent him
to prophesy, and stood in the porch of
the House of Yahweh. There he spoke
to all the people, ¹⁵ "Listen to the word
of Yahweh, God of Israel: I am about
to bring on this city and the towns
around it all the disaster I foretold,
because they are a stiff-necked people
and will not listen to me."

20 ¹ The priest Pashur, son of Im-
mer, who was the chief officer
in the House of Yahweh, heard Jeremi-
ah prophesying like this. ² He had
Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks
at the Gate of Benjamin, the upper
gate at the House of Yahweh. ³ And
the next day Pashur released him

1. 13, 12

one can be converted and God will act accord-
ingly. There is no plan of God written before-
hand that we should have to follow, pushed to do
good or evil by some fatal destiny. God is
continually creating us and he achieves his plan
for the world while at the same time we are free
to act. The Bible supports these two state-
ments, that nothing escapes God and that we
are free.

⁴ Jeremiah is prophesying alone. Apparent-
ly he has no followers, nor religious groups to
help him. Some people are getting tired of al-
ways hearing him threaten. The leaders and the
priests are angry at this individual's condemna-
tion of a society in which they live without prob-
lems. The true prophet's word disturbs the
conscience of the very people who do not accept
his authority.



from the stocks. Then Jeremiah said to him, "Yahweh's name for you is not Pashur but 'Terror on every side.'⁴ For Yahweh says: I am going to hand you over to terror, you and your friends. They will fall under the sword of their enemies while you look on.

I will deliver all Judah into the hands of the king of Babylon who will deport them to Babylon or slay them by the sword.⁵ I will give over all the

wealth of this city, all its stores, all that is valuable, all the treasure of the kings of Judah; all this I will deliver into the hands of their enemies who will seize it and carry it off to Babylon.

⁶ As for you, Pashur, and all your household, you will be taken captive to Babylon and there you will die and be buried – you and all your friends to whom you prophesied lies."

You have seduced me

+ ⁷ Yahweh, you have seduced me
and I let myself be seduced.

You have taken me by force and prevailed.
I am a laughing stock from morning till night;
they all make fun of me,

⁸ for every time I speak
I proclaim violence and plunder.
Yahweh's word has brought me
insult and derision all day long.

⁹ So I decided to forget about him
and speak no more in his name.
But his word in my heart is like a fire
imprisoned in my bones.
I force myself to hold it in,
but that is impossible.

¹⁰ I hear many whispering against me:
"Terror on every side!
Denounce him! Yes, denounce him!"
Those who were my friends watch me
to see if I will slip:
"Perhaps he will be deceived:
then we will get the better of him
and have our revenge."

¹¹ But Yahweh, a mighty warrior, is with me.
My persecutors will stumble and not prevail.
They will yet fail; covered in contusion,
may they be disgraced forever!

¹² Yahweh, God of hosts, you test the just
and probe the heart and mind.
Let me see your revenge on them,
for to you I have entrusted my cause.

¹³ Sing to Yahweh! Praise Yahweh!
For he has saved the poor from the hand of the wicked!



¹⁴ Cursed be the day I was born!
No blessing on the day my mother brought
me to light!

¹⁵ Cursed be the man who gave the news to
my father: 'You have a child! a son!'
and made him happy!

¹⁶ Let him be like the towns that Yahweh
destroyed without mercy.

Let him hear shouts of warning in the
morning
and a war cry at noon!

¹⁷ For he did not do away with me in the
womb.

Then my mother would have been my
grave,
and have carried me forever.

¹⁸ Why did I ever leave the womb
to live in trouble and sorrow,
and end my days in shame?

Answer to Zedekiah

21 ¹ These words came to Jeremiah from
Yahweh when king Zedekiah sent Pa-
shur, son of Malchiah and the priest Zeph-
aniah son of Maaseiah, to say to him: ² "Consult
Yahweh on our behalf, for Nebuchadnezzar,
king of Babylon, is at war with us. Perhaps
Yahweh will work a few of his miracles and
make the enemy withdraw."

³ Jeremiah replied, "This is what Yahweh
the God of Israel says to Zedekiah: 'I am about
to bring back to you the weapons with which
you are fighting outside the wall the king of
Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging
you; and I will heap them in the centre of the
city.'

⁵ Then I myself will fight against you with
outstretched hand and mighty arm, with anger
and fury and great wrath, ⁶ I will strike all in
the city, both men and animals, and they will
die of a terrible plague.

⁷ After this – it is Yahweh who speaks – I

will hand over Zedekiah, king of Judah, his
servants and the citizens who survive the
plague, the sword and starvation. I will deliver
them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king
of Babylon and to their enemies, to those who
seek their lives. They shall be slain without
mercy or compassion."

⁸ And you will say to the people, "This is
what Yahweh says: See, I place before you the
way of life and the way of death. ⁹ Whoever
stays in the city will die either by the sword,
famine or plague; those who go out and sur-
render to the Chaldeans who are besieging the
city, will live and will be the only ones to be
saved.

¹⁰ For I am turning to this city for its ruin,
not for its good – word of Yahweh – it will be
given over to the king of Babylon who will
destroy it by fire.

Address to the royal family

¹¹ To the royal family of Judah say this:
¹² Descendants of David, hear the word of
Yahweh:

Give judgment each morning
and save the oppressed from the hand of
the oppressor,
lest my fury break out like a fire
with no one to quench it.

¹³ This is Yahweh's word, "See, I am
coming to you
who live in the hills overlooking the val-
ley,

you who say, 'Who will come against us
and enter this secure place?'

¹⁴ I will punish you as your deeds deserve,
and in your forests I will light a fire
that will devour all that surrounds you."

Against evil kings

22 ¹ Yahweh said to me, "Go to the
house of the king of Judah and give
him this message: ² Hear the word of Yahweh,

14. Job 3, 3	17. Job 3, 11	2. 2 K 22, 13	10. Lev 20, 3; Am 9, 4
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+ This "confession" recalls the one in chapter
15. The Bearer of the Truth is rejected and
mocked simply because he speaks by virtue of a
personal mission which the people do not ac-
cept. Let us not forget that Jeremiah lived six
centuries before Jesus, and long before there
was any thought of the beyond, and so, we will
have a better understanding of his calling for
divine justice.

You have taken me by force: is there any-
thing more understandable if God is Love?

But his word is like a fire in my bones. What
is really amazing is the irresistible power of God's
Word. It is more difficult to resist it than to face
men's opposition. Paul will declare, in a fairly

similar way, that he cannot evade the responsi-
bility of preaching the Gospel (1 Cor 9, 16). This
text forces us to revise and deepen the very
simplicistic ideas we have concerning our free-
dom: being free is to be faithful to the most de-
manding mission.

I decided to speak no more in his name.
Elsewhere Jeremiah comes close to blasphemy.
But, in the end, he surrenders to Yahweh in
trust.

The curse which follows in verses 14-18 will
be picked up and developed in the third chapter
of Job.

■ The passage in 21:1-10 refers to the
second siege of Jerusalem in 588. Then from

O king of Judah, you who sit on the throne of David. To you, your servants and all who enter by these gates,³ Yahweh says:

Practice justice and do good.

Free the one who is wronged from his oppressor.

Do no harm to the foreigner, the orphan or the widow; do them no violence, and let no innocent blood be shed here.

⁴If you do this, kings succeeding King David will enter these gates. They will come with their chariots and horses, with their servants and their people.

⁵ But if you do not heed my word,

I swear by myself – it is Yahweh who speaks –

this place will become a ruins."

⁶ For this is what Yahweh says of the royal house of Judah:

For me you are like Gilead, like a peak of Lebanon! And yet I will make of you a desert, a city without inhabitants.⁷ I am preparing destroyers to attack you, each with an axe in his hand. They will cut down your choice cedars and throw them into the fire.

⁸ Pagans without number will pass by this city and say to one another, "Why has Yahweh dealt in such a way with this great city?"⁹ And they will answer, "Because they broke their covenant with Yahweh, their God, and worshipped and served other gods!"

¹⁰ Do not weep for the one who is dead!

Do not grieve for him.

Mourn rather for the one in exile

because he will never return

nor see his homeland again!

¹¹ For this is what Yahweh has said of Shalum, son of Josiah who succeeded his father as king of Judah:

¹² He will never return, for he will die in the place to which he has been deported and will never again see this land.

Against Jehoiakim

¹³ Wretched the man who builds his house with stolen goods, its storeys with injustice!

Wretched the one who makes his fellowman work for nothing and refuses him a salary!

¹⁴ So you build for yourself a fine palace with spacious upper rooms!

So you have large windows put in, you have it paneled with cedarwood and painted vermillion.

¹⁵ Does amassing cedar make you more of a king?

Was not your father a just man?

With eating and drinking he was able

to do right, and all went well for him.

¹⁶ He defended the cause of the poor

and needy.

And Yahweh asks, Isn't it knowing me, to act like that?

¹⁷ But your eyes and heart are set on gain and the shedding of innocent blood, on the practice of extortion.

3. Ex 22, 20; Dt 19, 10

7. Is 37, 24

9. Dt 29, 23

13. Mi 3, 10; Acts 2, 12

16. 9, 23; Hos 6, 6

21:1-28 we have several oracles against the royal family, before the first siege, in the years 605-598. See Kgs 22:38-47 concerning those kings.

In those days, the nobility and the civil servants of Jerusalem lived as usual, without being concerned by the ongoing crises of the kingdom. Yet, before long, they would all be killed or exiled.

The same is also true now: rich countries and people are enjoying themselves and live in indifference on top of a volcano. A few recent words of D. Helder Camara are appropriate here:

"There has always been violence. But now it is perhaps more massive than ever: it is everywhere and it takes on many forms: brutal, open, subtle, blind, rationalised, consolidated, anonymous, abstract, irresponsible.

If the powerful of the underdeveloped world do not have the courage to let go of their privileges and to bring justice to millions of people living in inhuman situations; if govern-

ments make reforms only on paper; how can we stop the young people tempted to adopt radically violent positions?

Until when will atomic bombs be more feared than the bomb of poverty which is being built in the heart of the third world?"

◆ *Alas for the shepherds who lose and scatter!* This new attack against evil leaders is the prelude to words of hope.

I will gather the rest of my flock. The destruction of the "physical" Israel prepares for the coming of the "spiritual" Israel. People were used to seeing their leaders abuse their power, and their rulers become richer. But God is preparing for his people a shepherd who will look after the sheep.

They will call him Yahweh-is-our-justice: this is a way of showing him to be different from the king of the time, Zedekiah which means Yahweh-is-my-justice.

I will place shepherds over them who will care for them. As well as the just king, Jeremiah

¹⁸ Therefore this is what Yahweh says of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah:

For him no one shall lament: Alas, my brother! Alas, O sister! No one will lament saying: Alas, my lord! Alas, your majesty!

¹⁹ He will be given the burial of a donkey, dragged away and thrown out well beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

²⁰ Go up to Lebanon and cry out; weep from the heights of Bashan or from Abarim,

for all your lovers have been crushed.

²¹ I spoke to you in more fortunate days, but you said: 'I will not listen.'

You have been like that since your youth, paying no attention to my word.

²² A wind will scatter all your shepherds and your lovers will be taken captive; then you will be covered with shame because of your evil deeds.

²³ You who call your house: 'Lebanon' and made your nest of cedarwood, how you will groan when sorrow comes to you as to a woman in the pangs of childbirth!

²⁴ By my life – says Yahweh – even if Jeconiah, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand I would pull him off!

²⁵ I will hand you to those who seek your life, to those you fear, to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and to the Chaldeans. ²⁶ Then I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into a foreign land where you were not born. There you shall die, ²⁷ for to the land for which you long, you will never return!

²⁸ Is this Jeconiah a broken and useless crock that no one wants? Why has he been expelled, he and his family, to a land they do not know?

²⁹ Land, land, land! Hear what Yahweh says. ³⁰ These are his words, "List this man as childless, as a failure in life!" None of his race will succeed; not one will sit on the throne of David and rule over Judah.

The good shepherd

23 ¹ "Alas for the shepherds who mislead and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" It is Yahweh who speaks.

² This is the message of Yahweh, God of Israel, to the shepherds in charge of my people, "You have scattered my sheep and driven them away instead of caring for them. Now I will deal with you because of your evil deeds.

³ I will gather the rest of my sheep from every land to which I have driven them and I will bring them back to the grasslands. They will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ I will place shepherds over them who will care for them. No longer will they fear or be terrified. No one will be lost."

⁵ And Yahweh speaks, "The day is coming when I will raise up to David a righteous offspring, a king who will rule wisely and govern with justice and righteousness. ⁶ Then Judah will enjoy peace and Israel will live in safety. His name will be *Yahweh-our-justice*!

⁷ So the days are coming – word of Yahweh – when people will no longer say: "Yahweh is a living God for he brought the sons of Israel out of Egypt" ⁸ but rather: "Yahweh is a living God, for he brought the descendants of Israel back from the country of the north and from all the lands where he had driven them, to live again in their own land!"

26. 2 K 24, 15

28. Ps 31, 13

1. Ezk 34

6. Is 9, 6; Mt 5, 3

sees other shepherds: besides the only Shepherd, Christ, there is room for men determined to be responsible for their brothers.

No longer will they fear. God promises definitive peace. The new people of God will be more than a mere continuation of the old kingdom of Israel, and the new king will be more than the earthly kings (see how Jesus develops this point in John 10).

Mankind hopes for unity in peace and the mission of the church now is to offer the witness of different people gathered in Christ. The reality, however, will be achieved only in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rv 21:22).

Jeremiah expresses the same hope elsewhere, especially in 33:15-18. In 30:21 he mentions that the good shepherd will have to be a man living in intimate union with God. In Ezekiel 34 we find the same image of the Good Shepherd preparing for what Jesus will say in John 10, Luke 15:4 and Matthew 9:36.

■ See also Dt 13:6 and 18:22 and Jer 28 on the subject of false prophets.

Those who are not well versed in their faith marvel at visions and dreams, forgetting that dreams can be particularly deceptive.

Lying prophets

■ ⁹ For the prophets:

My heart breaks within me,
all my bones tremble,
I am like a drunken man,
like a man overcome with wine
because of Yahweh and his holy words.

¹⁰ The land is full of adulterers. Because of this I put a curse on the country; it is in mourning and the desert grasslands have withered. They follow an evil path and readily act unjustly. ¹¹ Even the prophet and the priest are corrupt; I have found out about their wickedness in my House – word of Yahweh.

¹² That is why their path will become slippery and dark, making them stumble and fall when I bring evil upon them in the year of their punishment.

¹³ I will know how stupid the prophets of Samaria were, prophesying in the name of Baal and leading my people Israel astray. ¹⁴ But among the prophets of Jerusalem as well I saw horrors: they are adulterers and liars!

They encourage the evildoers so that none of them turns away from wickedness. For me all of them are like Sodom; and the common people like Gomorrah.

¹⁵ That is why Yahweh the God of hosts speaks against the prophets: I will give them bitter food to eat and poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem evil has spread throughout the land.

¹⁶ This is Yahweh's warning, "Do not listen to what the prophets say. They give you false hope and tell you their own illusions, and not what comes from the mouth of Yahweh.

¹⁷ They dare say to those who despise me: 'Yahweh has spoken, be at peace'; and to those who follow their own stubborn hearts they say: 'No misfortune will come upon you!'

¹⁸ Who then has been present in the council of Yahweh? Who has heard and understood his word? Who has paid attention to his word and is able to pass it on?

¹⁹ The storm of Yahweh's wrath breaks forth and a whirling hurricane bursts upon the head of the wicked! ²⁰ Yahweh's anger will not subside before he has fully carried out his own designs. In the days to come you will understand what it is.

²¹ I did not send these prophets, yet they went running. I did not speak, yet they prophesied! ²² Were they present in my council? Then let them proclaim my word to my people and have them turn away from their evil ways and their wicked deeds.

²³ Am I a God only when I am near – it is Yahweh who speaks – and not when I am far off? ²⁴ If a man hides in secret places do I not see him? – says Yahweh – Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?

²⁵ I have listened to what the prophets said, prophesying lies in my name. All said: 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' ²⁶ How long will there be prophets of lies who proclaim their own illusions? ²⁷ They would like to make the people forget my Name by the dreams they relate to each other, just as their fathers forgot my Name when they followed Baal. ²⁸ The prophet who has a dream prophesies a dream, whereas the one who receives my word proclaims the word of truth.

What have straw and wheat in common? It is Yahweh who speaks. ²⁹ Isn't my word like fire, like the hammer that shatters a rock?

³⁰ That is why I oppose the prophets who steal from one another words that are supposedly mine. ³¹ I am against the prophets who have only to move their tongues to utter oracles. ³² I am against those who base their prophecy on lying dreams and lead my people astray with their trickery and pretensions. I did not send them or charge them to transmit my orders, so they are of no benefit to my people – word of Yahweh.

³³ And when these people, or a prophet or a priest makes fun of you asking: 'What is the 'Burden' of Yahweh? you will answer: 'You are the burden – and I am going to get rid of you.' This is Yahweh's word. ³⁴ And the prophets, priests or common people who say: 'Burden' of Yahweh, will be punished, and their household as well.

³⁵ This is what you should say, each one to his friend or brother, "What is Yahweh's answer?" or "What has Yahweh said?" ³⁶ But there must be no mention of 'Burden' of Yahweh for it will be burdensome for the one who says it. ³⁷ And if you want to know, ³⁸ this is what Yahweh says:

³⁹ Since you use this expression though I commanded you not to use it, I will carry you off and thrust you out of my sight, both you and the city I gave to you and your fathers. ⁴⁰ I will bring upon you everlasting shame and dishonour that will be yours forever.

The two baskets of figs

24 ¹ Yahweh showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the Temple. It was after Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon had deported Jehoniah, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah together with the princes of Judah, the

blacksmiths and metalworkers and had taken them to Babylon.

² In one of the baskets were choice figs like the first of the season, in the other were very poor figs, so bad that they couldn't be eaten.

³ Yahweh said to me, "What do you see Jeremiah?" I replied, "Figs. The good figs are excellent but the bad figs are so rotten they cannot be eaten!"

⁴ Then the word of Yahweh came to me.

⁵ This is what Yahweh God of Israel says: "Just as I see these figs are good, so do I consider good those who have been deported from Judah to the country of the Chaldeans. ⁶ I will look kindly on them and bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not destroy them, plant them and not uproot them. ⁷ I will dispose their heart to know me as Yahweh. They will be my people and I will be their God for with all their heart they will come back to me.

⁸ As one deals with bad figs, so rotten they cannot be eaten – it is Yahweh who speaks – so will I deal with Zedekiah king of Judah, his princes and the rest of Jerusalem, those who remain in the country and those who live in Egypt.

⁹ I will make them an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, an object of ridicule, a curse in all the countries to which I will drive them. ¹⁰ And I will send the sword, famine and plague on them until they disappear from the land I gave to them and to their fathers.

Seventy years of captivity

+25 ¹ This is the word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiaquim, son of Josiah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. ² And this word Jeremiah the prophet transmitted to all the people of Judah and to all the citizens of Jerusalem:

³ Since the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon until today, that is for twenty-three

years, the word of Yahweh has come to me and I have continuously spoken to you, ⁴ but you would not listen. Besides Yahweh has sent his servants the prophets to you again and again, but you neither listened nor paid attention.

⁵ They said, 'Turn from your evil ways and repent of your wicked deeds that you may live in the land that Yahweh gave to you and your fathers forever and ever. ⁶ Do no turn after other gods to serve and worship them. Do not arouse my anger with these things your own hands have made, and I will do you no harm.' ⁷ But you refused to listen – it is Yahweh who speaks – and aroused my anger with these gods you yourselves have made and in so doing harmed yourselves.

⁸ That is why Yahweh God of hosts says to you: Because you would not listen to what I said, ⁹ I will summon all the clans of the north – it is Yahweh who speaks – and my steward Nebuchadnezzar will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy these people, making them desolate, an object of ridicule, an everlasting ruins. ¹⁰ I will banish from them every sound of joy and happiness, the song of the bride and bridegroom, the noise of the mill and the light of the lamp.

¹¹ All the land will be a ruin and a desolation and for seventy years these nations will serve the king of Babylon.

¹² (But after seventy years I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation for their guilt – it is Yahweh who speaks – and I will make it forever desolate!)

¹³ On this land I will now bring all that I foretold, all that is written in this book. ¹⁴ They will be subject to great nations and kings! I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands."

The cup of God's wrath

¹⁵ This is what Yahweh, God of Israel, said to me, "Take this cup of wine and let all the nations to whom I send you drink from it.

7. 30, 21; 31, 33

11. 2 Chron 36, 20

12. 29, 10; Dn 9

15. Ezk 23, 32

o The first siege of Jerusalem occurred in 598, along with the capitulation of king Jehoiaquim, and a first exile. In the ten years that followed, the new king Zedekiah along with the people who remained, acted as if nothing had happened. Though they were defeated and poor, the people of Jerusalem came to think that they were better off and that they only had to lament over the fate of those in exile. Jeremiah rejects this opinion: God is interested in those in exile for they are the beginning of the future renewed people. On the other hand, something worse is going to happen to those remaining in Jerusalem.

+ This chapter combines:

25:1-13: an introduction which must have come before Jeremiah's prophecies against the people of Judah and which now form chapters 1-24 of his book. Note in this passage the prophecy concerning the seventy years which was to be the time of the exile of the Jews in Babylon. It is a symbolic number since there were two exiles, in 598 and 587 and many left after 538.

25:14-38: an introduction which must have come before the prophecies against the foreign nations gathered in chapters 46-51.

¹⁶ They will drink and stagger and panic at the sword I am sending among them."

¹⁷ So I took the cup from the hand of Yahweh and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink from it: ¹⁸ Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and leaders, so that they would be left in ruins, desolate, an object of ridicule and curses, as they are today. ¹⁹ Then I gave it to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to his ministers, his princes and all his people, to all the countries of the west, ²⁰ to all the kings of Uz, to all the kings of the Philistines; those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and those left at Ashdod, ²¹ Edom, Moab and Ammon; ²² all the kings of Tyre and Sidon: the kings of the coastlands across the sea; ²³ Deda, Tama, Buz and ²⁴ all the kings of Arabia and the kings of the west and the kings of those who live in the desert; ²⁵ all the kings of Zimri, Elim and Media and ²⁶ all the kings of the north, far and near, one after the other; all the kings existing on the face of the earth! And after them the king of Babylon shall drink it!

²⁷ You will say to them, "This is the message of Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel: 'Drink, get drunk, vomit, fall down not to get up again in front of the sword I am sending against you.'

²⁸ But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, say to them, 'Yahweh the God of hosts has spoken: You also must drink.

²⁹ When you see that I am punishing first the city where my Name rests, do you think you will be spared? No, you will not be spared for I myself am bringing down a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth – it is Yahweh God of hosts who speaks.'

³⁰ You will communicate all this to them and say, "Yahweh roars on high and from his holy dwelling threatens all the inhabitants of the world. His mighty roar echoes to the farthest ends of the earth. ³¹ For Yahweh judges all the nations and passes sentence against all humankind, and the wicked he abandons to the sword – word of Yahweh."

³² Yahweh, God of hosts, says, "See, disaster spreads from nation to nation. A storm arises from the ends of the earth. ³³ On that day Yahweh's victims will be spread from one end of the earth to the other. No one will lament over them; no one will gather them up or bury them – they will be as dung on the soil!

³⁴ Howl, shepherds, and lament!

Roll in the dust you leaders of flocks for

the day of slaughter and dispersal has come for you and you will fall like fattened sheep.

³⁵ There will be no refuge for the shepherds, no escape for the leaders of the flocks.

³⁶ The shepherds cry out and the leaders of flocks wail, ³⁷ for Yahweh lays waste the grasslands, and the pastures are silent because of the fury of Yahweh's anger.

³⁸ Like a young lion he leaves his lair; because of the fury of his anger the land has been stricken by the sword and has become a wasteland."

Jeremiah is arrested and judged

26 ¹ At the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah: ² Yahweh says this, "Stand in the courtyard of Yahweh's House and say to all who come from the towns of Judah to worship in the House of Yahweh – all that I command you to say; omit nothing! ³ Perhaps they will listen to you. Perhaps each one will turn from his wicked ways. Then I will relent and not do the harm I had in mind to inflict on them because of the wickedness of their deeds.

⁴ Say to them: This is what Yahweh says:

"You have not obeyed me and walked according to my Law which I have set before you. ⁵ You have not listened to my servants, the prophets, whom I have continually sent to you. If you persist in not heeding them, ⁶ I will treat this House of mine as I did the sanctuary of Shiloh and let all the nations see that Jerusalem is a cursed city."

⁷ The priests, the prophets and all the people heard what Jeremiah said in the House of Yahweh. ⁸ It happened that when Jeremiah finished saying

30. Jl 4, 16; Am 1, 2

33. Is 66, 16

1. 7, 1-15

2. Rev 22, 19

◆ In 7:1-15 we had the discourse against people who trust in the Temple. Here, Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch – about whom we will speak later – summarizes the discourse and tells us what impact it had.

– The people defend Jeremiah against the priests and the prophets.
– Jeremiah maintains his position firmly: he cannot provide proof, or miracles to confirm what he is saying. He is saved by the

all that Yahweh had commanded, the priests and prophets seized him saying, "You will die! ⁹ How can you speak in Yahweh's Name when you say this House will be treated like Shiloh and this city is to become a deserted ruins." And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the House of Yahweh.

¹⁰ On hearing this the leaders of Judah came up from the king's palace to the House of Yahweh and took their place at the entrance of the New Gate. ¹¹ Then the priests and the prophets said to the leaders of the people: "To death with this man for he has prophesied against the city as you have heard with your own ears!"

¹² Jeremiah replied, "Yahweh sent me to prophesy against this House and this city all that you have heard. ¹³ Now reform your ways and your actions and obey Yahweh your God that he may relent and not bring upon you the harm he had intended.

¹⁴ As for myself I am in your hands; do with me whatever you consider just and right. ¹⁵ But know that I am innocent and if you take my life you bring a crime upon yourselves, on the city and the people. In truth it was Yahweh who sent me to say all that I said in your hearing."

¹⁶ Then the leaders, backed by the people, said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve death: he spoke to us in the Name of Yahweh."

¹⁷ Some of the elders of the country addressed the assembly of people, ¹⁸ "Micah of Moresheth prophesied publicly in the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah:

'Zion will become like a field, Jerusalem a heap of rubble and the Temple Mount a hill of overgrown thickets.'

¹⁹ Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone among the people of Judah kill him? Rather they feared Yahweh and implored his pardon until they succeeded in making him relent; and Yahweh did not inflict the harm with which he had threatened them. How can we commit such a crime?"

²⁰ Another man, Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath Jearim prophesied also in the name of Yahweh. He prophesied against this city and this country in words similar to those of Jeremiah. ²¹ When King Jehoiakim with all his ministers and officials heard his words, he decided to do away with him. Uriah came to know of their plot and fled in terror to Egypt. ²² But King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Achbor with some people into Egypt. ²³ They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim who had him slain and his body thrown into the common people's burial place.

²⁴ As for Jeremiah he was befriended by Ahikam, son of Shaphan, and was not handed over to those who wanted him put to death.

The yoke of Nebuchadnezzar

27 ¹ In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, son of Josiah, the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah in this way, ² "Make for yourself ropes and a yoke and put them round your neck. ³ Then send word to the kings of

conversion of the people: they have recognized the voice of truth.

- They recall the words of the prophet Micah 3:12 in the previous century.
- At the end of the chapter, there is mention of the family of Shaphan, the secretary of the king who had favoured the religious reform of King Josiah (see 2 Kgs 22:8). Shaphan and his people will protect Jeremiah on several occasions.

The confrontation of Jeremiah and the

priests is not accidental. Oftentimes those who kept the word of God opposed the prophets of their times. John the Baptist was ignored by the priests, and Jesus was condemned by them. The reason is that, often, religious ministers only think of maintaining things from the past and the external practices of religion, whereas the prophets are advocating moving forward and serving God more sincerely.

On the other hand, it is difficult for religious "teachers" to accept that God may use someone else to teach or to reprimand them.



Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through their ambassadors, who have come to Jerusalem, to see Zedekiah king of Judah. ⁴ Give them these instructions for their masters:

Yahweh God of hosts bids you give this message to your masters: ⁵ It is I who made the earth, and the people and animals that inhabit it, with my great power and outstretched arm, and I give them to whomsoever it pleases me. ⁶ Now I have given all these lands into the hands of my steward Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and I will even make the beasts of the field subject to him. ⁷ All nations will serve him, his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes and then he will be overpowered by powerful nations and great kings.

⁸ As for the nation or kingdom that refuses to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, I will punish it with the sword, famine and plague – word of Yahweh – until I completely wipe it out.

⁹ For your part pay no attention to your prophets, diviners, interpreters of dreams, astrologists or sorcerers who say: You must not submit yourselves to the king of Babylon.

¹⁰ For they are prophets of lies which will cause you to be finally driven from your land. I myself will drive you out and you will perish.

¹¹ But the nation that submits to the yoke of the king of Babylon and serves him, that nation I will leave in its own land – word of Yahweh – to till it and live there.

¹² Then I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah, "Place your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon. Serve him and his people and you will live. ¹³ Why should you and your people perish by the sword, famine and plague as Yahweh has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?"

¹⁴ Do not listen to the prophets when they say, "You will not have to serve the king of Babylon." For they prophesy lies. ¹⁵ I did not send

them, says Yahweh, and they proclaim untruths in my Name. Let it not be that I banish you, and you perish, you and the prophets who tell you this."

¹⁶ Then I spoke to the priests and the people, "Yahweh speaks: Do not listen to your prophets who say: 'Very soon now the articles from Yahweh's House will be brought back from Babylon.' They prophesy lies. ¹⁷ Do not listen to them; instead serve the king of Babylon and survive. Why should this city become a ruins? ¹⁸ If they were prophets and if they had Yahweh's word in their hearts, they would now be praying to Yahweh God of hosts not to allow the objects still remaining in the House of Yahweh and in the royal palace and in Jerusalem to be carried off to Babylon.

¹⁹ For, Yahweh says something about the pillars, the Sea, the movable stands and the other objects still in this city ²⁰ which Nebuchadnezzar did not carry off when he deported Jekoniah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon together with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem.

²¹ Yes, this is what Yahweh the God of hosts says about the objects remaining in the House of Yahweh and in the royal palace in Jerusalem: ²² "They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them. Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place."

Jeremiah and Hananiah

o28 ¹ Early in the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year, the prophet Hananiah spoke to me. Hananiah son of Azzur from Gibeon proclaimed in Yahweh's House in the presence of the priests and the people,

5. Dn 4, 14

o As we saw in 22:1, the ten years separating the two sieges of Jerusalem, from 598 to 588, were times of madness and false illusions. There were always people predicting the collapse of the empire of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and the return of the exiles. Jeremiah rises courageously against such false hope and predicts submission to Nebuchadnezzar and so the Jewish leaders consider him an enemy of the nation.

Jeremiah confronts the false prophets. When prophets do not agree, how can people know the authentic prophet? See Dt 13:6 and 18:22 on this.

The prophet who prophesies peace will not be accepted until his predictions are fulfilled.

Jeremiah says something more than Deuteronomy. Ever since Elijah (see 1 Kgs 19:18), the mission of the prophets had been to predict the gradual fall of the kingdom of Israel and to announce another kingdom which would come later. They predicted a few victories, but in the midst of a continuous slipping towards destruction. Therefore, the Jews should have distrusted Hananiah who was announcing prosperity, more than Jeremiah who insisted on Yahweh's threats.

The prophets were sent to a sinful people to form their conscience regarding sin and not to put it to sleep. When we live in the midst of injustice, we must distrust those who promise prosperity.



² "This is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says: I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³ Within two years I will bring back to this place all the objects removed from the House of Yahweh by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and taken to Babylon. ⁴ I will moreover bring back Jekoniah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the other captives from Judah who were deported to Babylon. For I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon – word of Yahweh."

⁵ Then Jeremiah replied to Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people, ⁶ "Amen! May Yahweh do so and fulfill the words you have spoken by bringing back from Babylon to this place the objects from the House of Yahweh and all the exiles. ⁷ Yet hear now what I say in your hearing and the hearing of all the people.

⁸ The prophets before your time and mine continually prophesied war, disaster and plague to many nations and great kingdoms. ⁹ So the prophet who prophesies peace will not be recognized as truly sent by Yahweh, until his predictions are fulfilled."

¹⁰ Then Hananiah took the yoke

from the neck of Jeremiah and broke it ¹¹ and proclaimed in the presence of all the people, "Yahweh says this: In the same way within two years will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar from the neck of all the nations." Then Jeremiah the prophet went on his way.

¹² Some time later, the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, ¹³ "Go and tell Hananiah: This is what Yahweh says: You have broken a wooden yoke but in its place you will get a yoke of iron.

¹⁴ For this is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says: I am placing a yoke of iron on the neck of all the nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals."

¹⁵ Then Jeremiah said to Hananiah, "Listen! Hananiah, Yahweh has not sent you and yet you have deceived these people, giving them false hope with your lies. ¹⁶ That is why Yahweh says with regard to you: I am removing you from the face of the earth. You shall die because you have counselled rebellion against Yahweh."

¹⁷ And in the seventh month of that year Hananiah died.

PROPHECIES OF BLESSING

The letter to the exiles

29 ¹ This is the text of the letter the prophet Jeremiah sent to the rest of the elders, to the priests, the prophets and to all the people that Nebuchadnezzar had deported from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² This was after King Jekoniah, the queen mother, the officials, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the smiths and metalworkers had left Jerusalem.

³ The letter was entrusted to Elash son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

⁴ This is what Yahweh God of hosts and God of Israel says to all those deported from Jerusalem to Babylon:

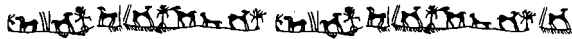
⁵ "Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat what they produce, marry and have children, ⁶ take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too will have children. Increase and multiply while you are there and do

9. Dt 18, 22

10. 1 K 22, 13-25

2. 2 K 24, 15

◆ In the years from 598 to 587, while the people in Jerusalem are becoming more and



not decrease. ⁷ Work for the prosperity of the land to which I have sent you and intercede with Yahweh on its behalf; for its welfare will be your welfare."

¹⁰ This is what Yahweh says, "When the seventy years in Babylon have been completed I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to you and bring you back to this place." ¹¹ For I know what my plans for you are, plans to save you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and to give you hope."

¹² And Yahweh says, "When you call on me I will listen. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart." ¹⁴ For Yahweh says, "I will let myself be found by you and I will gather you from among all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you and bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile."

¹⁵ Indeed you are trusting in prophets allegedly raised for you by Yahweh in Babylon. ¹⁶ But this is the word of Yahweh: ¹⁷ Do not be deceived by the prophets and seers who are among you. Do not believe in their dreams or be confident in their illusions. ¹⁸ For I did not send them and they take advantage of my name to foretell lies. As for the king who sits on the throne of David and all the people who live in this city (your kinsmen who did not go into exile with you); ¹⁹ thus says Yahweh God of hosts, "I am sending sword, famine and plague against them. I will make them like bad figs, so rotten they cannot be eaten. ²⁰ I will pursue them with sword, starvation and plague. They will be a horror for all the kingdoms of the earth, a curse, an abomination, a sign of deso-

lation, mockery and ridicule among all the nations where I will drive them. ²¹ For they did not heed my words when I sent them again and again my servants, the prophets. They refused to pay attention.

²² As for you, exiles, whom I sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon, hear the word of Yahweh. ²³ This is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says concerning Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah who prophesy lies in my name, "I will hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and he will slay them before your eyes. ²⁴ This will give rise to a curse widely used by the captives from Judah in Babylon: 'May the Lord treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, who were roasted in the fire by the king of Babylon!' ²⁵ for they have acted outrageously: they have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives and in my name proclaimed lies which I did not command them. I know it and have witnessed it," declares Yahweh.

²⁶ After that Shemaiah of Nehelam ²⁷ sent letters in his own name to all the people in Jerusalem and to Zephaniah, son of Maaseiah the priest and to all the priests saying, ²⁸ "Yahweh has made you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge in the House of Yahweh to arrest every mad prophet and put him in the stocks and neck-irons. ²⁹ So why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth a would-be prophet in your midst? ³⁰ In this role he sent a message to us in Babylon: You will be there for a long time! Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce."

³¹ When Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet, ³² the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah. ³³ "Send this message to all the exiles: This is what Yahweh says concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam: Shemaiah prophesied although I did not send him and he made you trust in lies. ³⁴ Because of that I will punish Shemaiah and his descendants; none of them will be left to see the good I shall do for my people, for he incited my people to rebel against Yahweh."

13. Dt 4, 29; Is 55, 6

23. 23, 10

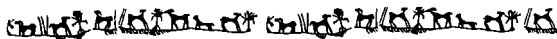
more blind, Jeremiah wants to guide the exiles. There is a temptation for them to believe that things could go back to what they were before. There are even among them prophets who keep up the illusion of a quick defeat of Babylon. One of them sends letters to Jerusalem to have Jeremiah put in jail (24-28).

In fact, they have to accept defeat, to realize their unfaithfulness to Yahweh which is the cause of their actual humiliation, and change their outlook. At that very moment, another

prophet, Ezekiel, who is a true prophet speaks in a similar way.

A slow transformation is going to take place in the priests, the nobility, the artisans and the civil servants who were exiled and, after seventy years of exile, their children will return to Jerusalem as "the poor ones looking for Yahweh."

+ Chapters 30 and 31 bring us back to the happy years of King Josiah. Besides promoting the renewal of the faith and the worship of Yahweh, he managed to conquer part of what



The restoration of the northern kingdom

30 ¹ This is another word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh:

² Yahweh, God of Israel says, "Write in a book all I have communicated to you, ³ for the days are coming when I shall bring my captive people Israel and Judah back to the land I gave to their fathers as their inheritance.

⁴ These are words spoken by Yahweh to Israel:

⁵ We heard cries of fear,
terror and not peace!

⁶ Ask and see:

Does a man bear children?

Then why do I see every strong man
with his hands on his hips like a woman in
labour,

every face turned a ghastly colour?

⁷ How terrible that day!

there is none to equal it!

A time of distress for Jacob,
but he will be saved.

⁸ On that day, – declares Yahweh of hosts – I will break the yoke around his neck and burst his bonds. Then strangers will no longer make servants of them; ⁹ but they shall serve Yahweh their God and David their king whom I will raise up for them.

¹⁰ Yahweh says, "Jacob my servant, do not fear. Don't be afraid, Israel, for I will save you and your descendants from that far-off land where you are captive. Jacob shall return and know peace, molested by no one.

¹¹ I am with you to save you. I will completely destroy all the nations where you are scattered. You alone shall not be destroyed, but I will discipline you justly and not let you go unpunished."

¹² Yahweh says,

"Your wound is incurable,
your injury is grievous.

¹³ There is no one to plead your cause.

There is a remedy for an ulcer
but no healing for you!

¹⁴ All your lovers have forgotten you;

they care nothing for you.

For I struck you as an enemy does,
with a cruel punishment,
because of your great guilt
and the wickedness of your sin.

¹⁵ Why cry out now that you are hurt?
Is there no cure for your pain?

Because of your great crime and
grievous sin I have done this to you.

¹⁶ But all who devour you will in turn be devoured. Your oppressors will be taken captive; your plunderers will be plundered and those who despise you will be despised. Because you were called 'outcast – Zion for whom no one cares,' ¹⁷ I will restore you to health and heal your wounds," says Yahweh.

¹⁸ Yahweh says, "I will bring the captives back to Jacob's tents and have pity on his dwellings. The city will be rebuilt over its ruins and the palace restored on its original site. ¹⁹ From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of merrymaking.

I will multiply them and they shall not be few. I will honour them and they shall not be disdained. ²⁰ Their children will be as before and their community will be established before me. I will punish their oppressors.

²¹ Their leader will be one of themselves and their ruler shall emerge from their midst. I will bring him near to me for who would have the courage to approach me? ²² You shall be my people and I shall be your God."

²³ See the storm of Yahweh bursting forth in fury; like the turmoil of a hurricane it is sweeping down on the head of the wicked.

²⁴ The fierce anger of Yahweh will not turn away until he has done and fulfilled the purpose of his heart.

In the latter days you will understand this.

31 ¹ Yahweh declares that when that time comes he will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be his people.

² Thus says Yahweh:

The people who survived the sword
have found grace in the desert.

As Israel marched to his rest

7. Mt 24, 21; Rev 16, 18

21. Dt 17, 15

22. Lev 26, 12

10. Is 44, 2; Mt 4, 4

24. Jn 13, 7

12. Na 3, 19

1. Ezk 11, 20

17. Is 54, 6

3. Is 49, 14; Hos 11, 4

had been the kingdom of Israel and was now an Assyrian province after the fall of Samaria.

The days are coming when I shall bring back my captive people Israel. The Israelites had been expelled from the land and scattered. Now, they were not here to listen to Jeremiah, but he addresses them through time and space. What he is telling them also applies to Judah which, in its turn, is going to be destroyed and dispersed.

This time Yahweh speaks like the Father to the prodigal son. He recalls their sins of the past which forced him to punish them and he promises that he will bring about the return of his dispersed people.

He recalls their sins of the past which forced him to punish and he promises that he will bring about the return of his dispersed people. Similar promises fill chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah.



³ Yahweh appeared from afar saying,
I have loved you everlastingly,
so I have kept for you my mercy.

⁴ I will restore you again,
and you shall be rebuilt,
O virgin Israel!

You will take up your tambourines
and go out to dance joyfully.

⁵ You will plant vineyards again
on the hills of Samaria,
and the farmers who plant them
will enjoy their fruit.

⁶ A day will come when watchmen
will call out on the hills of Ephraim,
"Come, let us go to Zion,
to our God Yahweh!"

⁷ For Yahweh says this:
Shout with joy for Jacob;

rejoice for the greatest of nations.
Proclaim your praise and say:
"Yahweh has saved his people,
the remnant of Israel!"

⁸ Look, I will bring them back
from the land of the north,
gather them from the ends of the earth.

All of them – the lame and the blind,
mothers and women in labour –
a great throng will return.

⁹ They went weeping,
they will return in joy.
I will lead them to streams of water,
on a level path so that no one will

stumble,
for I am Israel's father
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

He who scattered Israel now gathers them!

¹⁰ Hear the word of Yahweh, O nations,
proclaim it on distant coastlands:
He who scattered Israel now gathers them together;
he guards them as a shepherd guards his flock.

¹¹ For Yahweh shall ransom Jacob
and redeem him from the hand of his conqueror.

¹² Shouting for joy, they will ascend Zion;
they will come streaming to Yahweh's blessings –
the grain, the new wine and the oil,
the young of the flocks and herds.

They will be like a well-watered garden;
no more will they be afflicted.

¹³ Maidens will make merry and dance,
young men and old as well.

I will turn their mourning into gladness,
instead of sorrow I will give them comfort and joy.

¹⁴ I will fill the priests with abundance,
and satisfy my people with my bounty
– Yahweh declares.

¹⁵ Thus speaks Yahweh:
"In Ramah is heard a voice
of mourning and great weeping,
Rachel wailing for her children
and refusing to be consoled,
for her children are no more."

¹⁶ Yahweh says this to her:
"Weep no more and dry your eyes;
your sorrow will have redress.



They will come back from the enemy's land.

¹⁷ There is hope for your descendants;
your sons will return to their own borders.

¹⁸ I heard Ephraim saying in grief:
'You disciplined me like an unruly calf,
and I have been disciplined.
Bring me back, and I will return,
for you are my God, my Lord.

¹⁹ Yes, I strayed, but I have repented.
Now I understand and I beat my breast;
I bear the disgrace of my youth,
I blush with shame and humiliation.'

²⁰ Is not Ephraim my favoured son,
the child in whom I delight?
Often have I threatened him,
but I still remember him,
and my heart yearns for him.
I must show him mercy,
declares Yahweh.

²¹ Set up road signs,
put up guideposts;
turn your attention to the highway,
the road by which you went.
Turn back, O virgin Israel,
turn back to these your cities.
²² How long will you continue to wander,
O unfaithful daughter?
Yahweh is creating something new on
earth –
the woman finds her husband again."

Restoration of Judah

²³ These are words of Yahweh, God of hosts and God of Israel, "When I bring back the captives to the land of Judah and its towns, the people will once more use the expression: 'Yahweh bless you, O dwelling of righteousness, holy mountain!'

²⁴ All Judah and its towns, the farmer and those who move about with their herds will live there in peace. ²⁵ I will refresh the weary and lift up the downhearted."

²⁶ I then awoke and looked about; my sleep had been peaceful.

²⁷ "The days are coming - this is the word of Yahweh - when I shall sow the people of

Israel and the people of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beasts. ²⁸ It will come about that just as I watched over them to uproot and overthrow, to destroy and bring disaster, so shall I do the same to build and plant - word of Yahweh.

²⁹ No longer will it be said: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

³⁰ Instead everyone will die because of their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes will have his teeth set on edge!

The new covenant

■ ³¹ The time is coming - it is Yahweh who speaks - when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and the people of Judah, ³² not like the one I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. They broke my covenant although I was their Lord.

³³ This is the covenant I shall make with Israel after that time: I will put

18. Ps 80, 4 20. Hos 11, 9 30. Dt 24, 16; Ezk 18, 2 31. 2 Cor 3, 6; Heb 9, 15

■ Here we must underscore 31:31-34 where Jeremiah delivers his most famous prophecy. During the bitter days which the Jewish people are experiencing, God reveals and Jeremiah an-

nounces the New and eternal Covenant between God and his people.

I will make a new covenant. This is like saying that the Sinai Covenant which made Israel

my Law within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God and they will be my people.

³⁴ And they will not have to teach each other, neighbour or brother, saying: 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the greatest to the lowliest, for I will forgive their wrongdoing and no longer remember their sin."

³⁵ This is the word of Yahweh, he who gives the sun for light during the day and orders the moon and the stars to give light at night,

he who stirs the sea and makes the waves roar, and who is called Yahweh, God of hosts:

³⁶ "Only if these laws vanish from my sight, – word of Yahweh – will the race of Israel cease to be a nation before me.

³⁷ Only if the skies above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched, only then will I reject the race of Israel because of what they have done – word of Yahweh.

³⁸ Behold the days are coming when the city will be rebuilt for Yahweh from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate ³⁹ and the measuring tape will stretch from there to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. ⁴⁰ The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown

and all the fields as far as the brook of Kidron and the corner of the Horse Gate on the east will be holy to Yahweh. Never again will the city be uprooted, never again destroyed."

Jeremiah buys a field

32 ¹ This is the word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh in the tenth year of Zedekiah, king of Judah, the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. ² At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem and Jeremiah the prophet was imprisoned in the Guards' Courtyard of the royal palace of Judah.

³ Zedekiah king of Judah had him shut up after saying to him, "Why do you prophesy in the name of Yahweh as you do? Yes, you said: 'I am going to hand this city to the king of Babylon who will take it.' ⁴ And Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape from the Chaldeans; he will be delivered into the power of the king of Babylon, speak face to face to him and see him with his own eyes. ⁵ And he will be brought to Babylon where he will remain until I deal with him. In any case your fight against the Chaldeans is hopeless."

⁶ So at that time Jeremiah said, "The word of Yahweh came to me: ⁷ Hanamel son of Shallum, your uncle is going to visit you and ask you to buy his field at Anathoth as it is your right to do so." ⁸ Then as Yahweh had said, Hanamel my cousin came to me in the court-

33. Ezk 36, 28; Zac 8, 8

34. 24, 7; Is 54, 13; Jn 6, 45

40. Jl 4, 17

7. Lev 25

God's people, had become obsolete or insufficient. God had bound himself to a family (Abraham's) which became a people under Moses's leadership. And, apparently his promises were more for the community than for individuals.

They broke my covenant. Actually, this covenant between Yahweh and Israel on Sinai had failed, through Israel's fault, not Yahweh's. But it is not a matter of renewing it as Joshua, Samuel, Hezekiah and Josiah had done so many times. It is not a matter of making another one like it, since this old covenant had already proven its weakness: people are sinful and unable to escape from their sins. There are moreover, no laws, or human solidarity, or any form of education which can bring God's grace to everyone and preserve them in the faith. There cannot be a true believer without a personal accepting of the divine Truth. The true people of God cannot be confused with any other people or human community: only will those who are reborn become part of God's people.

I will put my Law in their hearts. Now, Jeremiah knows the secret of the New Covenant. For he is aware of the change which occurred in him when Yahweh made him a prophet. Then, he discovered an intimate rela-

tionship with God which is entirely different from a religion of mere practices.

I will make another covenant with Israel. Jeremiah predicts the day when Yahweh will reveal himself to all believers as he had done with his great prophets. The law will be in their hearts and the hand of God will keep them on the right path, as was the case with Jeremiah when he doubted.

I will forgive their sins. A New Covenant will be achieved through the death of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. In celebrating the Last Supper, Jesus says: "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews will develop the meaning of the New Covenant (see Hebrews 8:8 and 10:16).

The Gospel of John will also clarify the meaning of *they will all know me*: in the Christian faith, not everyone receives personal revelations, but everyone is guided by the Father to Christ in whom are found all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom.

In chapter 34, Ezekiel expresses himself in a very similar way, with this difference: Ezekiel speaks of the coming of the Spirit and Jeremiah, of the New Covenant.



yard of the Guards and said, 'Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin since you have the right of possession and the redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.'

⁹ I then understood this was the word of Yahweh and I bought the field from Hanamel and I weighed out the silver for him, seventeen shekels of silver. ¹⁰ Then I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed and the silver weighed on the scales. ¹¹ Then I took the deed of purchase (the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions and the open copy). ¹² I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch, son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my uncle and the witnesses who signed the deed and before all the Jews who were sitting in the court of the Guards. ¹³ Then in their presence I commanded Baruch:

¹⁴ This is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says: Take these documents, both the sealed and the unsealed copies of the deed of purchase. Place them in an earthenware jar so that they may last a long time ¹⁵ for Yahweh God of hosts and God of Israel says this: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land."

Prayer of Jeremiah

¹⁶ When I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to Yahweh: ¹⁷ "Ah, Lord Yahweh, you have made the heavens and the earth with your great power and outstretched arm! To you nothing is impossible! ¹⁸ You show mercy to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers' sins on their children. Great and Mighty, Yahweh God of hosts is your name! ¹⁹ Great in counsel and mighty in deeds, your eyes follow the ways of all the sons of men, to give to each one according to his conduct and the fruit of his actions.

²⁰ You have continually worked signs and wonders, in the land of Egypt, in Israel and among all humankind and gained renown, as we see today. ²¹ You brought your people from the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm, arousing great terror.

²² You gave them this land which you had promised with an oath to their fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey. ²³ They entered and conquered it but they did not listen to you

and did not walk according to your Law. They refused to do what you commanded and you brought great misfortune on them. ²⁴ You see, O Yahweh, the mounds built up to take the city are reaching it. And the city exhausted by the sword, famine and plague will be given over to the Chaldeans. What you foretold has happened as you can now see! ²⁵ And yet you told me, O Lord Yahweh, to buy a field with silver and have the purchase witnessed and now the city is falling to the Chaldeans!"

God's answer

²⁶ The word of Yahweh then came to Jeremiah: ²⁷ "I am Yahweh, the God of all humankind. Is there anything impossible for me?"

²⁸ Therefore this is what Yahweh says: I am about to hand the city over to the Chaldeans and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon who will take it. ²⁹ The Chaldeans who are attacking the city will come in and set it on fire. They will burn the houses where the people aroused my anger by burning incense to Baal and pouring drink offerings to foreign gods. ³⁰ For the people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth.

³¹ All they did was to arouse my anger with the work of their hands – it is Yahweh who speaks – for this city has so aroused my anger and fury from the time it was built to this day, ³² that I must remove it from my sight. It is on account of all the evil the people of Israel and Judah have done to anger me – they, their kings and princes, their priests and prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

³³ They turned their backs to me and not their faces. Although I taught them time and time again they did not listen nor have they learned the lesson. ³⁴ They put their idols in the sanctuary that houses my Name to defile it. ³⁵ They built high places to Baal in the valley of Ben-Hinnom where they sacrificed their sons and daughters to Moloch, something I never commanded nor did I ever think they could do such a detestable thing and so make Judah so sinful.

I will bring them back

³⁶ As you say, this city exhausted by the sword, famine and plague will be handed over to the king of Babylon. But now listen to what Yahweh the God of Israel says: ³⁷ "See, I am

◆ During the second siege and prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah buys a field as if to prove that the land has not lost its worth; one day the fallen nation will rise

again. The end of the chapter (32:37) renews for Judah the same promise of the new covenant which he had predicted for Israel a few years before (chapters 30 and 31. 31).

18. Ex 20, 5

28. Num 18, 22; Gen 18, 24; Zac 8, 6

37. Ezk 27, 23



going to gather them from all the countries where I scattered them in my anger, fury and great wrath.

I will bring them back to this place and have them live in safety. ³⁸ They will be my people and I shall be their God.

³⁹ I will have them think and act in another way, so that they may always fear me for their own good and the good of their children.

⁴⁰ I will make an eternal covenant with them by which I shall never cease to do them good and I shall place my fear in their heart so that they may never turn away from me.

⁴¹ I shall rejoice in doing them good and I shall plant them securely in this land with all my heart and soul."

⁴² And Yahweh says, "Just as I brought great disaster on this people, so shall I bring them all the happiness I promised them.

⁴³ Then fields will be bought in this land about which you say that it is a wasteland without man or beast and given over to the Chaldeans.

⁴⁴ Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds written and sealed and witnessed in the territory of Benjamin and the region around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah, in the towns of the hill country, in the towns of Shephelah and those of the south.

Yes, I will bring back their captives" – word of Yahweh.

Another promise of restoration

33 ¹ When Jeremiah was still detained in the Guards' Court the word of Yahweh came to him a second time:

² He who made the earth, who fashioned and established it, he whose Name is Yahweh is speaking to you, ³ "Call me and I shall answer. I will reveal to you great and hidden things you have not known." ⁴ For this is what Yahweh God of Israel says, "You see what happened to the houses in this city and the royal palace of Judah that were demolished and used as a defence against the siege mounds in the ⁵ fighting against the Chaldeans. They have been filled with the dead bodies of the men I slew in the fury of my anger when I no longer looked to this city because of their wickedness.

⁶ But now I will apply a remedy and a healing. I will cure them and make them enjoy peace and truth. ⁷ I will bring back the captives of Judah and Israel and rebuild them as before.

⁸ I will cleanse them from the guilt of their sin against me and their infidelity. ⁹ This city will be for me a cause of joy, praise and glory in the sight of all the nations of the earth, when they

hear of all the good I do for them. They will fear and tremble when they see all the good and all the peace I provide for them."

¹⁰ Thus says Yahweh, "You say of this city that it is a desolation without men or animals. But in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem which are a ruins without men or animals ¹¹ there will be heard again the sound of merriment and happiness, the song of the newlywed and the voice of those who pray: 'Praise to Yahweh God of hosts, for Yahweh is good and his love endures forever!' The voice of those who sing praise in the House of Yahweh will be heard when I restore the fortune of the land as it was before," says Yahweh.

¹² Thus says Yahweh God of hosts: In this place, which is a desolation without men or animals and in all its towns, there will be again pasture for shepherds to shelter their flocks.

¹³ In the towns of the hill country, Shephelah and the south, in the territory of Benjamin and the villages around Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, flocks will pass under the hand of the one who counts them – word of Yahweh.

Promises to David's descendants

¹⁴ The days are coming when I shall fulfill the gracious promise that I made in favour of Israel and Judah.

¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will make him who is the shoot of righteousness sprout from David's line; he will practise justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. He will be called Yahweh-Our-Righteousness."

¹⁷ For Yahweh says, "David will never be without a descendant seated on the throne of Israel, ¹⁸ nor will the priests and Levites be without a man to stand before me continually to present burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and offer sacrifices."

¹⁹ The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah as follows, ²⁰ "If you are able to break my covenant with the day or my covenant with the night so that night and day would not follow at their appointed times, ²¹ then might my covenant with David my servant be broken. Only then would there be no descendant to reign on his throne and no priests or Levites to minister before me. ²² Just as it is impossible to count the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore, to the same extent shall I multiply the descendants of David and the Levites who minister before me."

²³ Again the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, ²⁴ "Have you not noticed what these



people say: 'Yahweh has rejected the two kingdoms he chose.' So they despise my people, not even considering them a nation. ²⁵ But Yahweh says: If I have not established my covenant with day and night, if I have not fixed the laws of the heavens and the earth, ²⁶ then I can reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and not take from among them rulers for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; but I am going to restore their fortune and have compassion on them."

A promise to Zedekiah

o34 ¹ This was the word of Yahweh addressed to Jeremiah when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and his army as well as all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his dominion, and all the peoples were fighting against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah:

² This is the word of Yahweh, God of Israel: "Go and say this to Zedekiah king of Judah: 'See, I am giving this city to the king of Babylon and he will set it on fire.' ³ You will not escape from his hands but will surely be captured and given over to him. You will see him face to face and speak directly to him and you will go to Babylon.' ⁴ Just listen, Zedekiah, king of Judah, to the word of Yahweh! This is what Yahweh says about you, 'You will not die by the sword; ⁵ no, you will die in peace. As they made funeral pyres in honour of your fathers, former kings, so will they make a fire in your honour and lament 'Alas, my master!' – word of Yahweh."

⁶ Then Jeremiah the prophet told all this to Zedekiah, king of Judah in Jerusalem. ⁷ At that time the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against the cities of Judah which were still resisting – Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah.

About the liberated slaves

⁸ The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah after King Zedekiah had made a treaty with all the people of Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for

the slaves. ⁹ Everyone was to free his Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no fellow Jew would be kept in bondage.

¹⁰ They agreed to this and so set them free. ¹¹ But afterwards they changed their mind and brought back the slaves they had freed and used them as slaves again.

¹² Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, ¹³ "Yahweh the God of Israel says this: I made a covenant with your fathers the day I brought them out of Egypt from the house of slavery and I said: ¹⁴ At the end of every seven years you will free your brother Hebrew who sold himself to you and has served you for six years. You are to send him away a free man. But your fathers did not listen and paid no attention. ¹⁵ Recently you repented and did what was right in my sight when each one proclaimed the freedom of his slave and you made a covenant with me in the House where my Name rests. ¹⁶ But now you have gone back on your word and profaned my Name. You have brought back your slaves, male and female, to whom you had given complete freedom and you have again reduced them to slavery.

¹⁷ That is why Yahweh says: Since you have not obeyed me in proclaiming freedom for your brothers and neighbours I now proclaim 'freedom' for you, freedom to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you detestable to every kingdom on earth. ¹⁸ The men who have sinned against my covenant, who have not observed

1. 32, 1. 9. Ne 5, 8. 14. Dt 12; 2 K 4, 1. 15. 1 K 8, 43. 16. Lev 19, 12

o This chapter includes two events from the second siege of Jerusalem.

34:1-7: Jeremiah invites Zedekiah to surrender to the Chaldeans as Jehoiakim had done during the first siege. This dialogue is also related in 21:1-7.

34:9-22: Concerning the liberation of slaves. The Bible does not accept that any member of

the people of God should lose freedom forever. If due to debts a man had to sell himself and become the servant of his creditor, this was not to last more than seven years. Every seven years a sabbatical year was proclaimed (see Dt 15:12) during which slaves of Hebrew descent were to be given their freedom.

The truth is that the social laws were poorly

the terms of the alliance they made with me, I will treat them like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its halves. ¹⁹ The princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the freemen who walked between the pieces of the calf, ²⁰ I will hand over to their enemies, to those who seek their lives. Their carcasses will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

²¹ Zedekiah and his officials I will give over to the hands of their enemies and to those who seek their life. You saw the army of the king of Babylon withdrawing from you. ²² But now I am giving a command and bringing them back to this city. They will fight against it, capture it and set it on fire. As for the towns of Judah I will reduce them to a wasteland without inhabitants."

The example given by the Rechabites

35 ¹ This was the message given to Jeremiah by Yahweh in the days of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah: ² "Go to the Rechabite family; speak to them and bring them to a room in the House of Yahweh and there give them wine to drink."

³ So I went to get Jaazaniah, son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah, his brothers and sons and all the household of the Rechabites. ⁴ I brought them to the House of Yahweh, into the room of the sons of Hanan, son of Igdaliah, the man of God. It was next to the room of the leaders which is above the room of Maasekah, son of Shallum, the doorkeeper. ⁵ I then placed pitchers of wine and cups before the men of the Rechabite family and said, "Drink wine!"

⁶ But they answered, "We don't drink wine because our father Jonadab son of Rechab gave us this command: 'Never drink wine, neither you nor your sons; ⁷ don't build a house

and don't sow seeds. You shall not plant a vineyard; do nothing like that but live in tents all your days so that you may live for a long time in the land where you dwell!'

⁸ We have obeyed Jonadab, son of Rechab our father in all that he commanded us, always abstaining from wine, we, our wives, our sons and daughters. ⁹ We haven't built houses to live in and we have no vineyards, fields or seeds. ¹⁰ We live in tents and we obey and practice all that Jonadab our father ordered us. ¹¹ But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked the country, we said: "Come, we shall go to Jerusalem to escape from the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Arameans. This is why now we stay in Jerusalem."

¹² Yahweh spoke again to Jeremiah, ¹³ "This is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says: Go and say to the men of Judah and to the citizens of Jerusalem: Will you not accept a correction and listen to what I say? — word of Yahweh. ¹⁴ Jonadab son of Rechab commanded his sons not to drink wine, and his words were observed; to this day they have obeyed their father in not taking wine. As for you, I have spoken to you time and time again and you have not heeded me! ¹⁵ I have sent you my servants the prophets again and again saying: Turn away from your wickedness, reform your way of life and do not follow other gods to serve them. Then you will live in the land I gave to you and your forefathers. But you neither heeded nor listened to me. ¹⁶ The descendants of Jonadab son of Rechab have carried out their father's order but these people have not obeyed me."

¹⁷ Therefore this is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says,

"I am going to bring on Judah and on everyone living in Jerusalem all the disaster I foretold, because I spoke and they would not listen, I called and they would not answer."

¹⁸ Then Jeremiah said to the family of Rechabites, "This is what Yahweh God of hosts and God of Israel says: 'Because you have obeyed Jonadab your father and observed all his instructions, because you have acted in accordance with what he commanded, ¹⁹ because of that — word of Yahweh — Jonadab shall not lack a descendant to stand before me always.'"

1. 2 K 10, 15

8. Heb 11, 13; 1 Pet 2, 11

observed in those days. And so, before the threat of siege, the most believing among the people of Jerusalem realized that the best way to obtain God's blessing would be to follow the social laws of the Bible and to liberate their slaves.

Yahweh rises in favor of the oppressed: he will destroy their own country if that is neces-

sary to punish those who so despise their brothers.

+ Chapters 36-44 could be called "Jeremiah's sufferings": they describe the fate of the prophet during the sieges of 598 and 587 and after the destruction of Jerusalem.



THE SUFFERINGS OF JEREMIAH

The scroll is burned

+36 ¹ In the fourth year of Jehoiaquim son of Josiah it happened that this word came to Jeremiah from Yahweh:

² "Provide yourself with a scroll and write on it all that I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the nations, from the first day I spoke to you in the time of Josiah until this day. ³ Perhaps the people of Judah will understand what afflictions I am thinking of sending them to make each of them turn away from his evil ways so that I may forgive their wickedness and sin."

⁴ Jeremiah then called Baruch son of Neriah and while Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on the scroll all that Yahweh had said.

⁵ Then Jeremiah commanded Baruch, "I am in jail and cannot enter the House of Yahweh. ⁶ So you go to the House of Yahweh on a day of fasting and read publicly all that you wrote as I dictated. Read it to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns. ⁷ Perhaps they will entreat Yahweh and each one will turn from his wickedness, for great is the wrath of Yahweh and the punishment with which he has threatened this people."

⁸ Baruch son of Neriah did all that the prophet Jeremiah had commanded about this reading in the House of Yahweh.

⁹ In the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiaquim son of Josiah, king of Judah, a fast before Yahweh was proclaimed to all the people in Jerusa-

lem and all the people who came from the towns of Judah.

Then in the House of Yahweh Baruch read publicly from the scroll the words of Jeremiah. ¹⁰ This he did in the room of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the secretary, in the upper court at the entry of the New Gate of the House of Yahweh.

¹¹ When Micaiah son of Gemariah, son of Shaphan heard of all Yahweh's words written on the scroll ¹² he went to the secretary's room in the king's house where all the officials were sitting – Elishama, the secretary, Delaiah, son of Shemaiah; Elnathan, son of Acbor; Gemariah, son of Shaphan; Zedekiah, son of Hananiah, and all the other officials.

¹³ Micaiah told them all that he had heard when Baruch read to the people from the scroll. ¹⁴ Then all the officials sent Jehudi, son of Netaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll from which you read to all the people and come!" So Baruch went with the scroll in his hand. ¹⁵ They told him to sit down and read it to them, and Baruch read it to them.

¹⁶ When they heard all that, they looked at one another in fear and said, "We shall tell this to the king."

¹⁷ They then questioned Baruch as to how he had written that and he said,

1. Ekk 2, 9

These are the last days of the kingdom of Judah. The events briefly related at the end of the second book of Kings take on a new meaning here because someone with much insight is experiencing them. In the midst of the masses who suffer without understanding, Jeremiah knows what God's plans are. This people, who neither believe nor obey the Lord, must lose their material illusions and after them, the best of their children will come to a more profound faith.

Nevertheless, Jeremiah is crushed by his people's disaster. After having suffered because of them, he is now suffering with them and he

becomes the figure of the suffering Saviour, Christ.

Baruch, son of Neriah, was secretary (36, 26), something like the chancellor of the king. He was also Jeremiah's secretary and he may have written these chapters.

36: The episode of the burned scroll takes place during the first blockade. Let us remember that in those days people wrote on strips of parchment, or sheepskin, which were rolled up.

37: Zedekiah is respectful toward Jeremiah. He is, in fact, at the mercy of his officials. Here, as in the Passion of Jesus, the rulers do not rule, but follow the mood of the majority.



¹⁸ "As he dictated these words, I wrote them in ink on the scroll." ¹⁹ Then the officials said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah hide yourselves and let no one know where you are."

²⁰ They put the scroll in the room of Elishama the secretary and went to the king in the courtyard and reported all to him.

²¹ The king then sent Jehudi to bring him the scroll. He brought it from Elishamah's room and read it to the king and to all the officials standing around him. ²² Now it was the ninth month and the king was seated in the winter palace and a fire was burning in the fire pot in front of him. ²³ Whenever Jehudi finished reading three or four columns they tore them off with the secretary's knife and threw them in the fire until the whole scroll was burned.

²⁴ The king and his officials were not afraid and they did not tear their garments when they heard all these words. ²⁵ And yet Elnathan, Deliah and Gemariah had urged the king not to burn the scroll, but he did not listen.

²⁶ The king then ordered Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the secretary and Jeremiah the prophet; but Yahweh concealed them.

²⁷ The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah after the king burned the scroll with the words

Baruch had written as Jeremiah dictated, ²⁸ "Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll that Jehoiakim burned." ²⁹ And tell Jehoiakim this message of Yahweh: You have burned the scroll and you said: This man dared to write that the king of Babylon will certainly destroy this land and wipe away from it men and animals! ³⁰ That is why Yahweh has spoken against Jehoiakim, king of Judah: Not one of his descendants will sit on the throne of David. His dead body will be exposed to the heat of day and the chill of night. ³¹ I will punish him, his children and his attendants for their wickedness. On them and on those living in Jerusalem and on the people of Judah I will bring all the affliction I have foretold against them, because they have paid no attention."

³² Jeremiah then took the other scroll and gave it to Baruch son of Neriah the secretary. He wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned in the fire, and he added many more similar words.

Zedekiah consults Jeremiah

37 ¹ Zedekiah was made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in place of Jehoiakin son of Jehoiakim. ² But neither he nor his attendants nor the people of the land paid attention to the words of Yahweh spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.

³ King Zedekiah sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah with the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to Jeremiah to say, "Intercede for us with Yahweh our God!" ⁴ At that time Jeremiah was still going about among the people and had not been put in prison. ⁵ Pharaoh's army had come out of Egypt and when the Chaldeans heard of this, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

⁶ Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah the prophet: ⁷ "Yahweh the God of Israel has spoken. Say this to the king of Judah who sent you to consult me: Pharaoh's army that

IS JEREMIAH A TRAITOR?

How strange is Jeremiah's attitude during this war in which the Jews defend their independence to death!

Jeremiah accuses his people and not the Chaldeans in whom he only sees God's instrument.

Jeremiah advises surrender and submission to the foreign power. He even invites the exiled Jews to promote the prosperity of their conquerors.

And we cannot say that these are mistakes on the part of the prophet since his attitude cannot be separated from his message. Two reasons clarify Jeremiah's position:

— On one hand, the Jewish nationalists do not know what God wants to do with Israel in the future. They see only defeat and slavery and they prefer to fight to death. Jeremiah, however knows the extraordinary future that Yahweh has in store for Israel. Israel bears the hopes of the future world and so, they must not disappear in a hopeless struggle.

— On the other hand, the Jewish leaders focus only on the appearances of freedom and patriotism. To them, everything seems lost if they submit to foreign authority. Jeremiah, for his part, focuses on the hearts of men. To be Jewish means to preserve Israel's ideals and reasons for living; to be free means to serve Yahweh alone.



was on its way to help you is about to return to its own land, ⁸ and the Chaldeans will come back and attack this city. They will capture it and set it on fire.

⁹ Do not deceive yourselves by saying that the Chaldeans are sure to stay away from you. They will not! ¹⁰ Even if you had defeated the whole Chaldean army and they were left with only wounded men, they would all come out of their tents and set fire to this city."

Jeremiah in the well

¹¹ While the Chaldean army was withdrawing from Jerusalem because of the advance of Pharaoh's troops, ¹² Jeremiah left Jerusalem to go to the territory of Benjamin to receive an inheritance there. ¹³ At the Benjamin Gate he was stopped by a sentry named Irijah, son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah who said, "You are deserting to the Babylonians!"

¹⁴ "That's not true!" Jeremiah said, but Irijah did not listen. He arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. ¹⁵ They were angry with Jeremiah, struck him and locked him in the house of Jonathan the secretary which had been made into a prison.

¹⁶ When Jeremiah was put in the dungeon cells and had been there for a number of days, ¹⁷ King Zedekiah sent for him and secretly questioned him in his house: "Is there any word from Yahweh?" Jeremiah replied, "Yes, there is!" and added, "You will be handed over to the king of Babylon!"

¹⁸ Then Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What wrong have I done

to you, to your servants or to the people that you should put me in prison? ¹⁹ Where are your prophets ²⁰ who said to you: 'The King of Babylon will not come to attack you and destroy this land?' Now hear me, my lord king! Listen to my petition and do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, for fear I may die there!"

²¹ King Zedekiah ordered that Jeremiah be transferred to the Guards' Court and that each day he be given a loaf of bread from the bakers' street until the supply of bread was exhausted. So Jeremiah remained in the Guards' Court.

38 ¹ Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur son of Malchiah heard what Jeremiah said publicly ² in the name of Yahweh, "If you stay in the city you will die by the sword, famine and plague, but whoever surrenders to the Chaldeans will escape with his life although he may lose everything. ³ For Yahweh has spoken: I have handed over this city to the king of Babylon and he will take it."

⁴ The officials then said to the king, "This man should be put to death. All he does is to weaken the hands of the soldiers remaining in the city and the hands of all the people. In fact he is not out to save the people but to do harm." ⁵ King Zedekiah said, "He is in your hands for the king can do nothing against you."

11. Ps 69

5. Dn 6, 16; 14, 30

And so, it is essential to him that his compatriots do not become contaminated by the gods and the false values of the Chaldeans; in comparison, to submit to the yoke of a Chaldean master seems a much lesser evil. Besides, Jeremiah shares the ideas expressed particularly in the book of Judges: if Israel keeps faith and observes the Law, sooner or later, it will recover its independence and return home.

Put in modern terms, Jeremiah's attitude contains two lessons:

- Do not insist on fighting for causes or institutions which are no longer relevant to a world which has undergone irreversible changes and in which God calls us to a different mission.

- Know that a people's true independence is their moral and cultural independence. It would be tragic if their children, dazzled by a foreign way of life, were to sacrifice their traditional moral values, or in a subservient way adopt norms and forms of development imposed from outside.



⁶ So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malchiah the king's son, in the Guards' Court. They lowered him by means of ropes. There was no water but only mud in the cistern and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

⁷ Ebedmelech, an Ethiopian official of the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the cistern. While the king was sitting at the Benjamin Gate, ⁸ Ebedmelech went and spoke to him, ⁹ "My lord king! It was evil of these men to do all they did to Jeremiah the prophet. They threw him into the cistern where he will die."

¹⁰ So the king ordered Ebedmelech the Ethiopian: "Take three men from here and draw Jeremiah the prophet out from the cistern before he dies."

¹¹ Ebedmelech took the men with him and went into the king's house beneath the treasury. There he got pieces of rags and old clothes which he lowered by means of ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. ¹² Ebedmelech said to Jeremiah, "Put the pieces of rags and old clothes under your armpits, over the ropes." This Jeremiah did. ¹³ Jeremiah was then drawn up from the cistern by means of the ropes and he stayed in the Guards' Court.

¹⁴ King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and received him at the third entrance of the House of Yahweh and there said to him, "I am going to ask you a question; hide nothing from me!" Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, ¹⁵ "If I tell you something, won't you put me to death? And if I give you counsel you will not listen." ¹⁶ King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah: "As Yahweh lives who gave us a soul, I will not have you die and I will not hand you over to those who want to kill you."

¹⁷ Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what Yahweh God of hosts and God of Israel says: If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon you will live and the city will not be set on fire. You and your household will live. ¹⁸ But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Chaldeans and they will set it on fire. For your part, you will not escape."

¹⁹ King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am uneasy because of the people of Judah who have surrendered to the Chaldeans. I fear the Chaldeans will give me over to them and they will ill-treat me." ²⁰ Jeremiah said, "They will not hand you over. Listen to what Yahweh says to you through me; it will be well with you and you will live. ²¹ But if you refuse to surrender, this is what Yahweh let me see.

²² All the women left in your palace will be brought to the officers of the king of Babylon and will sing this song: 'Your friends have deceived you and overcome you. When your feet sank into the mud, they turned away!' ²³ All your wives and children shall be led out to the Chaldeans and you will not escape from them. You will be caught by the king of Babylon and this city will be burned down!"

²⁴ Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Let no one know about this conversation or you will die. ²⁵ If the officials hear that I have spoken with you and if they come to you and ask you what I spoke of to you, even though they threaten you, ²⁶ you will say to them: I only made a petition to the king not to send me back to the house of Jonathan to die."

²⁷ All the officials came to Jeremiah and questioned him. He replied just as the king had instructed him,



and they said no more as the conversation had not been heard.

²⁸ But Jeremiah remained in the Guards' Court until the day Jerusalem was taken.

The fall of Jerusalem and the fate of Jeremiah

39 ¹ In the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with his whole army and they besieged Jerusalem. ² On the ninth day of the fourth month in Zedekiah's eleventh year a breach was made in the city wall. ³ All the officials of the king of Babylon entered and took their seats at the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sherazer of Samgar, Sarsekim chief officer, Nergal-Sherazer a high official and all the officials of the king of Babylon.

⁴ On seeing this, Zedekiah king of Judah and all the military fled from the city by night, going out by way of the king's garden through the gate between the two walls in the direction of Arabah. ⁵ The Chaldean army pursued and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. He was taken captive and led to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath and there Nebuchadnezzar passed sentence on him.

⁶ There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah in his presence and all the nobles of Judah. ⁷ He put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him with a double bronze chain to take him to Babylon.

⁸ The Chaldeans set fire to the royal palace and the houses of the people and then broke down the walls of Jerusalem. ⁹ Nebuzaradan, commander of the bodyguard, deported to Babylon the remainder of the people who stayed in the city as well as those who had deserted to him and those of the craftsmen who were still there. ¹⁰ As for the poorest people who had nothing, Nebuzaradan left them at that time in the land of Judah, giving them vineyards and fields.

¹¹ Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given orders about Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan chief of the bodyguard: ¹² "Take him and look after him; do him no harm but deal with him just as he tells you." ¹³ Nebuzaradan commander of the bodyguard, Nebushazban a chief officer, Nergal-Shazezer, a high official and all the other officers of the king of Babylon ¹⁴ sent and had Jeremiah taken from the Guards' Court and given over to Gedaliah son

of Ahikam son of Shaphan. So he remained among the people.

Reward for Ebedmelek

■ ¹⁵ Now the word of Yahweh had come to Jeremiah when he was a prisoner in the Guards' Court: ¹⁶ "Go and speak to Ebedmelek the Ethiopian: This is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says: You will see on that day that I am about to carry out my words foretelling disaster and not prosperity for this city.

¹⁷ But I will save you on that day – word of Yahweh – and you will not be given over to the men you fear. For I will certainly save you and you will not fall by the sword. ¹⁸ You will escape with your life because you have trusted me – it is Yahweh who speaks."

Jeremiah is freed

40 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah after Nebuzaradan, commander of the bodyguard, had released him from Ramah when he had taken him, bound in chains, with those to be deported from Jerusalem and Judah to Babylon. ² The commander of the bodyguard took Jeremiah and said to him, "Yahweh your God foretold this calamity for this place. ³ Yahweh has brought about what he predicted because you sinned against him and did not listen to him. ⁴ But today I am freeing you from these chains that were on your hands. If you prefer to come with me to Babylon, come and I will look after you, but if you prefer not to come with me to Babylon, then remain in this country; go where you consider it right and good for you to live." ⁵ Nebuzaradan added, "Why don't you go back to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, the man appointed by the king of Babylon to be over the towns of Judah? You could stay with him among your people. Yet go wherever it seems right for you to go." The commander of the bodyguard gave him provisions and a gift and set him on his way. ⁶ And so Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.

Gedaliah, the governor

◆ ⁷ Now all the army chiefs who were in the open country with their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam over the land and put him in charge of the men, women and children and the low-

liest of the people who had not been deported to Babylon. ⁹ They came to Gedaliah at Mizpah: Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite and Jaazaniah son of Maacathite and their men.

⁹ Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan swore to them and their men: "Don't be afraid of serving the Chaldeans; stay in the country, serve the king of Babylon and all will be well with you. ¹⁰ As for me, my base is Mizpah and I am your representative with the Chaldeans who settle at this place. For your part gather wine, fruit and oil; store it in your vessels and stay in the towns you have occupied."

¹¹ The Jews who were in Moab, Ammon, Edom and in the other lands also heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of the population and that he had placed over them Gedaliah son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan. ¹² All these Jews returned from the places where they had been dispersed and came to Gedaliah at Mizpah in the land of Judah. There they gathered in wine and fruit in great quantities.

Gedaliah murdered

¹³ Johanan son of Kareah and all the chiefs of guerrilla warfare came to Gedaliah at Mizpah ¹⁴ and said, "Don't you know that Baalis, king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to kill you?" ¹⁵ But Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, did not believe him.

Then Johanan spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, "Let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah without anyone knowing. Why should he attempt to kill you; why should all the Jews assembled with you be dispersed and the rest of Judah perish?" ¹⁶ But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, "Don't do that because what you have said about Ishmael is a lie."

41 ¹ In the seventh month it happened that Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama of the royal family who had been chief officer of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan at Mizpah. While they were eating together ² Ish-

mael and the men with him stood up and slew Gedaliah with the sword, thus killing the man whom the king of Babylon had appointed governor of the land.

³ Ishmael also killed the Jews who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah as well as the Chaldean soldiers who were there.

⁴ Two days after the assassination of Gedaliah and before anyone had heard of it, ⁵ eighty men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria arrived with beards shaved, torn clothes and their bodies slashed, carrying offerings and incense to the House of Yahweh.

⁶ Ishmael son of Nethaniah left Mizpah to meet them weeping as they went. He said to them, ⁷ "Come along to Gedaliah, son of Ahikam." But as soon as he came to the centre of the town, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men with him killed them and threw their bodies into a cistern. ⁸ Ten of these men, however, said to Ishmael, "Don't kill us for we have provisions hidden in the country, corn, oil, barley and honey." These Ishmael did not kill with the others.

⁹ The cistern where Ishmael had thrown the corpses of these people he had killed was the large cistern built by King Asa when he had to defend himself against Basha king of Israel. Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled it with their corpses.

¹⁰ Ishmael took captive the small population of Mizpah, the royal princesses whom Nebuzaradan, commander of the bodyguard, had left in the care of Gedaliah. Ishmael obliged them to follow him and set out for the land of the Ammonites.

¹¹ When Johanan son of Kareah and the army officers with him heard of the crimes of Ishmael they assembled their men and set off to fight Ishmael. ¹² They caught up with him at the great pool of Gibeon.

¹³ As soon as the people Ishmael had taken by force from Mizpah saw Johanan, son of Kareah and the army officers with him, they rejoiced ¹⁴ and turned back to join Johanan. ¹⁵ In the meantime Ishmael was able to flee from Johanan with eight men and went to the Ammonites.

¹⁶ Then Johanan and the army officers with him took the people he had rescued from Ishmael, son of Nethaniah. They were those men.

1. 2 K 25, 25

◆ The Chaldeans had made Judah a province of their empire. As its governor, they named a Jew, Gedaliah, belonging to the Shaphan family who had always been favorable to Jeremiah. The resistance party murders him and with this, its only gain is a new dispersion of the Jews.

Chapters 42-44 show us Jeremiah fighting his people for the last time. There is not even one faction that listens to the prophet. Those favouring resistance to the Chaldeans as well as those in favor of submission, follow their own whims and refuse to obey Yahweh.

women, children and court officials that Ishmael carried off by force from Mizpah after slaying Gedaliah. Johanan brought them from Gibeon, ¹⁷ and they stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem. They planned to go on later towards Egypt ¹⁸ for fear of the Chaldeans because Ishmael had slain Gedaliah who was appointed governor of the land by the king of Babylon.

The flight to Egypt

42 ¹ Then the army officers, especially Johanan, son of Kareah and Jezeiah son of Hoshai, and all the people from the smallest to the greatest came to speak to Jeremiah: ² "Listen to our plea and pray to Yahweh our God for us, this remnant of people, because really we are few from many, as you can see. ³ May Yahweh your God show us the way we should go and what we should do."

⁴ Jeremiah the prophet answered them, "I have heard you. Yes, I am going to speak to Yahweh as you have requested. And whatever be the word of Yahweh, I shall let you know it without hiding anything."

⁵ They said to Jeremiah, "May Yahweh be a true and worthy witness against us if we do not act according to every word that Yahweh your God will say to us through you! ⁶ Whether it be good or bad for us we will obey Yahweh our God to whom we are sending you, so it will be well with us for having obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God."

⁷ Ten days later the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah. ⁸ He then called Johanan, son of Kareah and the army officers with him and all the people from the least to the greatest ⁹ and said to them, "This is the word of Yahweh, God of Israel to whom you sent me with your petition: ¹⁰ If you wish to live peacefully in this land I will build you up and not pull you down, I will plant you and not uproot you for I will relent of the harm I did you. ¹¹ You are afraid of the king of Babylon, but do not fear him – word of Yahweh – for I am with you to save you and rescue you from his hand. ¹² I will put mercy in his heart so that he may have mercy on you and let you live in your own land. ¹³ But if you say: 'No, we will no longer live in this land,' disobeying the voice of Yahweh your God, ¹⁴ and if you say: 'No, we shall go to Egypt where we shall no more have wars or hear the trumpet call, where we shall not be hungry for bread!'"

¹⁵ Then hear the word of Yahweh, remnant of Judah! Yahweh God of hosts and God of Israel speaks: "If you turn towards Egypt to go there and stay there, ¹⁶ the sword you fear will strike

you there in the land of Egypt and famine which you dread will be yours there in Egypt and you will die. ¹⁷ All those who turn towards Egypt to enter and live there will die by sword, famine and pestilence. No one will escape or flee from the misfortune that I will bring upon them."

¹⁸ This is what Yahweh God of hosts and God of Israel says, "Just as my burning anger was poured out on the people of Jerusalem, so will my fury be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You will become a curse and a reproach and you will never again see this place." ¹⁹ That is what Yahweh has foretold, O remnant of Judah. Do not go to Egypt; be quite sure that I have warned you today. ²⁰ You risked your lives when you sent me to Yahweh your God saying: 'Pray for us to Yahweh our God and tell us all that Yahweh says and we shall do it.' ²¹ I have told you today though you still do not obey Yahweh your God in all that he told you through me. ²² Be sure of this, it will be by the sword, famine and pestilence that you will die in the place where you want to go and live."

43 ¹ Jeremiah had hardly finished giving the message of Yahweh to the people – all that Yahweh had sent him to say – ² when Azariah son of Hoshiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, "You are lying! Yahweh our God did not send you to tell us not to go and settle in Egypt. ³ No, Baruch son of Neriah is prompting you to hand us over to the Chaldeans either to be killed or deported to Babylon!"

⁴ So neither Johanan son of Kareah nor the army officers nor the people heeded Yahweh's command to stay in the land of Judah. ⁵ Instead Johanan and the army officers led away the remnant of the Jews who had returned to the land of Judah from the nations where they had been driven. ⁶ They also led away the men, women, children and the royal princesses – all those that Nebuzaradan, commander of the bodyguard, had left in the care of Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, with Jeremiah, the prophet and Baruch, son of Neriah. ⁷ So in defiance of Yahweh's order they entered Egypt and arrived at Tahpanhes.

Jeremiah foretells the invasion of Egypt

⁸ There at Tahpanhes the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah: "While the Jews are watching you, ⁹ take some large stones and bury them in clay in the brick terrace at the entrance to Pharaoh's house at Tahpanhes ¹⁰ and then say to them: This is what Yahweh God of hosts

and God of Israel says: I am sending for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and he will set his throne over these stones that I have hidden here and spread a royal canopy. ¹¹ He shall come and strike the land of Egypt bringing death to those destined to die, captivity for those destined to be taken captive, sword for those destined for the sword. ¹² He will set fire to the temples of the Egyptian gods; these gods will be burned or carried away. As a shepherd wraps himself in a cloak, so will the king of Babylon wrap the land of Egypt about himself and depart in safety. ¹³ He will break the sacred pillars at Heliopolis and burn the temples of the gods in Egypt."

Jeremiah's last warnings

44 ¹This word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews living in Egypt, in Migdal, Tahpanhes, Memphis and the territory of Patros: ²"You have seen all the disaster that I brought on Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. ³ Today they are no more than a ruins without inhabitants because of the evil they have done. They have angered me by offering incense to foreign gods neither they nor their fathers knew.

⁴ I sent them my servants the prophets time and time again to tell them: 'Do not do this abominable thing that I detest!' ⁵ But they did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn away from their evil ways or give up worshipping strange gods. ⁶ Then the fury of my anger was loosed and blazed in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem making them the desolate ruins they are today.

⁷ And now Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel asks you: Why do you bring such great harm on yourselves? Because of your deeds every man, woman, child and infant will be taken from Judah and you will be left without a remnant? ⁸ Why do you anger me with the work of your hands? Why do you worship foreign gods in Egypt where you came to live? Surely you will decrease in number and be a curse and an object of reproach among all the nations? ⁹ Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers and the misdeeds of the kings of Judah and its princes, and the evil behaviour of your wives in the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem?

¹⁰ So far they have had neither contrition nor fear and have not followed my law and my decrees that I set before you and your fathers."

¹¹ Because of this Yahweh God of hosts and God of Israel warns you, "I am turning my face away from you to bring disaster on you

and completely destroy Judah. ¹² The remnant of Judah that chose to enter Egypt and live there will all perish. They will be destroyed by the sword and famine and become an object of horror and cursing, of condemnation and reproach. ¹³ I will punish those in Egypt as I punished Jerusalem with the sword, famine and pestilence. Except for a few refugees, ¹⁴ none of the remnant of Judah that came to Egypt will escape or flee, and return to Judah where you long to go and live."

¹⁵ Then all the men who knew their wives were offering incense to foreign gods and all the women, a great assembly, replied to Jeremiah in a louder voice. ¹⁶ "As for what you say in the name of Yahweh we will not listen; ¹⁷ we want to do all that we said we wanted to do: ¹⁸ burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out wine to her as we did, we and our fathers, our kings and princes in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. Then we had our fill of bread and were prosperous and free from misfortune. ¹⁹ But since we stopped burning incense and pouring out libations to the queen of heaven we have been in need of everything and have perished by the sword and famine. And the women added, "When we offered incense and poured libations to the queen of heaven, didn't our husbands know that we made sacrificial cakes decorated with her image?"

²⁰ Jeremiah then answered all the people, men and women, who had told him this: ²¹ "Is it not better that Yahweh remembered the incense you burned in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you, your fathers, your kings, princes, and all the people?"

Do you think it slipped his memory? ²² Yahweh could no longer bear the sight of your evil-doing and the detestable things you did. That is why your land has become the curse, the desolate waste without inhabitants that it is today!

²³ All the misfortune that you are suffering today has happened because you burned incense and sinned against Yahweh, because you did not obey him or follow his law, his instructions and his commands."

²⁴ Jeremiah then addressed all the people especially the women, "Listen to Yahweh's message: ²⁵ This is what Yahweh the God of hosts and the God of Israel says: You and your wives think that what you say with your lips becomes an obligation you must fulfill. You say: 'We shall keep the vows we have made to burn incense and pour out wine to the queen of heaven.' Go ahead! Keep your vows and do

Invasion of Egypt

¹³ This is the message Yahweh gave to the prophet Jeremiah about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who was to attack Egypt:

¹⁴ "Announce this in Egypt, and proclaim it in Migdol, Memphis and Tahpanhes. Say to them:

Take your posts; prepare for the worst!
The sword has devoured your neighbours.

¹⁵ Why has Apis fled?

Your black bull god did not make a stand!

Why? Because Yahweh thrust him down

¹⁶ and caused him to stumble and fall.

Then they said to each other:

'Get up, let us go back to our people,
to the land of our birth,
away from the devouring sword.'

¹⁷ Pharaoh, king of Egypt, will be called
"The noisy one who lets his chance slip

by."

¹⁸ As surely as I live – says the King
whose name is Yahweh Sabaoth –
one will come who is like Tabor,
like Carmel above the sea.

¹⁹ Pack your belongings ready for exile,
you who live in Egypt,
for Memphis will be laid waste,
without inhabitants and desolate.

²⁰ Egypt is a beautiful heifer,
but a gadfly from the north has come
upon her.

²¹ The mercenaries in her ranks
are like fattened calves;
but they too have fled
failing to stand their ground,
for the day of their calamity has come,
the time of their punishment.

²² She makes a sound like a fleeing
serpent

as her enemies advance in force,
coming against her with axes,
like loggers cutting down trees.

²³ Dense though her forest be,
they will raze it – says Yahweh.
They are beyond number,
more numerous than locusts.

²⁴ The daughter of Egypt will be abased,
handed over to the people of the north."

²⁵ Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel, has
said: "I will punish Amon of Thebes, and
Egypt with her gods and kings, Pharaoh and
those who trust in him. ²⁶ I will hand them over
to those who seek their lives, to Nebuchadnezzar,

king of Babylon, and his ministers. Later,
however, Egypt will be inhabited again as in
times past – it is Yahweh who says so.

²⁷ But fear not, my servant Jacob; be not
dismayed, O Israel. I will deliver you from a
distant land, your descendants from their place
of exile. Jacob will again find rest, and no
one will make him afraid.

²⁸ Fear not, Jacob my servant, for I am with
you – Yahweh speaks – I will make an end of
the nations among which I scattered you, but I
will spare you. I will discipline you, though
with justice; I will not let you go unpunished.

Against the Philistines

47 ¹ This is Yahweh's word that came to
the prophet Jeremiah concerning the
Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza.

² Thus says Yahweh:

"Look, waters rise from the north;
soon they will become a raging flood
overflowing the land and all it contains,
the towns and their inhabitants.
All dwellers in the land will wail

³ at the sound of the hooves of stamping
steeds,
the rattle of chariots, the rumbling of
wheels.

Fathers forget their children,
as their hands fall limp.

⁴ The day of ruin has come upon the
Philistines;

Tyre and Sidon, the last of their allies,
are cut off from them.

Yahweh is set to destroy the Philistines,
the remnant from the coasts of Caphtor.

⁵ Gaza is shaved bald,
Ashkelon has perished.
O remnant in the valley,
how long will you gash yourselves?

⁶ O sword of Yahweh,
how long before you rest?
Return to your scabbard;
stop and keep still!

⁷ But how can it rest,
when it is Yahweh who commanded it
to attack Ashkelon and the seacoast?"

Against Moab

48 ¹ Concerning Moab. Yahweh the God
of Israel, says this:

"Woe to Nebo, for it is laid waste.
Kiriathaim is captured and disgraced;
the fortress is shattered and abased.

² No more will Moab be praised;

men in Heshbon are plotting her downfall:

'Let us put an end to that nation!'

You, too, Madmen, will be subdued;
behind you stalks the sword.

³ Listen, a cry from Horonaim –
a cry of ruin and destruction!

⁴ Moab is destroyed;
her cry is heard as far as Zoar.

⁵ Her little ones go up the way to Lulith,
weeping bitterly as they make the ascent.
On the descent to Horonaim
the cry of destruction is still heard.

⁶ Flee, run for your lives,
like the wild asses in the desert.

⁷ Since you trusted in your deeds and riches,

you also will be captured.
Chemosh will go into exile,
together with her priests and officials.

⁸ Upon every city the destroyer comes,
and not a single city escapes.

The valley is despoiled,
the plain plundered,
as Yahweh has declared.

⁹ Bury Moab for she has perished!

Her cities will become desolate,
with no inhabitant left.

¹⁰ A curse be on him who is lax in performing the work of Yahweh! A curse be on him who holds back his sword from shedding blood!

¹¹ From his youth Moab has lived at ease
resting complacently upon lees,
never having gone into exile,
never having been decanted;
so she kept her own flavor as wine,
her aroma remained the same.

¹² And so the day will come – Yahweh says –
when I will send decanters to her. They will
empty her flasks and break her jars. ¹³ Then
Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh, as Israel
has been ashamed of Bethel, in which they put
their trust.

¹⁴ How can you say, 'We are heroes and
valiant men of war?' ¹⁵ Moab will be destroyed,
her towns shattered; her finest young men will
be slaughtered – it is the King who speaks,
whose name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

¹⁶ Moab's ruin is near at hand;
her downfall comes at top speed.

¹⁷ All you her neighbours, mourn for her,
all you who knew her well;
say, 'How the mighty scepter is broken,
the glorious rod!'

¹⁸ Come down from glory,
sit on the parched ground,
all you who dwell in Dibon;

Moab's destroyer has come against you,

he has destroyed your stronghold.

¹⁹ Stand by the way and watch closely,
you who dwell in Aroer;
ask the men who flee, the women who
escape,

ask them what has happened.

²⁰ Moab is shamed, oh, yes, destroyed;
howl and cry out for her.

Announce it by the Armon
that Moab is ruined.

²¹ Judgment has come on the tableland: on
Holon, Jahzah and Mephaath, ²² on Dibon,
Nebo and Beth-diblathaim, ²³ on Kiriathaim,
Beth-gamul and Bethmeon, ²⁴ on Kerieth and
Bozrah, on all the cities of Moab, far and near.
²⁵ The horn of Moab is cut off and her arm
broken – it is Yahweh who speaks.

²⁶ Make her drunk! Because she magnified
herself against Yahweh, Moab will wallow in
her vomit and become a laughingstock in turn.

²⁷ Was not Israel a laughingstock to you? Was
she found among thieves, that whenever you
speak of her you wag your head?

²⁸ Leave the cities and dwell in the rocky
cliffs,

O inhabitants of Moab.

Learn from the dove that makes its nest
out of reach on the edge of a cliff.

²⁹ We have heard of the pride of Moab,
of her loftiness and arrogance,
of the haughtiness of her heart.

³⁰ Yahweh says: I know her insolence;
her words are false,
her deeds are vain.

³¹ And so I wail for Moab;
for the whole of Moab I moan;
for the men of Kir-heres I mourn.

³² O vineyard of Sibmah,
I weep for you more than for Jazer.
Your branches spread as far as the sea,
all the way to the sea of Jazer.
The destroyer has fallen
on your harvest and your vintage.

³³ Jubilation is at an end
in the fruit gardens of Moab;
the vintage shout of joy is not heard,
for I have drained the wine from the
wine vats.

³⁴ The cry of Heshbon and Elealeh is heard
as far as Jahaz. From Zoar to Horonaim and
Eglath-shelishiyah, their lament is heard, for
even the waters of Nimrim have become deso-
late.

³⁵ Yahweh says: I will bring to an end any
man in Moab who offers sacrifice on the high
place and burns incense to his gods.

³⁶ And that is why my heart, like a flute,
sobs for Moab, moans for the men of Kir-heres
whose accumulated riches have all perished.

³⁷ Every head is shorn, every beard cut off; gashes are on their hands, sackcloth covers their loins. ³⁸ There is nothing but lamentation on all the housetops and in the public squares of Moab, for I have shattered her like a vessel that no one wants – says Yahweh.

³⁹ What terror has seized Moab, what wailing! Oh, how she has turned back in shame! Moab has become a laughingstock and a horror to her neighbors.

⁴⁰ For thus says Yahweh: Look, an eagle is swooping down, spreading its wings over Moab.

⁴¹ The towns will be captured, the strongholds seized.

The heart of Moab's warriors on that day will be like the heart of a woman in travail.

⁴² Moab will be destroyed as a nation because she defied the Lord.

⁴³ Terror, pit, and snare be upon you, O people of Moab – says Yahweh.

⁴⁴ He who flees from terror will fall into the pit; he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare; for I will let this happen to Moab in the year of her punishment – says Yahweh.

⁴⁵ Fugitives stop in the shadow of Heshbon, for a fire has gone from the house of Sihon, burning Moab's skull and her boasters' crown.

⁴⁶ Woe to you, Moab,
people of Chemosh who suffer calamity!
Your sons are taken into exile,
your daughters into captivity.

⁴⁷ But in the days to come I will restore the fortunes of Moab – Yahweh declares."

The judgment on Moab ends here.

Against Ammon

49 ¹ Concerning the Ammonites. Yahweh says this:

"Has Israel no sons?
Has she no heir?
Why then has Milcom disinherited Gad,
why have his people settled in its cities?

² But the days are coming
– says Yahweh –
when I will sound the battle alarm
against Rabbah of the Ammonites.
It will become a heap of ruins,
its villages destroyed by fire.
Then Israel will dispossess
those who had dispossessed her
– Yahweh says.

³ Wail, Heshbon, for the destroyer
marches!

Howl, inhabitants of Rabbah!
Put on sackcloth, lament,

run to and fro, gashing yourselves;
for Milcom goes into exile,
along with his priests and officials.

⁴ Why boast of your valleys,
your valleys flowing with fruit,
O faithless daughter,
trusting in your riches and saying,
'Who will dare attack me?'

⁵ Look, I will bring terror upon you;
you will be driven away,
everyone making his own way,
with no one to gather the fugitives.

⁶ Yet I will restore the fortunes
of the Ammonites later on.
It is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks."

Against Edom

⁷ Concerning Edom, this is what Yahweh says:

"Is there no more wisdom left in Teman
Has counsel perished from the prudent?
Has their understanding decayed?

⁸ Flee or hide in dark caves,
you inhabitants of Dedan,
for I will bring destruction upon Esau
when I come to punish him.

⁹ If grape pickers worked in your
vineyard,
would they not leave gleanings behind?
If thieves came to you at night,
would they not steal only as much as
they want?

¹⁰ But I will strip Esau bare;
his hiding places I will uncover.
His relatives, children and neighbours
will perish, and he will be no more.

¹¹ Leave your widows and orphans
behind,
and rest assured I will keep them alive."

¹² For thus says Yahweh: "Even those no
sentenced to drink the cup must drink it. Why
then should you go unpunished? You, too
shall drink! ¹³ By my own self have I sworn
says Yahweh: Bozrah shall become an object
of horror and disgrace, a desolation and a
curse. All her towns and cities shall be ruins
forever."

¹⁴ I have received a message from
Yahweh,
a herald has been sent among the
nations:

"Assemble! Prepare for battle!
March against these people!

¹⁵ Look, I will reduce you among the
nations,
make you despised among humankind.

¹⁶ The terror that you inspire
and your pride have deceived you,
you who live in the crags,
on the rocky heights of the hill.
Though you build your nest as high as
the eagle's.

I will bring you down from there –
it is Yahweh who speaks.

¹⁷ Edom will become a horror, shocking
every passerby who will catch his breath at the
sight of her wounds. ¹⁸ As when Sodom, Gom-
orrah, and their neighbouring towns were
overthrown, no man shall dwell or visit there –
thus Yahweh proclaims.

¹⁹ As when a lion comes from the thicket of
Jordan to a rich feeding ground, so I, in an
instant, will drive Edom from its land. Whom
will I choose for this task? Who is like me and
can call me to account? What shepherd can
stand against me?

²⁰ Therefore hear Yahweh's plan against
Edom, against those who live in Teman. They
will be dragged away, even the smallest sheep;
their pasture will be destroyed on account of
them.

²¹ The earth will tremble at the sound of
their fall; to the Sea of Reeds their cry will
resound.

²² Look! An eagle will soar and spread its
wings over Bozrah. On that day the heart of
Edom's warriors will pound like the heart of a
woman in labour."

About the Syrians cities

²³ *Message concerning Damascus:*

"Hamath and Arpad are confused,
having heard bad news.

Their hearts are faint with fear
like the waters of a troubled sea.

²⁴ Damascus has become feeble
and turns to flee in panic,
gripped by anguish and pain,
like a woman in travail.

²⁵ How the renowned city is forsaken,
the city of delight!

²⁶ Her young men will fall in the streets,
her soldiers will be silenced on that day.
Yahweh declares:

²⁷ I will set fire to the walls of Damascus;
it will consume Ben-Hadad's fortresses."

Against the Arabic tribes

²⁸ *A message concerning Kedar* and the
kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar
king of Babylon attacked. This is what Yah-
weh says:

"Arise and attack Kedar,
destroy the people of the east!

²⁹ Their tents and flocks will be taken
away,
their goods and camels carried off
as men shout, 'Terror on every side!'

³⁰ Flee, dwell in deep caves,
you who live in Hazor – says Yahweh.
For Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon
has devised a plot against you.

³¹ Arise and attack a nation at ease,
which lives in confidence,
a nation that has neither bars nor gates,
a people that dwells alone complacently.

³² Their camels will become plunder,
their large herds will be spoils;
I will scatter to the winds
those who are in far-off places;
I will bring disaster
on them from every side.

³³ Hazor will be a jackal's haunt,
forever a wasteland
uninhabited by man,
unvisited by anyone."

Against Elam

³⁴ This is the *Word of Yahweh against
Elam*, which came to the prophet Jeremiah
at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, king of
Judah. ³⁵ Yahweh Sabaoth says this:

"See, I will break the bow of Elam, the
mainstay of their might. ³⁶ I will bring the four
winds against her from the four quarters of the
heavens, and there will be no nation on earth to
which Elam's exiles will not be dispersed.

³⁷ I will shatter Elam before their foes
before those who seek their lives. I will bring
disaster upon them, even my fierce anger. I
will pursue them with the sword until I have
made an end of them.

³⁸ I will set my throne in Elam and destroy
her king and officials. ³⁹ Yet I will restore the
fortunes of Elam in the days to come – says
Yahweh."

Against Babylon

50 ¹ This is the word Yahweh spoke
against Babylon and the land of the
Chaldeans, through the prophet Jeremiah:

² "Do not hide this, but announce among
the nations that Babylon is taken, Bel con-
founded, Merodach dismayed; her images are
put to shame, her idols destroyed.

³ A people from the north marches against
her, set to turn her into a wasteland abandoned
by both man and beast.

⁴ In those days – declares Yahweh – the



people of Israel and Judah will come in tears to seek their God Yahweh.

⁵ Their faces turned toward Zion, they will ask the way to it. They will come and say, 'Let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten.'

⁶ My people were lost sheep misled by their shepherds and left to roam on the mountains. They wandered from hill to hill and lost the way to their fold.

⁷ They were devoured by enemies who chanced upon them and said, 'We have no guilt. This is their due for they sinned against Yahweh, their true shepherd and hope of their fathers.'

⁸ Flee from Babylon, leave the land of the Chaldeans, be like the rams that lead the flock!

⁹ For I will stir up nations from the north to march against Babylon. Their arrows are like those of skilled warriors, that never return empty-handed; and Babylon will be captured.

¹⁰ Chaldea will be plundered, and the plunderers will be filled.

¹¹ Rejoice as long as you can,
you plunderers of my inheritance!
Frolic like heifers threshing grain,
and neigh like stallions!

¹² But your mother will be disgraced;
she will be the least of the nations,
laid waste and a desert.

¹³ Yahweh's fury will leave her desolate,
an empty solitude, uninhabited.
Every passerby will be horrified
at the sight of the wounds of Babylon.

¹⁴ Take your posts around the city,
all you who bend the bow.

Shoot at her, spare no arrows,
for great is her iniquity.

¹⁵ Raise the war cry!

Now she surrenders!

Her walls are torn down, her towers
fallen.

Since this is Yahweh's vengeance,
take revenge on her;
do to her as she has done to others.

¹⁶ Cut off the sower from Babylon,
and the reaper with his sickle at harvest
time.

Escape from the oppressor's sword;
let everyone return to his own people,
let everyone flee to his own land.

¹⁷ Israel was a straying sheep which lions
pursued. First to devour her was the Assyrian;
and the last to crush her bones was Nebuchad-
nezzar of Babylon.

¹⁸ Therefore Yahweh, God of Israel, says:
I will punish the king of Babylon and his land,
as once I punished the king of Assyria.

¹⁹ But I will return Israel to her fold, to feed
on Bashan and Carmel and on Mount Ephraim
and Gilead, till she has her fill.

²⁰ In those days, Yahweh says, a search
will be made for Israel's guilt, but none will be
found, and for the sins of Judah, and none will
be found; for I will forgive the remnant whose
lives I have spared.

²¹ Attack the land of Merathaim, and those
who live in Pekod; pursue and kill them, says
Yahweh; do all as I have commanded. ²² Battle
alarm is in the land, the alarm of great
destruction. ²³ How broken and shattered is the
hammer of the whole earth! How horrifying
has Babylon become among the nations!

²⁴ You ensnared yourself, O Babylon, and
were caught before you knew it; you were
found out and seized because you challenged
Yahweh. ²⁵ Yahweh has opened his armory,
brought out the arms of his fury, for Yahweh
Sabaoth has work to do in the land of Chaldea.

²⁶ Come against her from every side; break
open her granaries; pile her up like heaps of
grain, destroy her, leaving no remnant. ²⁷ Slay
all her oxen, down to the slaughter-house with
them! Woe to them! Their day has come, the
time for their chastisement.

²⁸ Listen! Fugitives and refugees from the
land of Babylon have come to announce in
Zion Yahweh's vengeance for his temple.

²⁹ Surround Babylon with archers, and leave

6. Zac 10, 2

8. Gen 19, 15; Is 48, 20; Zac 2, 10

+ Chapters 50 and 51 have the oracles
against Babylon: various discourses dealing with
the fall of Babylon and the return of the exiles.

You were my hammer (chapter 51:20). A
century before, Isaiah saw in Assur the rod with
which God would punish the nations. But Assur
was destroyed by Babylon which became the
hammer with which Yahweh was beating the
nations and destroyed them. After blindly fulfill-
ing God's will against Judah, Babylon would also
head towards its own collapse: fifty years later,
it would be destroyed by the Persians.

Jeremiah urges us not to fear the great
powers of today's world. Great nations have

emerged to destroy Christianity which had be-
come complacent and asleep; revolutions and
persecutions have destroyed the fragile struc-
tures in which Christians had placed their trust.
But, before the next generation, another giant
appears and overcomes the first, while the
church, seemingly despoiled and poorer, rises
with renewed strength.

*When we finish reading Jeremiah, we can
turn to the 40th chapter of Isaiah: the small
land of Judah will come back to life while the
great empires of Assyria and Babylon will
leave behind nothing but ruins.*



her no way of escape. Repay her as her deeds deserve; do to her as she has done to others. Give her the due for her defiance of Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

³⁰ That day her warriors and young men as well will fall and lie in silence. ³¹ I am against you, arrogant one! It is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks – the time to punish you has come.

³² The arrogant one will stumble; no one will help her up. In her towns I will kindle a fire that will consume everything around.

³³ Thus says Yahweh Sabaoth: The people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah as well, for their captors hold them fast and refuse to let them go. ³⁴ But strong is their avenger, Yahweh Sabaoth is his name. He will fight for their cause and succeed; he will give them rest in their land, but unrest to those who live in Babylon.

³⁵ A sword upon the Chaldeans, upon the people of Babylon, her princes and sages! ³⁶ A sword upon her false prophets: may they lose their wits! A sword upon her warriors: may they tremble in terror! ³⁷ A sword upon her mercenaries: may they become women!

A sword upon her treasures: may they be plundered! ³⁸ A sword upon her waters: may they dry up! For hers is a land of idols that go mad with terrors.

³⁹ So, desert beasts will live there; there will the owl and ostrich dwell. From generation to generation, the land will never be inhabited again. ⁴⁰ As when God overturned Sodom and Gomorrah with their neighbours, no man will live there any more, no one will make his home there again.

⁴¹ A strong people is coming from the north, a mighty nation. Stirred up from the far ends of the earth ⁴² are men armed with bows and spears who are cruel and without mercy. They sound like the roaring sea as they ride on galloping steeds. They come in battle formation against you, daughter of Babylon.

⁴³ Your king has heard news of them, and his hands hang limp. Anguish has gripped him, and pain as that of a woman in travail.

⁴⁴ As a lion comes from the thicket of Jordan to a rich feeding ground, so I, in an instant, will drive them off, and whom I choose I will establish there. For who is like me? And who can call me to account? What shepherd can stand against me?

⁴⁵ Therefore hear Yahweh's plans against Babylon, against the land of the Chaldeans: they will be dragged away, even the smallest sheep, their pasture will be destroyed on account of them.

⁴⁶ The earth quakes at the cry 'Babylon is captured!' Among the nations the outcry is heard."

The Lord against Babylon

51 ¹ This is what Yahweh says: "I will stir up a devastating wind against Babylon and the Chaldeans.

² I will send foreigners to Babylon to winnow her and lay waste her land.

On the day of her affliction they will besiege her from all sides.

³ Let not her archers bend their bows, let them not stand up in their armor.

Spare not her young men; destroy the host of her warriors.

⁴ They will fall fatally wounded in the streets of Babylon.

⁵ For Israel and Judah have not been forgotten

by their God, Yahweh Sabaoth, though their land is guilt-ridden before the Holy One of Israel.

⁶ Save your lives, flee from Babylon! Partake not of her punishment;

this is a time of Yahweh's vengeance, a time of his recompense to her.

⁷ Babylon was a golden cup in Yahweh's hand,

a cup which made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine,

and they have become mad. ⁸ Babylon's fall is sudden.

Wail for her, wail!

Bring balm for her wounds, if she could yet be healed.

⁹ 'We have tried to heal Babylon, but she is beyond healing.

Let us go back, each to his own land, and leave her to her judgment which rises up to heaven.'

¹⁰ Yahweh has defended our rights, come, let us declare in Zion what our God Yahweh has done.

¹¹ Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields!

Yahweh has aroused Media's kings in his resolve to destroy Babylon.

This is Yahweh's vengeance, vengeance for his temple.

¹² Raise a flag on the walls of Babylon, and make the watch strong.

Post guards, prepare an ambush!

Yahweh will carry out his purpose, his words against the people of Babylon.

¹³ You who dwell by mighty waters,



you who are rich in treasures,
this is your end; the time
for you to be cut off has come.

¹⁴ Yahweh Sabaoth has sworn:
Surely I will fill you with men,
thick as a swarm of locusts;
they will exult over you and raise the
vintage shout.

Hymn

¹⁵ He made the earth by his power,
founded the world by his wisdom,
spread out the sky by his discernment.

¹⁶ When he thunders, the heaven roars;
from the earth he makes clouds rise;
he sends lightning with the rain,
and from his vaults brings out the wind.

¹⁷ Men stand stupefied at this;
artisans blush, for the idols they made
have no life and are a fraud.

¹⁸ They are worthless, ridiculous;
when judgment comes they will perish.

¹⁹ The Portion of Jacob is not like them,
for he is the creator of all;
Yahweh Sabaoth is his name,
and his heritage is Israel.

The hammer of Yahweh

²⁰ You were my hammer, my weapon of
war. With you I wrecked nations, with you I
demolished kingdoms.

²¹ With you I wrecked horse and rider,
chariot and charioteer. ²² With you I wrecked
man and woman, youth and aged, young man
and maiden.

²³ With you I wrecked shepherd and flock,
farmer and draft animal, rulers and officials.

²⁴ But now I will repay Babylon and those
who dwell in Chaldea for the wrong they did to
Zion. ²⁵ I am against you, ravaging mountain,
ravager of the whole earth! It is Yahweh who
speaks.

I will lay my hands on you, roll you down
over the crags, and make you a parched,
eroded mountain. ²⁶ No cornerstone will be
taken from you, or foundation stone; forever
shall you be a ruins, Yahweh says.

²⁷ Raise a signal on the earth, among the
nations blow the trumpet. Prepare the nations
for war, summon the kingdoms to battle
Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. Marshal a great
force against her; bring up the cavalry, swarm-
ing and bristling.

²⁸ Prepare the nations to battle her, the
Medes with their kings, their governors and
officials, all the countries they rule.

²⁹ The earth trembles and writhes as Yah-
weh carries out his process of turning the land
of Babylon into a desert where no one lives.

³⁰ Her warriors have ceased to fight; they
cower in their strongholds. Their strength is
dried up, their homes are burned and their
gates broken.

³¹ One after another couriers run to the
king, bringing news that his entire city is
fallen: ³² The fords have been seized, the for-
tresses set afire, and all the warriors terrified.
³³ Yahweh Sabaoth, God of Israel, says: Baby-
lon is like a threshing floor at the time it is
trodden. A little while, and the time of the
harvest grain will come for her."

³⁴ The people of Zion said: Nebuchadnezzar,
king of Babylon, has consumed and routed
me. He has left me as an empty vessel. Like a
dragon he has swallowed me, and filled his
belly; he cast me out of my Eden.

³⁵ May the violence done to my flesh be
upon Babylon,' says the city of Zion. 'May my
blood be upon the Chaldeans,' says Jerusalem.

³⁶ Yahweh says to his people: "See now, I
defend your cause and avenge you. I will dry
up her sea and drain her springs. ³⁷ Babylon
shall become a heap of ruins, a haunt of jack-
als, an object of horror and derision, a place
where no one lives.

³⁸ Her people will roar like lions; they will
growl like lion cubs. ³⁹ But while they are fever-
ish, I will prepare a drink for them and make
them drunk till they grow drowsy and fall into
eternal sleep, never to wake up again.

⁴⁰ I will bring them down like lambs to the
slaughter, like goats and rams.

⁴¹ How has Babylon been seized, the glory
of the world taken captive! How has Babylon
become a horror among nations!

⁴² The sea has risen over Babylon and
covered her with its roaring waves. ⁴³ Her cit-
ies have become desolate, a land of drought
and a desert, a land where no one dwells, a land
through which no man travels.

⁴⁴ I will punish Bel in Babylon and make
him belch out what he devoured. No longer
will nations stream to him. The wall of Baby-
lon has fallen.

⁴⁵ My people, come out of her! Run for
your lives! Run from Yahweh's fierce anger.

⁴⁶ Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumors
are heard, when rumors come year after year,
rumors of violence and disaster, intrigues of
ruler against ruler.

⁴⁷ The time will surely come when I will
punish the idols of Babylon; her land will be
put to shame when all around her lie slain.



⁴⁸ Then heaven and earth and all therein will rejoice over Babylon, for out of the north the destroyers will come to attack her – it is Yahweh who speaks.

⁴⁹ Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel, just as the slain of all the earth have fallen because of Babylon.

⁵⁰ You who have escaped the sword, leave and do not linger. Remember Yahweh from this far country and think of Jerusalem:

⁵¹ 'We have been put to shame, dishonour has covered our faces; because aliens have entered the holy places of Yahweh's house.'

⁵² But days will come – Yahweh declares – when I will punish her idols; the wounded will groan all over her land. ⁵³ Though Babylon mount skyward, though she fortify her heights, the mere threat of the destroyers I send is enough to make her terrified.

⁵⁴ Listen! Loud cries from Babylon, the sound of terrible destruction from the land of the Chaldeans! ⁵⁵ That is Yahweh laying waste the city, silencing her monstrous din.

Well may her waves roar and their clamor be heard afar! ⁵⁶ Upon Babylon the destroyer has come; her warriors are captured, their bows are broken.

For Yahweh is a God who rewards, who repays her enemies in full. ⁵⁷ I will make her rulers and sages drunk, her governors, her officers and warriors; they will sleep the sleep of death and never awake, says the King whose name is Yahweh Sabaoth.

⁵⁸ Yahweh Sabaoth says this: The wide ramparts of Babylon will be razed to the ground, her high gates burned down. The people's labour will go to naught; the nation's toil will end in fire."

The written oracle thrown into the river

⁵⁹ This is the message Jeremiah gave to Seraiah, son of Neriah who is Mahseiah's son, when he went to Babylon at the command of Zedekiah, who was then in the fourth year of his reign as king of Judah.

⁶⁰ Jeremiah had written on a scroll the entire disaster that was to befall Babylon – all these words recorded here.

⁶¹ Jeremiah then said to Seraiah, "When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud. ⁶² Then

say: 'Yahweh, you yourself have proclaimed that this place will be destroyed, that neither man nor beast will ever live here again, for it will remain desolate forever.'

⁶³ When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. ⁶⁴ Then say: "So will Babylon sink and rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her."

Here end the words of Jeremiah.

The fall of Jerusalem

52 ¹ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother, Hamutal by name, was the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah.

² He did evil in the sight of Yahweh just as Jehoiakim had done. ³ All that happened in Jerusalem and Judah came about because of Yahweh's anger until the day when he drove them out of his sight.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon; ⁴ so in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched with his entire army and laid siege to Jerusalem. They camped outside the city and built siege works all around it. ⁵ The city was under siege up to the eleventh year of Zedekiah.

⁶ On the ninth day of the fourth month famine became a serious problem in the city, and throughout the land there was no bread for the people. ⁷ When the city was opened by a breach in the wall the Judean army fled. They left the city by night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden. While the Chaldeans were still surrounding the city they fled towards the Arabah. ⁸ The Chaldeans followed in hot pursuit of King Zedekiah. They caught up with him in the plains of Jericho. All his army deserted and scattered.

⁹ The Chaldeans seized the king and led him away to Riblah in the territory of Hamath and there the king of Babylon passed sentence on him. There at Riblah, the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah in his presence and also killed all the officials of Judah.

¹⁰ He then put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with a double bronze chain and took him to Babylon. ¹¹ He was imprisoned there in the house of the guards until the day of his death.



¹² On the tenth day of the fifth month in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the bodyguard and servant of the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem and set fire to the House of Yahweh and the royal palace as well as to all the houses in Jerusalem. ¹³ He also burned every important building. ¹⁴ The Chaldean army under the commander of the bodyguard completely demolished all the walls around Jerusalem.

¹⁵ Nebuzaradan commander of the bodyguard carried off into exile some of the poorest among the people, the remnant of Jews left in the city, and those who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the remainder of the artisans.

¹⁶ But Nebuzaradan left behind those among the very poor who were capable of working in vineyards and cultivating the soil.

¹⁷ The Chaldeans broke into pieces the bronze pillars, the stands and the bronze Sea in the House of Yahweh and carried off all this bronze to Babylon.

¹⁸ They also took the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, the spoons and all the bronze articles used in the temple service. ¹⁹ The commander of the bodyguard took the basins, censers, sprinkling bowls, pots, lampstands, ladles and bowls – all that was made of gold or silver.

²⁰ The two pillars, the Sea and the twelve bronze bulls underneath it, the movable stands which King Solomon had made for the House of Yahweh – all this bronze was of an immeasurable weight.

²¹ The pillars were each eighteen cubits high with a circumference of twelve cubits. Each had a thickness of four fingers and was hollow. ²² On the top of each pillar was a bronze capital five cubits high and above this

and around the capital was filigree work with pomegranates in bronze. ²³ Ninety-six pomegranates hung down and in all the filigree decoration there was a total of a hundred pomegranates.

²⁴ The commander of the bodyguard took captive Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the next priest in rank, as well as three door-keepers.

²⁵ He also took from those in the city a eunuch in command of the fighting men, seven personal advisers to the king who were discovered in the city, ²⁶ the commander's secretary responsible for military conscription and sixty of his men who were found in the city. Nebuzaradan took all these away to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²⁷ There at Riblah in the territory of Hamath the king of Babylon had them put to death. So Judah was taken captive and taken away from its own land.

²⁸ This is the number of the population deported by Nebuchadnezzar: in the seventh year 3,023 Jews; ²⁹ in the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar 832 people from Jerusalem; ³⁰ in his 23rd year 745 Jews deported by Nebuzaradan commander of the bodyguard – in all 4600 people.

³¹ On the 25th day of the 12th month in the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year he came to the throne pardoned Jehoiakim king of Judah and released him from prison. ³² He spoke kindly to him and gave him more honourable treatment than the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³ Jehoiakim put aside his prisoner's garment and for the rest of his life ate at the king's table.

³⁴ Day by day for as long as he lived he was maintained by the king of Babylon.



WHEN EVERYTHING IS FALLING APART

"A third of the people will die by plague and famine; another by the sword, and I will scatter the rest everywhere; these I will also pursue and pour out my anger on them." These are God's words with which Ezekiel greeted the destruction of the holy people. Do they perhaps also apply to the present crisis in the Church?

Within a few years the Church has lost in many countries its imposing facade of well attended temples and rituals, a practising majority, a faithful clergy present everywhere, the security of unquestioned faith and universal obedience to the centre, Rome. All this is collapsing. Many people we hoped that the renewal begun at the Council would produce quick results. Yet, every day that which most seemed to assure the future is disappearing.

Other words from Ezekiel come to mind: "I will not allow you to be a people like the rest, rather I will rule over you by force. I will gather you from among the people and I will confront you. You will be under my authority." Could God be calling on destructive forces? Could God be the one who is breaking down the human inventions we believed to be the Church? Of course, something will remain, a *remnant* as Ezekiel puts it, that is to say, those whose faith will have been purified in trial and in whom the Holy Spirit will act with more freedom.

What was just said is enough to help us understand the value of the book of Ezekiel for today. He was God's witness in the final years of the kingdom of Judah, though living among these exiled in Babylon.

We will surely be surprised by the language he attributes to God who is always threatening and seems to delight in his people's predicament and agony, thus venting his resentment and his jealousy. However, would it be possible to speak about love without mentioning *jealousy* and *violence*?

We also find jealousy and violence when God comes to conquer sinful people. The husband goes looking for his unfaithful wife among her lovers and brings her back by force. Ezekiel's excessive words must not make us forget other pages of the Bible where God expresses himself tenderly; but we cannot ignore them either, under the pretext that God is a good daddy. We may have experienced in our own flesh the misery of the sinner challenging God: Ezekiel's role was to expose the bitterness of sin and the anger of God.

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

Ezekiel may have been a young priest taken to Chaldea among the ten thousand exiles after the first siege of Jerusalem in 598 (see 2 Kgs 24:14). There he was called by God as he tells us (chapters 1 and 2).

The first part of his book (chapters 1-24) contains his discourses announcing the total destruction of his country.

After the prophecies against the foreign nations, we have the third part of the book, the promises to the exiles, because God does not want his people to die.

We know of races that have disappeared and of immigrants who forget their land because they find work in another country. In this way the Jewish people might well have disappeared after the crisis in which Jerusalem was devastated. While they were in Babylon, exiled in a much more prosperous country, the older people yearned for their homeland, while the young only ought of taking advantage of their new situation. But Ezekiel, with his challenging teaching, kept forming the consciences of those who, one day, would return to Judea to build the new kingdom of God (chapters 33-39).

o 1 ¹ On the fifth day of the fourth month of the thirtieth year when I was with the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens opened and I had visions from Yahweh.

² On the fifth of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiakim)³ the word of Yahweh came to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans by the banks of the Kebar.

There the hand of Yahweh was upon me.

Ezekiel sees the Glory of Yahweh

+ ⁴ I looked: a windstorm came from the north bringing a great cloud. A fiery light inside it lit up all around it while at the centre there was something like glowing metal.

⁵ In the centre were what appeared to be four creatures with human form; ⁶ but each had four faces and four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight and their feet were like those of a calf, shining like polished bronze. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands.

⁹ The wings of one touched those of the other. Their faces did not turn as

they advanced, because they were able to go forward in any of the four directions of their faces. ¹⁰ I saw they had human faces; but each one also had the face of a lion on the right, and on the left the face of an ox, and all four had the face of an eagle. ¹¹ Their wings were spread upwards. Each had two wings meeting those of its neighbour and two covering its body; having four faces they could advance in any of the four directions. ¹² Wherever the spirit would go, they went without turning as they went.

¹³ Between these creatures could be seen glowing coals like torches moving between them. The fire blazed and flashed from thunderbolts. ¹⁴ The creatures ran to and fro like thunderbolts.

¹⁵ While I looked at the creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each of them, ¹⁶ glittering as if made of chrysolite. The four wheels had the same shape: indeed each was double – two wheels placed crosswise, ¹⁷ so they could follow any of the four

1. 3, 14

4. 8, 3; 11, 24; 40, 2

4. Is 6, 1

8. 10, 8

o The book begins with two different introductions. Nobody knows the meaning of the year thirty in the first verse; it may be a copyist's mistake. The fifth year of Jehoiakim bring us to 594 before Christ.

Then the hand of Yahweh was upon me. This means that Ezekiel was drawn into ecstasy: as if having left his body, he mysteriously met with God. He learned something of God's mysterious being, received his mission and was transformed into another man, all at the same time.

+ *A windstorm came from the North.* Ezekiel was overwhelmed by the vivid images accompanying God's words. We will find the vision of the Chariot of Yahweh again in chapter 10

where Yahweh is shown leaving his Temple in Jerusalem to live in Babylon among the exiles.

People of those days thought that their gods were confined to specific sanctuaries and places. Thus, the Jews thought that Yahweh was not to be found outside Palestine. Those exiled in Babylon, far from their homeland and their Temple where they could worship God, were soon given to despair. They felt that God had abandoned them and that only the people who stayed behind in their country could enjoy God's care.

Precisely for that reason, Yahweh teaches: Ezekiel that though he dwells in the temple of Jerusalem he is not less present in distant Babylon. Yahweh follows his people and dwells among them

In a vision Ezekiel sees four creatures with



directions without turning as they went.¹⁸ Their rims were lofty and looked terrifying, and the four of them were covered with eyes all the way round.

¹⁹ When the creatures moved forward the wheels moved along beside them and when the creatures rose from the ground the wheels rose, too.

²⁰ Wherever the spirit was to go, there the creatures went and the wheels went with them; they moved and rose up together, for the spirit of the creatures was also in the wheels.

²¹ When the creatures moved forward they did, too, stopping when they stopped, rising above the ground when they did, for the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels.

²² Over the heads of the creatures was a kind of platform; it had the imposing appearance of crystal and was arched over their heads.

²³ Under the platform their wings were straight, one parallel to the other. Each creature had two that covered its body.²⁴ I heard the noise of their wings when they moved, similar to the roar of many waters, similar to the voice of the Most High, the noise of a multitude or of a camp. When they were not moving they lowered their wings.

²⁵ I heard a noise above the platform over their heads.²⁶ Above it was a throne resembling a sapphire and high on this throne was a figure simi-

lar to that of a man. Then I saw a light as of glowing bronze as if fire enveloped him.

²⁷ From his waist upwards, and from his waist downwards it was as if fire gave radiance around him,²⁸ and the surrounding light was like a rainbow in the clouds after a day of rain. This vision was the likeness of Yahweh's Glory. On seeing it I fell on my face and then I heard a voice speaking.

Ezekiel receives his mission

2 ¹ He said to me, "Son of man, stand up for I am about to speak you."² A spirit came upon me as he spoke and kept me standing and then I heard him speak,

³ "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a people who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have sinned against me to this day.⁴ Now I am sending you to these defiant and stubborn people to tell them 'this is the Lord Yahweh's word.'

⁵ So, whether they listen or not this set of rebels will know there is a prophet among them.⁶ But you, son of man, do not fear them or what they say, for they will be as thorns for you and you will be sitting on a nest of scorpions. Don't be afraid of their words when you are facing this set of rebels.⁷ Tell them what I say whether they choose to listen or not, for they are rebels.⁸ Listen then, son of man, to what I say and don't be a rebel among rebels. Open your mouth and take in what I'm about to say."

⁹ I looked and saw a hand stretched out in front of me holding a scroll.¹⁰ He unrolled it before me; on both sides were written lamentations, groanings and woes.

18. Zac 4, 10	22. Ex 24, 10; Rev 4, 2	26. Is 6, 1; Dn 7, 9	3. Ex 3, 10; Is 6, 8
4. Jer 1, 7	5. 2 K 5, 8	6. Jer 1, 17; 15, 10	8. Rev 10, 9
			9. Rev 5, 1
			10. Rev 10, 8

four faces and four wings. This suggests – in images of those times – the greatness of God. In Chaldean palaces there were magnificent statues of fantastic beings called "Cherubs" combining features of the strongest of beings: man, the eagle, the lion and the bull. Here, they become impetuous living creatures surrounding and protecting the mystery of God. The intersecting wheels moving in every direction show God's action throughout the universe. They have eyes which see everything and are in constant movement. In Rev 4, the apostle John will use images

from this vision.

Above the creatures, a platform with appearance of crystal. The rainbow and the transparent vault supporting the throne also suggest the mystery of Yahweh. The same is true of the fire where Yahweh alone can live and where everything which is not God would be destroyed.

A figure like a man. Having reached the most intimate part of God, the last image will be a figure of man because God's power comes from his mysterious and personal being in whose likeness Man was created.

■ 3 ¹He said to me, "Son of man, eat what is given to you. Eat this scroll and then go; speak to the people of Israel." ²I opened my mouth and he made me eat the scroll and then ³he said to me, "Eat and fill yourself with this scroll that I'm giving you." I ate it and it tasted as sweet as honey.

⁴He said, "Son of man, go to the Israelites; speak to them with my words. ⁵Indeed it is not a people with a difficult foreign language to whom you are sent; it is to the people of Israel. ⁶It's not to the many nations with difficult and obscure languages which you cannot understand. If I sent you to them they would listen to you.

⁷But the Israelites will not listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me; all of them are defiant and stubborn of heart. ⁸See I am making your face as unyielding as theirs and your forehead as hard as theirs. ⁹I am making your forehead as hard as

a diamond, harder than flint; so you shall not fear or tremble because of this set of rebels."

¹⁰He said to me, "Son of man, listen and take to heart all I say to you, ¹¹and then go to the exiles, your fellow countrymen, speak to them and tell them: 'This is what the Lord Yahweh says,' whether they listen or not."

¹²Then the spirit lifted me up; behind me I heard a great acclamation, "Blessed be the Glory of Yahweh in his dwelling place" ¹³and I heard the noise of the animals' wings brushing against each other, and at the same time the noise of the wheels and the sound of a great noise.

¹⁴The spirit had lifted me up, and carried me off but I went in a bitter and feverish spirit because the hand of Yahweh was heavy upon me. ¹⁵I came to Tel Abib to the exiles living by the river Kebar and I stayed there seven days with them, overwhelmed.

6. Is 28, 11

8. Is 50, 7; Jer 1, 18

■ *Eat this scroll.* The vision of the scroll symbolically describes the call from Yahweh, giving Ezekiel his mission. We stress the second half which also includes the vision of the glory of Yahweh (3:12-13).

I am sending you to a defiant and stubborn people. This resembles what has been expressed by earlier prophets. When the Lord sends Isaiah, he only tells him about the counter-productive effect of his mission: the people will become hardened. In Ezekiel's case, there is more optimism: sent to rebels, he must be firmer and more persistent than they are to break through the shell of their hardened hearts. In fact, Ezekiel will be constantly arguing and fighting. Paul will say later that those who evangelize must teach whether the time is right or not (2 Tim 4:2) without ever losing heart.

Fill yourself with this scroll which I am giving you. Eating the scroll means that the prophet must internalize and assimilate the word of God: these were old books made of scrolls of parchment or papyrus.

In the beginning, Ezekiel only gave predictions of death. This explains why the book is about woes and lamentations.

It tasted sweet as honey. Ezekiel eats these predictions of misfortunes which seem sweet to him: the prophet has taken Yahweh's side and

he totally accepts his plans however terrible they may seem to the people. In sharing Yahweh's anger, Jeremiah kept his human heart and he suffered because of the suffering of his people. Ezekiel, on the contrary, does not feel torn.

Thus, with the examples of several prophets, the Bible shows us how God's Word separates believers from their own people (Matthew 10:34). All who are called to speak to others or lead them, begin to experience this conflict. They do not say what people want to hear, nor are they disturbed by the complaints of cowards and of the comfortable who ask to be left alone to live the way they want to. It will always be hard to lose the security we have when we feel we agree with everyone else. True believers accept taking God's side and, at times, going against the stream.

◆ The story of Ezekiel's vocation which we read in 3:1-15 is continued in 3:22-27. But here, it is interrupted by a paragraph (3:16-21) expressing one of the great themes of Ezekiel's preaching: God does not wish the sinner to die but rather to be converted and live (see chapter 18).

It is true that the catastrophe resulting from their mistakes is coming upon Ezekiel's hearers. But this is no cause for despair; if even only one person becomes aware of his wickedness, his

"I have made you a watchman"

◆ ¹⁶After seven days the word of Yahweh came to me, ¹⁷"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the House of Israel. With the word you hear from my mouth you will warn them in my name. ¹⁸When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' if you do not speak to warn the wicked man to give up his evil ways and so live, he shall die for his sin, and I will hold you responsible for his death. ¹⁹But if you have warned the wicked man and he has not given up his wickedness and evil ways, he shall die for his sin but you will save yourself. ²⁰When the righteous man turns from what is good to do evil I shall put an obstacle in his path: he shall die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. His good deeds will not be remembered and I shall hold you responsible for his death. ²¹But when you have warned the righteous man to keep him from sinning and he has not sinned, he

will live for sure for he was warned and you will save your life."

Ezekiel becomes mute

○ ²²The hand of Yahweh was upon me and he said to me, "Get up! Go to the valley and there I shall speak to you." ²³I got up and went towards the valley and there was the Glory of Yahweh that I had seen by the Kebar river. I fell on my face. ²⁴Then the spirit came to me and kept me standing; he spoke to me and said; "Go! Shut yourself in your house. ²⁵You, son of man, will be bound with cords and prevented from going among the people. ²⁶Your tongue shall stick to your palate and you will remain dumb and not be able to rebuke them for they are a rebellious people. ²⁷But when I speak to you I shall open your lips and you shall say to them: This is the word of the Lord Yahweh! He who listens, let him listen and he who refuses to listen, let him refuse for they are a rebellious people.

17. Jer 6, 17	19. Gen 4, 9	20. 18, 24; 2 Pet 2, 21	22. 3, 15	27. 24, 27; 33, 22
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efforts will not be in vain, for they will give life, at least to this one person.

I have made you a watchman. The prophet has been given an insight, which the rest do not have, into the sin of individuals and of society. He alone can see the dangers which are approaching, as God, who judges sin, has planned. The prophet struggles, not only against those who do not believe, but also against God the Judge, calling upon his mercy (Ex 32:11; Jer 14:11) as Moses and Jeremiah had done.

He will die, but I will hold you responsible for his death. The responsibility of one who has received insight from God: he received it to save others and he must not keep quiet.

When the righteous man turns from what is good. Everybody suffered equally in the crisis which ruined Judah. But Ezekiel states that these common sufferings will bring life or death to everyone as each deserves. This is because to be alive or to be dead does not have the same meaning for God as it does for us (Rv 3:1).

The same parable of the sentinel is presented in a better way in 33:1.

We will be able to notice several attitudes revealed by the prophet (or believer) in all ages:

- be alert, that is able to see what God thinks of the way we act, because we have internalized his word;

- do not fall asleep;
- be on top of the wall, that is, controlling the problems of our environment instead of ignoring them in order to be more at peace. Echo God's plans and human aspirations.

○ Following, are Ezekiel's prophecies in Chaldea during the six years prior to the siege and fall of Jerusalem.

For a while Ezekiel is dumb, then, he is paralyzed. This strange illness serves as a lesson. By every possible means, Ezekiel insists that Yahweh has decided on the ruin of Jerusalem because the Israelites have not repented and become more faithful.

Ezekiel is in Chaldea but he is concerned about Jerusalem. In these chapters his teaching is close to Jeremiah's during the same time. The form, however, is very different. Jeremiah spoke first, and later his statements were written down; whereas, Ezekiel writes in a more formal and ordered way. Unfortunately, his style is sometimes too elaborate and complicated, but we must reflect on these long parables full of marvelous images.

In 3:25 Ezekiel seems to be affected by a strange paralysis whose duration will be symbolic: 190 days plus 40 days. We do not know

Ezekiel plays war

4 ¹ Son of man, take a clay tablet; place it in front of you and draw on it the city of Jerusalem. ² Then act as if you were laying siege to it; dig a trench round it and build a ramp; set up tents and a battering ram against it. ³ Take an iron pan; place it as a wall of iron between you and the city and look towards the city: it is under siege and you are besieging it. All this will be a sign for the people of Israel.

⁴ Lie on your left side, taking upon yourself the sin of Israel, for you will bear their sin as long as you are lying on it. ⁵ I have assigned to you a number of days equal to the duration of their sins – for a hundred and ninety days you will bear the sin of Israel.

⁶ When you have completed this you shall lie down again on your right side and bear the sin of Judah for forty days – one day corresponding to a year.⁷ Then you shall turn your face and your bared arm towards the siege of Jerusalem and prophesy against it. ⁸ I shall bind you with cords to prevent you from turning from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your confinement.⁹ Take some wheat and barley, some beans, lentils, millet and spelt; put it all in one vessel and make some bread; this is what you will eat all the time you are lying on your side – one hundred and ninety days.

¹⁰ The food you eat will be a daily ration of eight ounces a day; ¹¹ you will drink two thirds of a quart of water each day. ¹² Eat the food as you would a barley cake. You will cook it publicly on human dung, ¹³ for that is the way – says Yahweh – the people of Israel will eat unclean bread among the nations where I shall drive them."

¹⁴I said, "Ah, Lord Yahweh! I have not been defiled: from childhood until now I have never eaten any animal found dead or torn; unclean meat has never entered my mouth."

¹⁵He then said, "Very well! I allow you cow dung in place of human dung for baking your bread." ¹⁶He continued, "Son of man, I shall cut off the food in Jerusalem. They will eat strictly-rationed bread with anxiety and despair as they drink water sparingly, ¹⁷for food and water will be in short supply and they will all waste away because of their sin.

Slaughter and death in Jerusalem

5 ¹ Son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor on your head

and beard. Then take scales and divide the hair you have cut off. ² Burn a third of it in the middle of the city at the end of the siege, then take a third that you will strike with the sword all around the city; finally scatter a third in the wind and unsheathe a sword and pursue them. ³ Take a few strands of hair and tuck them away in the folds of your clothes; ⁴ then throw some of them to burn in the fire. Then speak against all Israel:

⁵ This is what the Lord Yahweh said: That is Jerusalem! I placed her in the midst of the nations but she was worse than the other nations; ⁶ she rebelled against my laws and my precepts more than neighbouring nations. In fact she rejected my laws and did not keep my decrees.

⁷That is why the Lord Yahweh speaks thus: Your rebellion is greater than that of the nations around you – you have not kept my laws, respected my decrees or observed my ordinances but instead have conformed to the laws of neighbouring nations – ⁸“because of that the Lord Yahweh speaks thus: I too have set myself against you. I will pass judgment on you in the sight of the nations.” ⁹And because of your abominations I will punish you in a way I have never before done and never will do in the future. ¹⁰That is why fathers among you will eat their children and children their fathers. I will pass judgment on you and scatter your remnant to every wind.

"Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Lord Yahweh, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your horrors and abominations, I will strike you without pity! I too will show no mercy!

¹² A third of your people will die of the plague or starve within your walls, a third will fall by the sword outside the city, a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with sword unsheathed. ¹³ My anger will spend itself, my fury against them be satisfied. I will have my revenge and they will know that I, Yahweh, have spoken in my jealousy when I have exhausted my fury against them. ¹⁴ I will make you a heap of ruins, a reproach among the neighbouring nations in the eyes of all who pass by. ¹⁵ You will be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, a warning and an object of horror for the nations near you when, with anger, wrath and stinging reproach, I punish you. I, Yahweh, have spoken.

¹⁶When I send against you the deadly arrows of starvation to do away with you and

the meaning of these figures.

In 6:8-10 as many other prophets had done,

he announces that Yahweh will save a remnant. 'They will be disgusted with themselves for the

6. Num 14, 34

t3. Hos 9, 3

14. Lev 17, 15

Acts 10, 14

13, 17, 24; 21, 4

15. Jer 18, 16

blot you out, I will make you lack all food.
¹⁷ Hunger and wild beasts will destroy your children, while sword and plague will visit you. It is I, Yahweh, who have spoken."

6 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me as follows. ² "Son of man, look towards the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them. Say to them:

³ Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of Yahweh! To the mountains and hills, to the rivers and valleys the Lord Yahweh has spoken: I am going to bring the sword against you and destroy your high places. ⁴ Your altars will become desolate, your incense burners smashed; ⁵ I will lay your corpses in front of your idols and scatter your bones around your altars.

⁶ Wherever you live, the towns will be in ruins and the high places desolate, your altars demolished and defiled, your filthy idols smashed and ruined, ⁷ your incense burners knocked all around you and you will know that I am Yahweh. ⁸ But I shall spare some of you. They will escape the sword and be scattered among the nations.

⁹ Your survivors then will remember me among the people where they are exiled, for I shall break the adulterous hearts of those whose eyes lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they committed, for all their abominations. ¹⁰ And they will know that I, Yahweh, have not spoken in vain in saying I would inflict this disaster on them."

¹¹ This is what the Lord Yahweh said, "Clap your hands, stamp your feet and say: Well done! when the people of Israel are falling by the sword, famine and plague because of their abominations. ¹² He who is far away will die of the plague, he who is near will fall by the sword, whoever survives and is spared will die of starvation. Against them I will exhaust my fury. ¹³ And you will know that I am Yahweh when their people lie slain in the midst of their idols, around their altars, on every high hill, on the mountain tops, under every green tree and spreading oak and wherever they offered fragrant incense to all their idols. ¹⁴ I will stretch out my hand against them, I will make their country a desolate wasteland from the desert to Riblah, wherever they live; and they will know that I am Yahweh."

7 ¹ This word of Yahweh came to me, ² "And you, son of man, listen to what the Lord says to Israel:

³ Finished! The end is coming for the four corners of the land. It is all over for you, I am unleashing my anger against you. I will judge you according to your ways and repay you for all your filthy practices. ⁴ I will not look on you with pity; I will be merciless. I will bring against you what is fitting for your conduct and your detestable practices and you will know it is Yahweh striking you.

⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Disaster! Disaster is coming! ⁶ The end is near! It is your turn, you who live in the country. ⁷ The time has come, the day is near! No joy, only panic on the mountains! ⁸ Now I am unleashing my fury against you; my anger will exhaust itself on you. I will judge you according to your ways and your detestable practices. ⁹ I will not look on you with pity; I will be without mercy. I will judge you according to your conduct and call you to account for your detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity and I will show you no mercy. I will give you what your conduct deserves. And you will know that I am Yahweh when I strike you for your abominable practices.

¹⁰ This is the day, the end is coming, the die is cast. For insolence has blossomed, pride bears its fruits ¹¹ and violence reigns. No one will escape.

¹² The time has come, the day is here! Let not the buyer rejoice or the seller regret, for the punishment will fall upon all. ¹³ The seller will not get back what he has sold, even though he survives, for the sentence regarding the multitude will not be reversed.

¹⁴ They may sound the trumpet, make preparations, but no one will go to battle, for I am indignant with all. ¹⁵ Outside in the open is the sword; plague and starvation in the houses. Those in the country will die by the sword, those in the city will be victims of famine and plague. ¹⁶ Those who escape will go to the mountains; they will be like doves, each one moaning because of his sin.

¹⁷ Every hand will be limp, every knee as weak as water; ¹⁸ they will put on sackcloth and shudder. All will be covered with shame and every head bald.

¹⁹ They will throw their silver in the streets and their gold will be dropped like filth. Silver or gold will not save them on the day of

evil they have done'. This statement is typical of Ezekiel and it shows that the wicked will come to a sincere conversion; to be disgusted with one-

self because of one's sins is what brings God's grace.

Yahweh's anger. It will be useless to satisfy their hunger and to fill their stomachs, for it was their stumbling block, the cause of their sin.

²⁰ They became proud of their splendid jewel (the Temple), but they put into it their loathsome images and idols; that is why I will make it a horror. ²¹ I will hand it over as plunder to foreigners and as booty to the most wicked of the land, and they will defile it.

²² I will take away my protection from them and people will profane my treasure. Robbers will enter and desecrate it ²³ and within it there will be massacres, for the land is full of violence.

²⁴ I will bring the most cruel of the nations to take possession of their houses. I will break the pride of the violent and their sanctuaries will be profaned.

²⁵ Anguish is coming; they will seek peace but there will be none. ²⁶ Disaster will follow disaster, rumor will follow rumor. In vain will they demand a vision from the prophet. The priest will have no answer; the elders will be unable to advise. ²⁷ The king will mourn; the princes will be overcome with grief, and the hands of the citizens will tremble.

I will treat them as their conduct deserves and judge them according to their deeds, and they will know that I am Yahweh.

The Glory of Yahweh departs from the Temple

+ 8 ¹ On the fifth day of the sixth month in the sixth year, I happened to be sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting in front of me when the hand of the Lord Yahweh fell heavily on me. ² I looked and saw a being as of fire. Downwards

from what appeared to be his loins there was the appearance of fire, and from his loins upward a brightness like sparkling bronze. ³ As he stretched out the form of a hand and took me by my hair, the spirit lifted me between heaven and earth and brought me in a divine vision to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the inner gate facing north. There stands the idol which provokes Yahweh's jealousy.

⁴ And the Glory of the God of Israel was there, similar to the vision I had seen in the plain. ⁵ He said to me, "Son of man, look to the north." I looked in the direction of the north and there, to the north of the altar gate, at the entrance, I saw this idol which provokes his jealousy. ⁶ He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing? Do you see the great abomination that Israel commits here to drive me from my sanctuary? You will see other abominations greater than this."

⁷ He then led me to the door of the court. I looked and saw there was a hole in the wall. ⁸ He said, "Son of man, break through the wall."

I broke through the wall and there was a door. ⁹ He said, "Go in and see the wicked abomination they are committing here." ¹⁰ I went in, looked around and saw all kinds of reptiles, repulsive beasts and all the filthy idols of Israel portrayed on the wall all around.

¹¹ Before them stood seventy men, elders of Israel, and among them was Jaazaniah, son

26. Is 29, 14; Jer 18, 18; Mi 3, 6

1. 1, 3

Z. 1, 26-28

3. Dt 32, 21

5. 1, 28

+ Chapters 8-11 include a long vision of the sins of Jerusalem and the punishment which will follow. Everything happens in the Temple. What amazes Ezekiel the most is that they have despised God and rejected him from their hearts in favor of false gods.

In 8:2 we find some flashes of the vision of the first chapter. There is always something to indicate that Yahweh is present to the prophet who does not see him. Ezekiel is drawn into ecstasy again: his spirit is going to contemplate the sins of Jerusalem.

In 8:4, Ezekiel sees the Glory of Yahweh in the Temple. Since its inauguration by Solomon (see 1 Kgs 8:10), God had been present among his people even when they were building altars and statues to false gods in the very patios of the

temple. Now, however, Yahweh abandons his temple before it is destroyed by the Chaldeans; his Glory leaves for Babylon where the exiles are. God takes three steps before leaving:

- 9:3: he leaves the sanctuary and remains on the threshold;
- 10:19: he crosses the patios and remains at the east gate, across from the mount of Olives;
- 11:21: always going to the East, to Chaldea, Yahweh crosses the Kidron valley and lingers over the mount of Olives.

While Yahweh is abandoning his Temple, the fire of his holiness becomes punishment and death for the godless people who had set up their idols and engaged in adultery according to

of Shaphan. Each held a censer in his hand, and perfume rose from a cloud of incense.

¹² He said, "Do you see, son of man, what the elders of Israel do in the dark, each one in his room of pictures? For they think: Yahweh does not see us; Yahweh has forsaken the land." ¹³ Then he said, "You will see more of their great abominations."

¹⁴ He brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of Yahweh and there women were sitting, weeping for Tammuz. ¹⁵ He said to me, "Did you see, son of man? You will see even greater abominations than these."

¹⁶ And he led me to the inner court of the house of Yahweh and at the door to Yahweh's sanctuary, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, their backs to the temple, facing the east and worshipping the sun. He said to me, ¹⁷ "Did you see, son of man? Is it not enough for Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here? See they are waving the branch before their nose." ¹⁸ I too will act against them in anger; my eye will not see with pity and I will be without mercy. Though they cry loudly in my ears, I will not hear them."

9 ¹ Then he shouted loudly in my ears saying, "The punishment of the city is near; see each one of these has in his hand his instrument of destruction." ² And six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each one with his instrument of destruction. With them was a man clothed in linen with writing material at his side. They came and stopped near the altar of bronze.

³ Then the Glory of the God of Israel rose from the cherubim where it rested and went to the threshold of the house. Yahweh called to the man clothed in linen who had the material for writing at his side, ⁴ and he said to him, "Pass through the centre of the

city, through Jerusalem, and trace a cross on the forehead of the men who sigh and groan because of all the abominations committed in it."

⁵ I heard him say to the others, "Now you may pass through the city after him and strike. Your eyes shall not look with pity; show no mercy! Do away with them all – ⁶ old men, young men, virgins, children and women – but do not touch anyone marked with a cross."

⁷ And as they were told to begin with the sanctuary, they struck the elders who were in front of the Temple. Yahweh said to them, "Let the courts be filled with the slain and the Temple be defiled with their blood; go out!" They went and slew the people in the city. ⁸ It happened that while they were slaying the people, I was alone. I fell on my face and cried out saying, "Ah, Lord Yahweh! Are you going to destroy all that is left of Israel, and unleash your fury against Jerusalem?"

⁹ He said to me, "The sin of Israel and Judah is very great; the land is filled with blood and the city full of perversion. For they say: 'Yahweh has forsaken the land; Yahweh does not see.' ¹⁰ I too will be without pity; I will show no mercy and I will bring their deeds upon their heads."

¹¹ Then the man clothed in linen who brought the writing kit reported, "I have done what you ordered."

10 I looked and saw that in the expanse over the heads of the cherubim there was something resembling a sapphire stone in the form

12. Is 29, 15; Ps 10, 11
8. Am 7, 2; Jer 27, 18

14. Is 17, 10
1. 1, 22

15. Zac 12, 12

16. 2 K 21, 5

4. Ex 12, 7

the different meanings given to this word by the prophets (see chapter 16).

Among the collective condemnations, there are others aimed at individuals. Ezekiel co-operates with Yahweh and with him, he must pronounce the words of condemnation causing the death of the guilty ones.

9:4: A T which then had the shape of a cross, was to protect the "remnant".

9:8 "Alas, Lord God! Are you going to destroy...?" A true prophet threatens the people because of their sins, but at the same time, he wants to save them.

of a throne. ²He spoke to the man clothed in linen, "Enter by the space between the wheels under the cherubim, fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city." And I saw him as he entered. ³The cherubim stood at the right of the Temple when the man entered and the cloud filled the inner court. ⁴Then the Glory of Yahweh rose from above the cherubim to the threshold of the Temple and the Temple was filled with the cloud while the court was filled with the radiance of Yahweh's Glory.

⁵The noise of the cherubim's wings could be heard as far as the outer court, similar to the voice of God Almighty when he thunders. ⁶Yet the man clothed in linen had been given the order to take the fire from between the wheels, in the space between the cherubim; so he went and stood beside the wheel. ⁷The cherub then stretched his hand towards the fire in the space between the cherubim, took some and gave handfuls to the man clothed in linen who took them and went out. ⁸At that moment I noticed this human hand under the wings of the cherubim. ⁹I also saw four wheels beside the cherubim, each wheel beside a cherub. The wheels resembled sparkling chrysolite. ¹⁰As for their appearance, the four had the same form; each was formed of two wheels placed crosswise, ¹¹so they could move following any of their four directions, without turning as they went. ¹²In the direction the cherub's head was turned, the wheels followed without turning. Their rims were full of eyes all around. ¹³In my hearing the wheels were called "whirling." ¹⁴(Each one had four faces, the first was the face of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, the fourth the face of an eagle. ¹⁵The cherubim mounted up—they were the same creatures I had seen by the river Chebar.)

¹⁶When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved at their side and when the cherubim raised their wings to rise above the earth, the wheels did not depart from their side. ¹⁷When they stopped, the wheels stopped; when they rose, the wheels rose with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in them.

¹⁸The Glory of Yahweh went from above the threshold of the house and

went to rest on the cherubim. ¹⁹Then the cherubim left, opening their wings and rising above the earth in my sight, and the wheels went with them. They halted at the east gate of the house of Yahweh and the Glory of the God of Israel was over them.

²⁰These were the living creatures I had seen under the God of Israel on the banks of the river Chebar. I recognized them as cherubim.

²¹Each had four faces, each had four wings and they had what seemed human hands under their wings. ²²As for the appearance of their faces, they were the faces I had seen by the river Chebar, the same likeness. Each one went straight ahead.

The leaders of the people are punished

11 ¹Then the spirit lifted me up and brought me to the eastern gate of Yahweh's house, the one facing east, and there at the entrance to the gate were twenty-five men. Among them I saw Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Peletiah, son of Benaiah, leaders of the people. ²Yahweh said to me, "Son of man, these are the men who plot wickedness and give evil counsel in the city. ³They say: 'Now there is no need of more houses! The city is the pot and we are the meat!' ⁴Because of that, prophesy against them, prophesy, son of man!"

⁵The spirit of Yahweh seized me and said, "Speak! This is the word of Yahweh: I know what you have said, Israel! I know what you are thinking. ⁶You have multiplied your victims in the city; you have filled the streets with the slain. ⁷That is why Lord Yahweh has spoken. The slain you have left in its midst; they are the meat, this city is the pot and I will bring you out of it.

⁸The Lord Yahweh says: Because you are afraid of the sword, I will send the sword against you. ⁹I will make you leave and deliver you over to foreigners and I will pass sentence on you. ¹⁰You will fall by the sword; I will judge you on the borders of Israel and you will know that I am Yahweh. ¹¹The city will not be like a pot to preserve you, nor will you be meat within her. ¹²And you will know that I am Yahweh, for until now you have not walked according to my ordinances; you have not applied my laws, but instead you have acted according to the laws of the nations around you."

¹³It happened that while I was prophesy-

ing. Pelatiah, son of Beniah, died. I fell on my face and cried aloud saying, "Ah, Lord Yahweh! Are you to destroy even the remnant of Israel?"

¹⁴ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms. ¹⁵ "Son of man, these people have said of your brothers, your relatives, and all the exiled Israelites: 'They are well far from Yahweh! He gave this land to us as our possession'. ¹⁶ Give them therefore this word from Yahweh: I myself have sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the peoples, but I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries they entered.

¹⁷ For that reason the Lord Yahweh says, "I will gather you from among the peoples; I will group you together out of the countries where you were scattered and give you the land of Israel. ¹⁸ When you have come back and removed all the horrors and abominations, I will give you a new heart; I will put a new spirit in you.

¹⁹ Yes, I will remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes, observe my laws and practice them, and they shall be my people and I will be their God. ²¹ As for those whose hearts follow their horrors and abominations, I will punish them according to their deeds."

²² Then the cherubim lifted up their wings and the wheels went with them.

²³ The Glory of the God of Israel was over them and rose, leaving the city to rest on the mountain that is to the east.

²⁴ At that point the spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Chaldea – all this happened in vision by the power of the spirit of God – and the vision I had seen left me. ²⁵ Then I told the exiles all that Yahweh had shown me.

The parable of the exile

■ 12 ¹ This word of Yahweh came to me, ² "Son of man, you live in the midst of a house of rebels: they have eyes for seeing but do not see;

they have ears for hearing but do not hear, for they are a house of rebels.

³ Because of this, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage and leave by day in their sight as an exile does; and go as an exile to another place in their sight. Would that they may understand, because they are a house of rebels.

⁴ You will gather your things, an exile's baggage, by day to be seen by them, and you will leave in the evening in their sight as for a departure of deportees. While they look on, ⁵ dig a hole in the wall and leave from there. ⁶ As they look on, shoulder your baggage and leave in the dark. Veil your face and do not look at the land for I have made you a sign for Israel."

⁷ I did as I was ordered, gathering my things by day, an exile's baggage, and in the evening I made a hole in the wall with my hand. I left in the dark, in their presence, shouldering my baggage.

⁸ In the morning the word of Yahweh came to me: ⁹ "Son of man, did not the Israelites, these rebels, ask you, 'What are you doing there?'

¹⁰ Answer them on behalf of the Lord Yahweh: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the Israelites remaining in the city.

¹¹ Say, 'I am a sign for you, for what I have done will happen to them: They will be deported, exiled.' ¹² The prince among them shall shoulder his baggage in the dark and depart. They will dig a hole in the wall to let him leave by it. He will cover his face because he must not see the land with his eyes.

¹³ I will spread my net over him and he will be caught in its mesh. I will bring

■ At nightfall in Babylon, people gather at the doors of their houses. Ezekiel appears. Without saying a word he behaves as a solitary actor in a performance which captures the people's attention. When his act is over, he leaves without

giving any explanation. The next day he reveals the meaning of this parable in action.

By this symbolic act the prophet announces the deportation of the residents of Jerusalem and of their king.



him to Babylon in the country of the Chaldeans but he will not see it and it is there that he will die.

¹⁴ As for all those who form his court, his guard, his troops, I will scatter them to the winds and pursue them with the sword. ¹⁵ They will know I am Yahweh when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them in other countries. ¹⁶ I will however allow a small number of them to escape the sword, famine and pestilence so they may confess their abominations among the nations where they will go and they will know I am Yahweh."

¹⁷ This word of the Lord Yahweh came to me, ¹⁸ "Son of man, trembling you will eat your bread and you will drink water in fear and anxiety. ¹⁹ Say to the people, 'This is what the Lord Yahweh says regarding those who live in Jerusalem in the land of Israel: In fear they will eat their bread and in affliction they will drink their water because the land will be desolate, stripped of all it contains, due to the violence of its inhabitants. ²⁰ Cities that were inhabited will become ruins, the country a wasteland and you will know that I am Yahweh."

The word of God will be fulfilled

◆ ²¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ²² "Son of man, what do you mean by this proverb: The days pass and the visions do not come true? Why do you refer thus to what happens in Israel? ²³ You shall say to them this word of the Lord Yahweh: No more of this proverb. It will not be used in Israel, for the day is at hand when every vision will be

fulfilled. ²⁴ No longer will there be false visions or misleading divinations in Israel. ²⁵ I, Yahweh, will say what I want to say, and my words will be fulfilled. There will be no more delay, for it is in your days, rebellious people, that I will speak and it will be done – word of Yahweh."

²⁶ The word of Yahweh was given me in these terms, ²⁷ "Son of man, this is what Israel says: 'Ezekiel's visions refer to the distant future; he prophesies for times far off.' ²⁸ Therefore speak to them: This is what the Lord Yahweh says: There will be no further delay concerning my words: what I say will be done – word of Yahweh."

The false prophets

o13 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me again, ² "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, against those who prophesy on their own initiative. Say: Hear the word of Yahweh! ³ This is what the Lord Yahweh says: Woe to the senseless prophets who follow their own inspiration without having seen anything! ⁴ Your prophets, Israel, are like foxes among the ruins! ⁵ They have not gone up to the breaches nor have they built a wall around Jerusalem so that she may hold out in battle on the day of Yahweh. ⁶ Their discourse is trickery and lies; they say: *word of Yahweh* when Yahweh has not sent them and yet they wait for him to fulfill their word.

⁷ Is it not a false vision you have seen? Have you not uttered lying divinations? You say: *oracle of Yahweh* when I have not spoken. ⁸ But this is what Yahweh says: Because of your false and lying revelations I will oppose you, word of Lord Yahweh. ⁹ My hand will strike the prophets whose revelations are delusions, whose predictions are lies. They will not

1. 1 K 22, 13; Am 7, 14

◆ *The days pass and the visions do not come true.* We are surprised by the lack of faith of the Jews because, in looking back on Sacred History, it seems to us that it is filled with miracles and the words of the prophets were fulfilled. But, this is not the way it appeared to the prophets' contemporaries. For almost two centuries, there were only Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a few minor prophets; besides, miraculous liberations like that of Jerusalem in 701 did not occur often. History was not only miracles; and prophetic words were not fulfilled immediately. Moreover, side by side with the true prophets there were false ones whose visions often failed to come true. Thus, the Jews' unbelief is very understandable.

There are times, in the course of history,

when changes occur rapidly, and other times when God does not seem to be doing anything. In the Gospel itself we are told not to become materialistic when the Lord seems absent from the affairs of the world (Luke 21:34; 17:26; Pt 3:3).

● Truth and lies are spread in the world. In this, the prophets were no more privileged than we are, since all of them had opponents (see 1 Kgs 22; Is 28).

Here, Ezekiel gives us the characteristic actions of the false and the true prophet. The true prophet is the one who risks everything for the sake of the truth;

– he usually says something contrary to what the majority would like to hear (see also Jer 14:13);



be accepted among my people's assembly nor will they be inscribed in the register of the nation of Israel. They will not re-enter the land of Israel – and you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh.

¹⁰ These prophets have misled my people saying 'Peace!' when there is no peace. The people are building a wall and these prophets daub it with whitewash; ¹¹ but say to those who daub it with whitewash: The wall will fall. I will send torrential rain, huge hailstones and stormy winds, and see: ¹² the wall will fall! Will they not say to you: Where is the whitewash with which you daubed it?"

¹³ That is why the Lord Yahweh speaks thus: In my fury I will make a violent wind break out and in my anger I will send a torrential downpour, and my wrath will hurl destructive hailstones. ¹⁴ I will destroy the wall you daubed with whitewash; I will level it to the ground and its foundation will be laid bare. It will fall and beneath it you will be utterly destroyed and you will know that I am Yahweh. ¹⁵ I will exhaust my anger against the wall and against those who daubed it with whitewash. Then they will say to you: Where is the wall and where are those who whitewashed it, ¹⁶ the prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and who had visions of peace when there was no peace?"

¹⁷ Yahweh then said to me: "As for you, son of man, turn towards the women of your people who prophesy on their own initiative, and prophesy against them. ¹⁸ You will say: Woe to those who make magic bands for all wrists and veils for every size of head – those women who ensnare souls! ¹⁹ For the Lord Yahweh says: You who ensnare the lives of my people, will you preserve your own? You have dishonoured me among my people for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread. Because of you people die who should not die, and people live who should not live. For my people listen to you and your lies."

²⁰ That is why the Lord Yahweh speaks, "I hate the wrist bands with which you ensnare souls like birds. ²¹ I will tear your veils and free my people from your hands. No more will they fall into your hands and you will know that I am Yahweh. ²² You have disheartened with lies the righteous whom I would never dishearten, and you have strengthened the wicked, that he might not turn away from his evil ways and so save his life. ²³ Because of that I will no longer let you have false visions or practice divinations. I will free my people from your clutches and you will know that I am Yahweh."

I will not allow them to consult me

+14 ¹ Some of the elders of Israel came and sat in front of me. ² Then the word of Yahweh came to me, ³ "Son of man, these men are keeping in their heart and remain attached to what makes them sin. Am I to allow them to consult me? ⁴ Speak to them on my behalf: To every Israelite who goes to a prophet while he keeps filthy idols in his heart and is attached to what makes him sin, I, Yahweh, will give the answer his many idols deserve.

⁵ For I want to take hold of Israel's heart, the heart of all those who have strayed from me because of their filthy idols.

⁶ So then say to the people of Israel: Thus says the Lord Yahweh: come back, turn away from your filthy idols; turn your face away from all your abominations. ⁷ If a man of

10. Jer 28, 8

11. Mt 7, 24

19. Mt 3, 5; Is 56, 11

1. 8, 1; 20, 1

instead of keeping quiet about sin, he takes the risk of denouncing it (see Jer 23:14); he indicates the causes of evil instead of proposing makeshift solutions which only hide it for a while:

he is on top of the rampart, as a sentinel, seeing clearly the approaching judgment of God, namely, the inevitable consequences of sins and errors. Through his words and his intercession, he defends his people from the anger of Yahweh (Ez 22:30).

Ezekiel mentions the prophetesses and their gestures whose precise meaning escapes us; they caused the people to become preoccupied

with dreams, superstitions and illusory remedies, while remaining blind to crime and to sin.

+ *Am I to allow them to consult me?* Here, we have a warning for those who come to consult the Lord through the prophet in order to solve their most pressing concerns: Must I marry this woman? How will I be cured of my illness? Yahweh does not want to answer those who are not willing to obey him; rather, he will punish them for their wickedness: this will be 'their answer'.

If the prophet lets himself be seduced. If, for gain, the prophet agrees to answer questions which have nothing to do with his religious mis-



the people of Israel or a guest staying in Israel strays away from following me and goes to a prophet to consult me while he keeps idols in his heart and remains attached to what makes him sin, I, Yahweh, will answer him myself. ⁸ I will turn my face against this man, I will make of him a proverbial example, I will strike him from the midst of my people and you will know that I am Yahweh.

⁹ If the prophet lets himself be seduced and gives an answer, it will be I, Yahweh, who will have let him be seduced. I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel.

¹⁰ They will be responsible for their sin. The prophet will be as guilty as the one who consulted him, ¹¹ that the people of Israel may no longer stray from me. Instead of defiling themselves with all their transgressions, they will be for me a people and I will be their God – word of Yahweh."

¹² The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ¹³ "Son of man, when a nation sins against me by being unfaithful, I will stretch out my hand against it, deprive it of bread, and famine will destroy men and animals. ¹⁴ But if there were found in the land these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, they would save their lives because of their righteousness – word of Yahweh.

¹⁵ If I also let wild beasts roam the land to deprive it of children so that it becomes a desolation without a passerby because of the beasts, ¹⁶ if these three men were in the land, as

I live, word of Lord Yahweh, they would not save their sons or daughters but only they themselves would be spared while the land would be made desolate.

¹⁷ The same would happen if I brought the sword against this land and ordered the sword to go through the land destroying men and animals. ¹⁸ If these three men were in the land, as I live, word of Lord Yahweh, they would not save sons and daughters but they themselves would be spared. ¹⁹ Or if I sent pestilence to the land and poured out my fury against it in bloodshed in order to destroy men and animals, ²⁰ if Noah, Daniel and Job were in the land, as I live, word of Yahweh, they would not save sons or daughters, but their own lives would be spared because of their righteousness."

²¹ Now this is what the Lord Yahweh says, "Although I have sent my four great punishments, sword, famine, wild beasts and plague against Jerusalem to destroy men and animals, ²² there are survivors, sons and daughters who will be brought out. They will come to you here, and when you see their way of life and their deeds, you will no longer be shocked at the disaster I brought on Jerusalem and at everything that happened to her. ²³ They will set your mind at rest when you see their conduct and you will realize that not in vain was all that I did in the city – word of Lord Yahweh."

Israel: The useless vine

15 ¹ This word of Yahweh came to me, ² "Son of man, in what way is the wood of the vine superior to that of any other tree in the forest? ³ Do they take its wood to make anything? Do they use it to make a peg for hanging a tool?

⁴ But now they have used it as fuel and the fire has burned it at both ends leaving the middle charred. Is it then of any use? ⁵ If it was of no use when it was whole, of even less use will it be when burnt in the fire."

sion, Yahweh will punish the one consulting and the prophet as well.

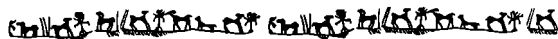
This implies the responsibility of people who let themselves be deceived by a false prophet. People prefer to go to a false prophet because they know that he will not point to God's demands and will not force them to see clearly the faults in their lives. In the end, they will all be lost.

■ In chapters 15-23 the sins of Judah throughout history are denounced four times, in different ways: chapters 16, 20, 22, 23.

In this chapter, the image of the vine is used to depict the necessary conclusion of Judah's

history: the nation is to be destroyed and its capital burned. Just like the wood of the vine when Yahweh chose it, Israel did not stand out from other people, either in number, or quality. Since they did not fulfil their mission, they can neither continue as God's people, nor become again a people like the rest:

◆ The story of the unfaithful wife, already told by Hosea and Jeremiah, is expanded to include all of sacred history. Here it begins with the conquest of Canaan. When David conquered Jerusalem, the common people there were Amorites and the upper class, Hittites.



* That is why Lord Yahweh speaks thus, "I took the vine from among all the trees of the forest, and I gave it to the fire to be burned. This is how I have just dealt with those living in Jerusalem. I will turn my face against them. Though they escaped from the fire, the fire will burn them and you will know that I am Yahweh when I turn against them. I will make the land a desolation because they have been unfaithful – word of Lord Yahweh."

The unfaithful bride

♦16 The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms: "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem its sins. You say on my behalf: Your beginning was in Canaan; there you were born. Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. On the day you were born your cord was not cut, you were not bathed in water to make you clean, you were not rubbed with salt nor were you wrapped in cloth. There was no one to look with pity on you or compassionate enough to give you any of these attentions. You were left exposed in the open fields because you were looked upon with disgust on the day you were born.

* But I passed by and saw you immersed in your blood. I said to you in the midst of your blood, "Live!" I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and became tall and were becoming of marriageable age. Your breasts were formed and your hair had grown but you were naked and exposed. I passed by later and saw you were at the age of love and spread part of my garment over you to cover your nudity. I made a covenant with you with an oath – word of Lord Yahweh – and you were mine. Then I bathed you in water, I cleansed you of your blood and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with embroidered cloth and put soft leather sandals on your feet. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with jewelry, putting bracelets on

your arms, a necklace around your neck¹² and a ring in your nose. I gave you earrings and a magnificent crown for your head. You were adorned with gold and silver; your clothing was fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You were fed on finest flour, honey and oil; you became very beautiful and rose to be queen. Your beauty was perfect and your renown spread through the nations, because of the splendour I had given you – word of Yahweh.

But you relied on your beauty; you trusted in your fame and you began to give yourself to every passerby like a prostitute. With some of your garments you made your high places where you played the harlot; (the like has never been and never will be). With my silver and my gold and with the ornaments that were your splendour and which I had given you, you formed male idols and gave yourself to them. With your embroidered garments you covered them and before them you have placed my oil and my incense.

My bread which I gave you, the fine flour, the oil and the honey with which I fed you, you offered as fragrant incense before them, word of Yahweh. You took the sons and daughters you bore for me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was it not enough to prostitute yourself? Did you have to slaughter my children as an offering to your idols? You revel in your abominations and prostitution without remembering the days of your youth when you were naked and exposed, lying in your blood.

Woe, woe to you – declares Lord Yahweh – for all this wickedness! You built your mounds and made your high places at every crossroads. At the entrance to every road you built your lofty shrines; you defiled your beauty giving yourself to every passerby and always increasing your harlotry. You gave yourself to the Egyptians, your large-limbed neighbours and provoked my anger with your

5. Jn 15, 6

3. Hos 1-3

8. Rut 3, 9

We can see the stages of this history:

Israel was of nothing when God chose her: v 4-5.

God enriches her: v 8-14.

The fall: v 15-22.

The promise: "I will remember my covenant with you"

In speaking of prostitution, Ezekiel is dealing with three sins at the same time: just as Isaiah and Jeremiah had done:

giving oneself to the worship of idols in spite of being "the bride of Yahweh";
organizing sacred prostitutions as practised in pagan cults;
submitting to powerful nations to gain their

political protection instead of remaining independent.

Ezekiel does not forget a single detail of what can humiliate his people and put them to shame. Such a strong criticism of their national history had never been heard by any people. By hitting at the pride of his compatriots, the prophet teaches us a lesson: to know God, we must know ourselves and bring all the stupidity and wickedness of our hearts into the open.

Notice also verses 59-63 where Yahweh promises the new covenant. The humiliation which follows the sins prepares for an upright life.



increasing promiscuity. ²⁷ And I stretched out my hand against you and reduced your territory and gave you over to the mercy of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines who were shocked by your filthy ways.

²⁸ You played the harlot with the Assyrians as well because you were never satisfied. Yes, you played the harlot with them but you remained insatiable. ²⁹ Then you multiplied your prostitutions in a land of merchants, Chaldea, and even with that you were not satisfied.

³⁰ Ah! How my anger rose against you, word of Lord Yahweh, as you did all that, the work of an accomplished harlot, ³¹ when you built your mounds at the entrance to every road and your shrines in every square! You were not like a prostitute because you scorned payments.

³² Adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your husband. ³³ All prostitutes receive fees, but you gave gifts to your lovers, bribing them to come to you for your favours. ³⁴ In your prostitution you have been different from other women; no one approaches you and whereas you offer payment no one gives you any. You are completely different.

³⁵ Therefore harlot, hear the word of Yahweh! ³⁶ This is what the Lord Yahweh says, "For having exposed yourself and uncovered your nakedness to your lovers and your abominable idols and because you have offered them the blood of your children, because of that, ³⁷ I will gather all the lovers that found pleasure in you and all those you loved, as well as those you hated; I will assemble them from all around to come against you and I will strip you before them and they will see your nakedness. ³⁸ I will judge you as adulterous women are judged and as those who shed blood and I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of anger and jealousy. ³⁹ I will hand you over to them; they will tear down your mounds and shrines; they shall strip you of your clothes, taking from you the ornaments that were your splendour and leaving you naked and bare. ⁴⁰ They shall bring a troop against you to stone you and gash you with swords. ⁴¹ Your houses will be burned by fire. Sentence shall be passed on you in the presence of many women. I will make you cease your prostitutions and you shall no longer be hired. ⁴² But when I have exhausted my fury against you, my jealousy shall leave you. I will be calm and no longer angry.

⁴³ Because you did not remember the days of your youth and roused my anger with all these things, I in turn will make you responsible for all you did, word of Lord Yahweh. Have you not added detestable deeds to all your other abominations?

⁴⁴ Every maker of proverbs will say of you: "Like mother, like daughter!" ⁴⁵ You are the daughter of your mother who loathed her husband and her children, and you are the sister of your sisters who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite, your father an Amorite. ⁴⁶ Your elder sister is Samaria who with her daughters lives on your left, and your younger sister at your right is Sodom with her daughters. ⁴⁷ You have followed their ways insanely and given yourself to the same abominations. You have been more corrupt than they in every way. ⁴⁸ As I live, word of Yahweh, Sodom your sister and her daughters have not done as you have done.

⁴⁹ The sins of Sodom your sister were pride, over-indulgence in food, complacency and indifference to the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They were arrogant and did detestable things in my sight. For that reason I destroyed them as you have seen. ⁵¹ As for Samaria she has not committed half of your sins. Your abominations are more numerous than hers and in comparison make your sisters appear righteous. ⁵² So bear your disgrace, you who have committed such detestable sins that have provided excuses to your sisters! They appear to be more righteous than you are. Be ashamed and bear your disgrace since your sisters seem holy compared to you.

⁵³ When I restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, ⁵⁴ that you may bear your shame and confusion because they now feel they are better than you. ⁵⁵ When your sister Sodom and her daughters and Samaria with hers will return to what they were before, you and your daughters will also return to what you were before. ⁵⁶ Had not Sodom your sister become a byword for you in the time when you felt proud, ⁵⁷ before your wickedness had become known? But now you have become the taunt of the daughters of Edom and all her neighbours, of the daughters of the Philistines who all around show their disgust for you. ⁵⁸ You shall bear the consequences of your foul behaviour and your abominations, word of Yahweh.

60. Jer 31, 31; Hos 2, 16

12. 2 K 24, 10

20. Jer 52

23. Dn 4, 10; Mt 13, 23

24. Ps 113, 7

o When I give you your sisters as daughters. After being punished and corrected, Israel will receive the mission to teach and lead other

people. This is also seen in the Church, which is holy, in some sense, but which also experiences human weakness. The people who have sinned



That you may be put to shame

o⁵⁹ For thus says Yahweh: "I will treat you as you deserve, you who despised the oath and broke the covenant.⁶⁰ But I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth and make in your favour an eternal covenant.⁶¹ You will be mindful of your ways and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both the elder and the younger, and give them to you as daughters, on the terms of my covenant with you.⁶² I will establish my covenant with you and you will know that I am Yahweh,⁶³ so that you may remember, be ashamed and never open your mouth again because of your humiliation, when I have pardoned you for all you have done, word of Lord Yahweh.

The kings – David's sons

17¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms. ² Son of man, set a riddle and relate a parable to the people of Israel. The Lord Yahweh says this:

+ ³The great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and fine plumage of various colours came to Lebanon and removed the top of a cedar. ⁴He broke off the topmost of the twigs and carried it off to a land of trade and set it in a city of merchants. ⁵He then took a seed of the land and planted it like a willow in fertile soil near abundant water. ⁶It grew and became a splendid vine with spreading branches turned towards the eagle, and roots growing deep. It became a vine growing branches and producing foliage.

⁷But there was another great eagle with powerful wings and abundant plumage and the vine twisted its roots and ⁸its branches towards him to be better watered than in the soil where it was planted. That vine, however, was able to produce branches, bear fruit and develop into a magnificent vine, because it had been planted in a good field near abundant water."

"The Lord Yahweh says, "Will the vine prosper? Will the eagle not tear out its roots and cut away its fruit so that the foliage will wither and the vine dry up? It will not take much effort or many people to pull up its roots. ¹⁰It has been transplanted, but it will not prosper. When the east wind blows, the vine will

completely wither away. In the soil where it grows it will wither!"

¹¹The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ¹²"Say to these rebellious people: Do you not recognize what all this signifies? The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and carried the king and princes off to Babylon. ¹³Then he took a member of the royal family and made an alliance with him, binding him by oath. He also carried off the leading citizens ¹⁴to keep the kingdom humble and unable to assert itself, and to oblige the king to respect the treaty.

¹⁵But the king rebelled against him and sent messengers to Egypt to ask for horses and a powerful army. Will he succeed? Will he escape after doing this? Will he escape after breaking the treaty? ¹⁶As I live, word of Lord Yahweh, he will die in the land of the king who put him on the throne, but whose oath he despised, and whose treaty he has broken. There in Babylon he will die.

¹⁷Pharaoh will not send a mighty army and throngs of men to help him in war when ramps are built and siege works erected to kill many people. ¹⁸This king has despised the oath and broken the treaty. Because he did all these things after giving his hand, he shall not escape!

¹⁹That is why the Lord Yahweh speaks thus: "As I live, I will make him account for the oath he despised and the treaty he broke. ²⁰I will spread my net over him and he will be caught in its mesh. I will bring him to Babylon and there I will demand an account of his infidelity to me. ²¹As for the pick of his troops they will fall by the sword; those who survive will be scattered to the winds and you will know that I, Yahweh, have spoken."

²²Thus says the Lord Yahweh: "At the top of the cedar I will take one of its uppermost branches, a tender twig and plant it. ²³On a lofty, massive mountain, on a high mountain of Israel I will plant it. It will produce branches and bear fruit and become a magnificent cedar. Birds of all kinds will nest in it and find shelter in its branches. ²⁴And all the trees of the field shall know that I am Yahweh, I who bring down the lofty tree and make the lowly tree tall. I will make the tree that is full of sap wither and the dry tree bloom. I, Yahweh, have spoken and this will I do."

33. Hos 8, 9 48. Gen 18, 19; Is 3, 9; Jer 23, 14

and experienced forgiveness often show more compassion and more eagerness to save sinners.

+ Ezekiel himself explains this long comparison. The conclusion is that kings descending from David are coming to an end. Another descendant of David will be chosen by God himself

to be the Messiah. Verses 22-24 refer to Christ and to the Church.

The one who broke the treaty (15-20). Zedekiah's submission to the Chaldeans was the just price for the previous errors denounced by the prophets. God does not accept every liberation, nor the use of any means whatsoever.



If a sinner turns away from sin, he will live

■18 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ² "Why are you applying this proverb to the land of Israel:

The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? ³ As I live, word of Yahweh, this proverb will no longer be quoted in Israel. ⁴ All life is in my hands, the life of the father and the life of the son are mine. The lives of both are in my hands, so the one who sins will die.

⁵ Imagine a man who is righteous and practices what is just and right. ⁶ He does not eat in the mountain shrines, or look towards the filthy idols of Israel, does not defile his neighbour's wife, or have intercourse with a woman during her period; ⁷ he molests no one, pays what he owes, does not steal, gives food to the hungry and clothes to the naked, ⁸ demands no interest on a loan and doesn't lend for interest, refrains from injustice, practices true justice, man to man, ⁹ follows my decrees and obeys my laws in acting loyally. Because such a man is truly righteous, he will live, word of the Lord Yahweh.

¹⁰ But perhaps this man has a son who steals and sheds blood, commit-

ting crimes which his father never did. ¹¹ Perhaps the son eats at the mountain shrines, defiles the wife of his neighbour, ¹² oppresses the poor and needy, steals, neglects to pay his debts, looks to the idols, does detestable things, ¹³ demands interest on a loan, even practices usury. Will such a man live? No, he will not! Because he has committed all these abominations he will die: his guilt will fall upon him.

¹⁴ But imagine that such a man has in turn a son who does not commit the sins he has seen his father do. ¹⁵ He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of Israel, does not defile his neighbour's wife, ¹⁶ or oppress anyone or ask for a pledge on a loan; does not steal; and gives food to the hungry and clothing to the naked, ¹⁷ turns from injustice, exacts no usury or excessive interest, observing my decrees and practicing my laws: such a man shall not die because of his father's sins; no, he will live!

¹⁸ His father instead, who practiced extortion and stole from others, will die for his sin, because he did wrong among his people.

¹⁹ You may say, 'Why does the son not bear the guilt of his father?' But the son did what was just and right, observing and practicing my decrees; he will live! ²⁰ The person who sins is

1. 14, 12-20; 33, 10-20 2. Jer 31, 29 4. Dt 24, 16 6. Mt 6, 6; Ps 15 20. Ex 20, 5; Lev 26, 39

■ Fathers ate sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. The primitive people of Israel had a strong sense of common responsibility within a group, family, or nation. In Joshua 7:24, we have the example of the culprit's family being condemned to death along with him, and also the example of the entire people being punished for the fault of one of their members.

However, in the last years of the kingdom of Judah, a sense of personal responsibility becomes stronger:

- The prophets had declared that human justice cannot punish children for the crimes of their parents (Dt 24:16). How then could God act in a different way and punish innocent people?

In ancient times, any error, even unintentional, was considered a "sin". Now, the prophets are teaching that only wickedness is a sin and misfortunes which are not a consequence of this evil are not punishment from God.

The destruction of Jerusalem seemed to punish everyone without differentiating between good and evil people. Ezekiel does not deny the fact that, on that occasion, God struck everyone; but to him, this was a thing of the past, and it was fitting for a people who had totally gone astray. He looks to the future and teaches how God will act from now on with regard to authentic religion:

- Justice will be for the just, and disgrace for



the one who will die. The son will not be held responsible for the sin of his father and the father will not be responsible for the sin of his son. The righteous deeds of the righteous will be to his credit and the sin of the wicked will be charged against him.

²¹If the sinner turns from his sin, observes my decrees and practices what is right and just, he will live, he will not die. ²²None of the sins he committed will be charged against him: he will live as a consequence of his righteous deeds. ²³Do I want the death of the sinner? – word of Yahweh. Do I not rather want him to turn from his ways and live?

²⁴But if the righteous man turns away from what is good and commits sins as the wicked do, will he live? His righteous deeds will no longer be credited to him, but he will die because of his infidelity and his sins.

²⁵But you say: Yahweh's way is not just! Why, Israel! Is my position wrong? Is it not rather that yours is wrong? ²⁶If the righteous man dies after turning from his righteous deeds and sinning, he dies because of his sins. ²⁷And if the wicked man does what is good and right, after turning from the sins he committed, he will save his life.

²⁸He will live and not die, because he has opened his eyes and turned from the sins he had committed.

²⁹But you, Israel, say: Yahweh's way is not just! Is my position not just? Is it not rather yours that is wrong? ³⁰That is why I will judge you, Israel, each one according to his ways, word of Yahweh. Come back, turn away from your offenses, that you may not deserve punishment.

³¹Free yourselves from all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, Israel? ³²I do not want the death of anyone, word of Yahweh, but that you be converted and live!"

The last kings of Judah

◆19 ¹As for you, son of man, intone a lamentation for the princes of Israel.

²Say: A lioness among lions was your mother! Crouching among the cubs she nursed her whelps. ³One of these she pushed forward and he grew to be a young lion, able to tear his prey and become a man-eater.

⁴But the nations heard about him and he was trapped in their pit; and they brought him with hooks to the land of Egypt. ⁵When she saw that her hope had come to nothing, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion. ⁶He strutted among the others for he had become a strong lion, able to tear his prey and be a man-eater.

⁷He destroyed their strongholds and ravaged their towns. The country and its inhabitants were alarmed at the sound of his roar. ⁸But the nations came against him from the regions round about. They spread their net over him and caught him in their pit. ⁹They put him in a cage with hooks and brought him to the king of Babylon. There he was put in custody so that his roar was no longer heard in the mountains of Israel.

4. 2 K 23, 31

the unfaithful: everyone will receive what he personally deserves.

– *If the wicked turns from his sin, he will live: everyone will have time to decide freely. If people are evil at first and then decide to do good, God will wait for their conversion and he will take their last orientation into account.*

From this we can draw several conclusions:

- We must never condemn or retaliate against some persons simply because they belong to a certain family, or group, or party who have committed crimes.
- It becomes difficult to accept the death penalty since it takes away the possibility

for the culprit to repair the harm done.

We are invited to look with compassion on those with a bad reputation, for God does not want the sinner to die, but to be converted.

In later times, wise men will note that often-times evil people do not receive their punishment, nor good people their reward in this life (see Job 21); and it will become obvious to them that God's justice will be achieved in the next life.

◆ In this comparison, the lioness is the Jewish nation. The cubs are the kings: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.



¹⁰Your mother was like the vine of a vineyard planted near water. It became fruitful and leafy from being so well watered. ¹¹It produced a vigorous branch that became a royal sceptre towering above the foliage. It was outstanding for its height and its numerous branches.

¹²But the vine was uprooted in fury and cast down to the ground. The east wind dried it up and stripped it of fruit. Its vigorous branch withered and was burned by fire. ¹³It is now planted in the desert, in an arid land of drought. ¹⁴Fire from its stem has destroyed its branches and fruit. No vigorous branch or royal sceptre has been left.

This is a lament that people will sing.

A summary of the history of Israel

o 20 ¹It happened on the tenth day of the fifth month of the seventh year, some men from among the elders of Jerusalem came to consult Yahweh and sat in front of me. ²Then the word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ³"Son of man, say to the elders of Israel: This is the word of the Lord Yahweh: Do you come to consult me? As I live, I will not answer you – word of Yahweh.

⁴Judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know about the detestable practices of their fathers. ⁵Say to them:

This is what Yahweh has said: The day I chose Israel, I committed myself to the descendants of Jacob with an oath. I revealed myself to them in the land of Egypt and I swore to them. I am Yahweh, your God. ⁶On that day I swore to them that I would take them out of Egypt to a country I had explored for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most splendid of lands.

⁷I said to them: Let each one reject the horrors that attract him! Do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am Yahweh, your God.

⁸But they rebelled against me and would not listen; none of them rejected the horrors that attracted them, none abandoned the filthy idols of Israel. I then thought of pouring out my fury on them, exhausting my anger against them in the land of Egypt. ⁹But for the sake of my Name I relented, lest it be profaned in the sight of the nations where they lived, whose inhabitants had seen how I revealed myself to the Israelites in bringing them out of Egypt.

¹⁰So I brought them out of Egypt and led them to the desert. ¹¹I gave them my decrees and made my laws known to them, laws by which man lives provided he observes them. ¹²I also gave them my sabbaths to be a sign between us, letting them know that I am Yahweh who makes them holy.

¹³But Israel rebelled against me in the desert. They did not follow my decrees, they despised my laws by which man lives, provided he obeys them; they so profaned my sabbaths that in my fury I thought of destroying them in the desert.

¹⁴But again I relented for the sake of my Name, lest it be profaned in the sight of the nations who saw me bring them out. ¹⁵However I swore to them in the desert that I would not bring them to the land flowing with milk and honey that I had given them – the choicest of lands – ¹⁶because they had despised my laws and had not followed my decrees; they had profaned my sabbaths, and their heart went after their idols. ¹⁷But I had pity on them and did not destroy them; I did not do away with them in the desert.

¹⁸I said to their children in the desert: Do not follow the example of your fathers; do not keep their practices and do not defile yourselves with their idols. ¹⁹I am Yahweh, your God. Follow my decrees, observe my laws and practice them. ²⁰Keep my sabbaths holy and let them be a sign between us and you will know that I am Yahweh, your God.

²¹But their children too rebelled against

1. Ps 106; 8, 1

9. Is 48, 11

10. Rom 6, 22; Ex 32, 12; Num 14, 13

o Another presentation of the sins of Israel throughout its history. Here, Ezekiel constantly speaks of *profanation*. Being the people of a holy God, Israel cannot live in the same way as other nations that are *profane*, that is to say, that they do not belong to God. The land of Israel, its laws, its feasts: everything is *holy* and cannot be used as people please.

In 20:22 Yahweh makes sure that *his Name* is not profaned. If he were to punish Israel and allow it to be destroyed, the other nations according to the mentality of the time, would despise God who was not able to save his people. Thus, his name would be "profaned". But when Yahweh gathers his people (20:41), all the

nations will see his power: thus, his name will be "sanctified".

I gave them statutes that were not good (25). Ezekiel interprets past history in his own way and points out what can humiliate his people as we noted in 20:25. At times the Israelites had used the Law of Leviticus (18:21) regarding the offering of the first-born to God. It justifies the sacrifice of children as practised by the pagans. Ezekiel leads us to see that the law actually required such sacrifices and that Yahweh had allowed it (he says: "had given" using a common Hebrew expression) to punish his people by letting them accumulate these crimes which pleased them.



me; they did not follow my decrees or observe my laws; they did not carry out these laws by which man lives provided he obeys them. They profaned my sabbaths and I thought of pouring out my fury on them and exhausting my anger against them in the desert.

²² But once more I held back my hand lest my Name be profaned in the eyes of the nations that had seen me bring them out. ²³ However I swore to them in the desert that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them in other lands since they had not obeyed my laws, ²⁴ but instead had defiled my sabbaths and had looked to the idols of their fathers. ²⁵ In the meantime I gave them statutes that were not good and laws they could not live by, ²⁶ so that they might be defiled by their gifts. I let them offer by fire all their firstborn, in order to shame them and let them know that I am Yahweh.

²⁷ Therefore, son of man, speak to Israel: say to them: This is what Yahweh says: Do you not know that your fathers offended me by their infidelity? ²⁸ I led them to the land I had sworn to give them, but whenever they saw a lofty hill or leafy tree they offered sacrifices. They provoked me with the offerings they made there – appeasing aromas and drink offerings. ²⁹ Then I said to them, 'What is this place to which you go?' That is why they called it *high place*.

³⁰ Say to Israel, Thus says Yahweh: Since you follow your fathers in lust after their abominations, ³¹ in bringing your gifts and sacrificing your children by fire, never ceasing to defile yourselves with your idols, am I to answer when you consult, Israel? As I live, word of Yahweh, I will not answer you.

³² You have in mind to be like the other nations, worshipping wood and stone, but this shall not happen. ³³ As I live, word of Yahweh, I will rule you with an iron hand, an outstretched arm and outpourings of wrath.

³⁴ Then I will bring you from the midst of the nations and from the peoples where I have scattered you with a strong hand, an outstretched arm and outpourings of wrath. ³⁵ I will lead you to the wilderness of Syria and ³⁶ there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. Just as I judged your fathers in the desert of Egypt, ³⁷ so will I judge you, word of the Lord Yahweh. I will make you feel my rod and sort you out. ³⁸ I will rid you of rebels; though they go out from the land of their exile, they shall not enter the land of Israel and you will know that I am Yahweh.

³⁹ People of Israel, this is what the Lord Yahweh says: Go, serve your idols, but in the

end you will not refuse to listen to me. No longer shall you profane my holy Name with your gifts and your idols. ⁴⁰ For it is on my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel – word of the Lord Yahweh – that all Israel, all in the land, shall serve me. ⁴¹ There I will accept you as a pleasing fragrance when I bring you out from the nations and assemble you from the lands where you were dispersed, and through you will show my holiness to the nations.

⁴² You will know that I am Yahweh when I lead you to the land of Israel, to the land that I swore to your fathers that I would give you. ⁴³ And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds by which you defiled yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves because of your evil ways. ⁴⁴ You will know that I am Yahweh when I deal with you, Israel, for my Name's sake and not according to your wickedness and corrupt deeds, word of the Lord Yahweh.

⁴⁵ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms. ⁴⁶ "Son of man, look towards the south; direct your words to the south and prophesy against *Forest of the south*. ⁴⁷ Say to the forest: 'O forest, hear the word of Yahweh: I am kindling a fire that will burn every tree, both green and dry; its flame will not be quenched but from the south to the north every face will be scorched. ⁴⁸ Everyone will see that it was I, Yahweh, who kindled it and that it will not be put out. ⁴⁹ This time I said, "Lord Yahweh, they say that I am always talking in parables!"

My sword is unsheathed

21 ¹ But the word of Yahweh came to me in these terms. ² "Son of man, look towards Jerusalem; address your words to the sanctuary and prophesy against Israel. ³ Say to Israel: I come against you; I will unsheathe my sword and cut off from you both the good and the wicked. ⁴ Yes: against both the good and the wicked. My sword is unsheathed against all mortals from north to south. ⁵ And all will know that I, Yahweh, have unsheathed my sword, and unsheathed it will remain.

⁶ And you, son of man, groan in the bitterness of a broken heart, groan in their presence. ⁷ When they say to you, 'Why are you groaning?' you will answer: 'Because of what will happen; when you hear of it, every heart will melt, every hand become limp, every spirit will be faint and knees shall be as weak as water. It is to happen; it has come, word of the Lord Yahweh.'

⁸ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms. ⁹ "Son of man; prophesy and say on my

behalf: The sword has been polished and sharpened.¹⁰ It has been sharpened for a massacre.¹¹ Yahweh gave it to be polished and seized by the hand. He has had the sword sharpened and polished to hand to the executioner.

¹² Cry out and wail, son of man, for this sword is intended for my people and for the princes of Israel. They shall be given over to the sword with my people; beat your breast, word of the Lord Yahweh.

¹³⁻¹⁴ And you, son of man, prophesy and clap your hands! The sword will strike and strike again for the slaughter, for the massacre.¹⁵ Hearts languish and people fall for I have placed at every gate the sword for slaughter.¹⁶ It has been sharpened and shines. O sword! slash to the right, slash to the left, wherever you turn.¹⁷ For my part I clap my hands and release my fury; I, Yahweh, have spoken."

¹⁸ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms,¹⁹ "Son of man, mark two roads for the coming of the king of Babylon's sword. The two should leave from the same point.²⁰ At the head of each road place a sign, the first directing the sword to Rammah of the Ammonites and the second to Judah and the fortified city of Jerusalem.²¹ The king of Babylon, in fact, is now standing at the parting of the ways, at the head of both roads looking for an omen. He is shaking arrows, questioning the idols, looking at the liver of the victims.

²² The lot falls upon Jerusalem. Then he raises a wacry, "Set a battering ram at the gates, construct a ramp and erect siege-works."²³ Those who have sworn allegiance to him in Jerusalem do not dare believe it; but he remembers their guilt and they are captured.²⁴ That is why the Lord Yahweh has spoken: Your evil deeds have brought to mind your wickedness and made known your sins. And when I remembered you, sin appeared in all your deeds. Because of this you will be taken captive.

²⁵ As for you, dishonoured criminal, prince of Israel, the day and moment of your punishment has come.²⁶ They will remove your turban, take away your crown. All will be

changed: what is lowly will be lifted high and what is lofty will be brought low.²⁷ I will make it a ruins, a ruins such as never has been, until the one comes whose right it is to rule, the one I shall send.

²⁸ And you, son of man, prophesy and say: This is Yahweh's word concerning the Ammonites and their insults. This is what you are to say: The sword is unsheathed for the slaughter, polished and flashing for the work of destruction.²⁹ Beware of your false visions and lying omens, when your sword is laid to the necks of the wicked for their time has come and their punishment is near.³⁰ People of Ammon, put back the sword in its sheath. In your own place, in the land of your birth you will be judged.³¹ I will pour out my wrath on you, against you I will breathe the fire of my fury and hand you over to brutal men, experts in destruction.³² You will be fuel for the fire; your blood will be spilled through the land and you shall be remembered no more for I, Yahweh, have spoken."

The sins of Jerusalem

+ 22¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms,² "Son of man, will you judge them? Will you judge the city of blood? Charge her with all her detestable practices.³ Say: This is the Lord Yahweh's word: City of bloodshed, your hour has come. You who made your own idols to defile yourself, you are nearing your last days, the end of your years has come.⁴ That is why I am making you an object of horror for the nations and a laughingstock for every country.⁵ Those both near and far will mock you, for your name is defiled and you are full of tumult.⁶ The leaders of Israel, each according to his strength, have one intent – to shed

10. Jer 12, 12 17. Jer 31, 19 26. 1 S 15, 12; Dn 5, 5 31. 17, 24 32. Gen 49, 10; Mt 5, 1

+ In this chapter, from his place of exile Ezekiel addresses the people of Jerusalem.

In you... in you... in you... All sorts of crimes are committed in Jerusalem. Your princes, your priests, your leaders, the people: they all took part in the evil.

The people of Israel have become like dross for me. The trials that we endure are like a furnace used to purify gold and other metals (1 Pt 1:7). But, in the case of Jerusalem, the comparison with the furnace has other designs:

the siege of the city allows the destruction of a people who did not carry out to their mission. Those who do not want to be purified are burned (Mt 3:10).

The blood that you shed (9 and 13). The blood shed by the murderer stained the earth until the blood of the murderer was shed (Dt 19:12). This Hebrew belief stemmed from the conviction that violence was the greatest evil. Above all God condemns organized violence which, by killing opponents and possible accus-



blood. ⁷In you, Israel, father and mother are treated with contempt, in you the alien is oppressed, the fatherless and the widow are wronged. ⁸You have despised my holy things and profaned my sabbaths.

⁹In you, men slander to shed blood; in you, they go to eat on the hill sanctuaries and act shamefully. ¹⁰In you are those who defile their father's bed, in you are those who violate women when they are unclean. ¹¹One man commits a detestable offence with his neighbour's wife, another shamefully dishonours his daughter-in-law, another violates his own sister, his father's daughter.

¹²In you, men accept bribes to shed blood. You exact interest and usury and you rob and exploit your neighbour, and you have forgotten me. It is Yahweh who speaks.

¹³See, I will clap my hands at your dishonest profit, and the blood you have shed. Will your courage hold out, will your hands be steady when I shall come against you? ¹⁴I, Yahweh, have spoken and I will act accordingly. ¹⁵I will scatter you among the nations, I will disperse you in other countries to rid you of your uncleanness.

¹⁶Then you will be dishonoured in the eyes of the nations and you will know that I am Yahweh."

¹⁷The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ¹⁸"Israel has become for me like dross; some were like silver, bronze, tin, iron and lead; but in the furnace only dross is left.¹⁹ The Lord Yahweh has spoken: This is

how I am gathering you together in Jerusalem. ²⁰As they place silver, bronze, iron, lead and tin in the fires of a furnace to be smelted, so in my anger will I assemble you, put you in the furnace and smelt you. ²¹I will gather you in Jerusalem, stir up the fire of my wrath and smelt you in it. ²²As silver is smelted in the furnace so will you be smelted and you will know that I, Yahweh, have poured out my fiery wrath against you."

²³The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ²⁴"Son of man, say to Jerusalem: You are a land without rain, a land without a shower on a day of wrath, ²⁵a land where the princes have been like a roaring lion tearing its prey. They devour people; they take treasures and precious objects and increase the number of widows.

²⁶Your priests have broken my laws and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between what is holy and what is common; they have not taught what difference there is between the clean and the unclean. They have ignored my sabbath and I have been dishonoured by them.

²⁷The officials of the city are like wolves who tear their prey, shedding blood and killing people for unjust gain. ²⁸As for the prophets, they whitewash everything by means of false visions and lying predictions, saying: 'The Lord Yahweh has spoken' when Yahweh has not spoken. ²⁹The lords of the land have practiced extortion and robbery, oppressing the

18. Is 1, 22

20. Mal 3, 2

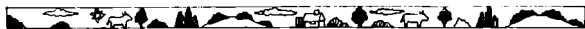
28. 13, 10

ers. allows the oppression of an entire people.

I looked among them, for one man to build a wall between them and me. Note verse 30 which brings to mind 13:9. Not everyone has the same understanding of the mystery of God, nor are they called to the same responsibilities. There is a need for intercessors who are in solidarity with others, feel compassion for them

and become responsible for them before God. Thus prayer appears to be very important. All prophets discover that this is to be their role.

This understanding of how God saves led many friends of God to "withdraw" into solitude; surrendering to the love of God through prayer and suffering.



poor and needy, molesting the alien and denying him justice.

³⁰ I looked for a man among them to build a wall and stand on the breach to protect the land lest I destroy it, but I found none. ³¹ So I have poured out my wrath against them; I have destroyed them in the heat of my fury bringing down on their heads all they have done – it is Yahweh who speaks."

Oholah and Oholibah

23 ¹ The word of the Lord Yahweh came to me in these terms. ² "Son of man, there were two women, daughters of the same mother. ³ They became prostitutes in Egypt, even from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and caressed. ⁴ The elder was called Oholah, her sister Oholibah. Both of them were mine and they gave me sons and daughters. *Oholah* is Samaria and *Oholibah* is Jerusalem.

■ ⁵ Oholah was mine when she played the harlot; she lusted after her lovers, the Assyrians, ⁶ warriors dressed in purple, governors, commanders, desirable young men, riders on horses. ⁷ She offered them her harlotry, to those who were the best of Assyria. She dishonoured herself with all those for whom she lusted and with their idols. ⁸ But she did not forget her harlotry with the Egyptians who had lain with her and poured their lust on her from the time of her youth. ⁹ That is why I gave her over to her lovers, the Assyrians, the object of her lustful desires. ¹⁰ They uncovered her nakedness, seized her sons and daughters and slew her. And she became a byword among women because punishment had come to her.

¹¹ Her sister, Oholibah, witnessed this but she was even more corrupt in her lust and worse than her sister in her prostitution. ¹² She lusted after the Assyrians, governors, com-

manders, horsemen, all desirable young men and ¹³ I saw how she dishonoured herself.

Both sisters acted in the same way but she went further than her sister. ¹⁴ No sooner had she seen men portrayed on walls, pictures of Chaldeans sketched in vermilion than she lusted after these men, ¹⁵ tightly belted, heads top-heavy with turbans, all resembling Babylonian cavalry officers. ¹⁶ She sent messengers to Chaldea and ¹⁷ they came to her in the bed of love and defiled her with their prostitution. They dishonoured her so much that she turned from them in disgust.

¹⁸ But because she had given herself and exposed her nakedness, I too turned from her in disgust just as I had turned away from her sister. ¹⁹ She multiplied her harlotry recalling her youth when she played the harlot in Egypt. ²⁰ She lusted after her lovers whose bodies were like those of donkeys and whose organs resembled those of horses. ²¹ She returned to the shameful conduct of her youth with the Egyptians.

²² That is why, Oholibah, thus says the Lord Yahweh: I am sending against you your lovers from whom you have turned away in disgust and I will bring them against you from all sides, ²³ Babylonians and Chaldeans, men of Pekod, Shoa and Koa and all the Assyrians with them, handsome young men, governors, commanders, cavalry officers, titled people all riding horses.

²⁴ They will come against you with chariots, wagons and throngs of people who will assail you from all sides with buckler, shield and helmet. ²⁵ I will put your case before them and they will judge you according to their laws. I will release my jealousy against you so that they shall deal with you furiously. They will cut off your nose and your ears and what is left of you will fall by the sword. They will seize your sons and daughters and what is left of you will be consumed by the fire; ²⁶ they will strip you of your clothes and ornaments.

²⁷ I will put an end to your shameful behaviour and your harlotry dating from your time in Egypt; you will not look towards them

31. Zep 3, 8

■ As he did in chapter 16, Ezekiel teaches his compatriots, who are indifferent to the love of Yahweh, by starting with what they know: jealous love and prostitution.

Ezekiel mentions three forms of idolatry: with the Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Babylonians: See commentary on Isaiah 30:22.

What offends God is not only that individuals forsake the God of justice – without whose knowledge nothing befalls us – to trust in stones, images and horoscopes, but also that the whole nation is sinning. God wished to develop within

it a new faith, lifestyle and culture able to save humankind; but instead they are satisfied with importing the most alienating of foreign cultures with their advertising, erotic dancers and video tapes.

Oholibah means *my tent is in her*: this refers to the southern kingdom, with Jerusalem, where Yahweh established his dwelling and to which he gave his promises.

Oholah means *her own tent*: this is the North which separated with Jeroboam in order to form a kingdom of its own.



again and will no longer dream of Egypt. Thus says ²⁸ Lord Yahweh: I am handing you over to those you hate, to those from whom you turned in disgust. ²⁹ They will treat you with loathing and take from you everything you have worked for, leaving you naked and uncovered and the nakedness of your harlotry will be exposed. ³⁰ Your shameful conduct and your promiscuity have brought this upon you, because you lusted after the nations and defiled yourself with their idols.

³¹ Since you have gone the way of your sister, I will place her cup in your hand. ³² Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You shall drink your sister's cup which is deep and wide. You shall be the butt of derision and mockery; the cup holds so much! ³³ You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow; it is a cup of desolation and horror, the cup of Samaria, your sister!

³⁴ You will drink and empty it to the dregs, and then tear your breasts – for I have spoken, word of the Lord Yahweh."

³⁵ That is why the Lord Yahweh speaks thus: "Since you have forgotten me and turned your back on me, you too will pay for your immodesty and harlotry!"

³⁶ Then Yahweh said to me, "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Confront them with their abominations. ³⁷ For they have committed adultery and stained their hands with blood. They committed adultery with their idols and even sacrificed their children – my children – as food for them. ³⁸ At that time they defiled my sanctuary and profaned my sabbaths: ³⁹ the same day they sacrificed their children to their idols, they entered my sanctuary to desecrate it. This is what they did in my house.

⁴⁰ Both of them sent messages to men who had come from afar and they came. You bathed yourself for them, painted your eyes and decked yourself with jewels. ⁴¹ You seated yourself on a stately couch and beside a table on which you put incense and oil that was fine.

⁴² The sound of a carefree crowd was heard here because of their number, not to mention the people brought in from the desert. They put bracelets on the wrists of the women and splendid crowns on their heads. ⁴³ Then I said about this city, worn out and defiled with her adultery: This is indeed harlotry! ⁴⁴ Men go to her as one goes to a prostitute. So they went to Oholah and Oholibah, the dissolute women!

⁴⁵ But upright men will judge as adulterous those who have shed blood, for indeed they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands."

⁴⁶ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: "Let a great assembly be gathered against them! Let them be delivered to terror and spoil! ⁴⁷ The assembly will stone them, have them cut in pieces by the sword, kill their sons and daughters and burn their houses.

⁴⁸ I will put an end to debauchery in this land; all the women will be warned and no longer will they imitate your immorality. ⁴⁹ I will make your immorality fall on your own heads and when you receive the punishment of your idolatry, you will know that I am Yahweh."

24 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me on the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year in these terms. ² Write today's date, this very day, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem today. ³ Teach this rebellious people by means of a parable: This is what the Lord Yahweh ordered me to do: Put the pot on the fire; place it there and pour water into it. ⁴ Put in it all the pieces of meat, the choice pieces, the leg and shoulder and fill it with the best of the bones. ⁵ Take these from the pick of the flock. Set wood underneath it in a circle to boil the pieces of meat and cook the bones in it."

⁶ Now this is what the Lord Yahweh says, "Woe to the city of blood, to the rusty pot with the rust encrusted on it! Let them empty it, piece by piece but without sparing anyone, ⁷ for the blood she shed is in her midst. She poured it on the rock surface, not on the ground where dust would cover it. ⁸ But I will not cover the blood that was poured on the bare rock. I shall instead kindle my fury and take revenge.

⁹ That is why the Lord Yahweh speaks thus: Woe to the city of blood! ¹⁰ I will make a great heap of wood! Pile on the wood, light the fire, cook the meat well, adding the spice, and let the bones burn. ¹¹ Leave the empty pot on the coals that it may heat and



the bronze grow red-hot melt the filth inside so its rust will be consumed.

¹² But the rust is such that not even the fire removes it. ¹³ I have tried to cleanse you of the filth of your immorality but since you would not be cleansed, you shall not be cleansed until I have satisfied my fury against you. ¹⁴ I, Yahweh, have spoken. This will happen; I will act and not relent; I will show no pity, no compassion. You shall be judged according to your ways and your deeds – word of Yahweh."

Ezekiel's wife dies

◆ ¹⁵ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ¹⁶ "Son of man, I am about to suddenly take from you the delight of your eyes, but you are not to lament or weep or let your tears flow. ¹⁷ Groan in silence and do not mourn for the dead; wear your turban, put on your sandals, do not cover your beard or eat the customary food of mourners."

¹⁸ I spoke to the people in the morning and my wife died that evening.

The next morning I did as I had been commanded. ¹⁹ Then the people said to me: "Explain to us the meaning of your actions." ²⁰ I said to them, "The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms: ²¹ 'Say to Israel: I am about to profane my sanctuary, your pride, the delight of your eyes for which you long. The sons and daughters you left behind will also fall by the sword, ²² but you will do as I have done; you will not cover your beard or eat the customary food of mourners; ²³ you will keep your turbans on your heads and sandals on your feet. You will not lament or weep. Instead, because of your sin, you will waste away and groan among yourselves. ²⁴ Ezekiel will be a sign for you. Do as he did and when this happens you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh."

²⁵ Son of man, the day I take their stronghold, the jewel which is the delight of their eyes, for which they and their children long, ²⁶ on that day a fugitive will come to give you the news. ²⁷ That very day you will open your mouth and be able to speak to him and you will no longer be silent. You will be a sign for them and they will know I am Yahweh.

PROPHECIES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS

Ammon, Moab, Edom, the Philistines

o25 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ² "Turn towards the people of the Ammonites and prophesy against them. ³ Say to them on my behalf: This is what the Lord Yahweh says: Because you mocked when my sanctuary was profaned, when the land of Israel was laid waste and the Judeans were exiled, ⁴ I am giving you over to the people of the East as their possession; they will pitch their camps and settle among you. They will eat your fruit and drink your milk. ⁵ I

will turn Rabbah into a pasture for camels and the towns of the Ammonites into a sheepfold and you will know that I am Yahweh."

⁶ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: "Because you clapped your hands and stamped your feet and danced for joy with an evil heart against the land of Israel, ⁷ I will stretch out my hand against you and hand you over as plunder to the nations. I will cut you off from the nations; no longer will you be numbered among them. I will destroy you and you will know I am Yahweh."

17. Jer 16, 7	26. 33, 22	27. 3, 26; 12, 6	1. Jer 4, 9, 1; Zep 2, 8	8. Is 15, 16
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◆ Once again, the prophet uses his own situation to announce the fall of Jerusalem which will lose its wealth and its inhabitants.

The prophet's personal trial in his marriage can be compared to what happened to other prophets, and the commentary was found in Jeremiah 16:1.

○ Chapters 25-32 contain the "messages against the pagan nations" similar to what is found in other prophets.

After announcing the almost total destruction of Israel, the prophet predicts the final destruction of Israel's enemies, when the time of justice arrives. The prophet's words are inspired by an



⁹ Thus says the Lord Yahweh, "Because Moab said: 'Judah is like all the other nations,' I will leave Moab unprotected and destroy the towns which are her glory; Beth eshimoth, Baal Meon, Kiriathaim. ¹⁰ I will give Moab along with the Ammonites as a possession to the people of the East so that the Ammonites will not be remembered among the nations. ¹¹ When I will punish Moab, they will know I am Yahweh."

¹² Word of the Lord Yahweh, "Because Edom took revenge on Judah and was guilty in so doing, this is what the Lord Yahweh says: 'I will stretch out my hand against Edom, destroying men and animals. I will make it a ruin from Teman and let them be slain as far as Dedan. ¹⁴ I will put Israel in charge of my revenge against Edom. They will deal with Edom according to my wrath and my fury and Edom will experience my revenge' – word of Yahweh."

¹⁵ Word of the Lord Yahweh, "Because the Philistines have taken revenge with an evil heart and because of their ceaseless hatred, thus says the Lord Yahweh: ¹⁶ 'I intend to stretch out my hand against the Philistines; I will cut off the Kerethites and destroy the rest of the coast. ¹⁷ I will take terrible revenge and punish them in my wrath – then they will know I am Yahweh.'"

Against Tyre

26 ¹ On the first day of the month in the eleventh year, the word of Yahweh came to me in these terms. ² "Son of man, you see how Tyre has mocked Jerusalem: 'Aha! the land through which the goods of the nations come to me is destroyed; what she received will now be mine. I shall prosper while she lies in ruins.' ³ 'Because Tyre said that – word of the Lord Yahweh – I am against her! I will bring many people against her. They will rise like the waves of the sea, ⁴ they will destroy the

ramparts of Tyre and knock down its towers. I will sweep away the dust, making of it a bare rock. ⁵ She will be in the midst of the sea, a place to hang out nets – I, Yahweh, have spoken."

⁶ Tyre will be plundered for the nations; her villages on dry land will be laid waste by the sword and they will know that I am Yahweh."

⁷ This is what the Lord Yahweh says, "From the north I will bring Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, against Tyre. He will come with horses, chariots and cavalry, a vast army and throngs of people. ⁸ He will lay waste with the sword your villages on dry land. He will set up a siege wall against you and throw up a mound and raise a roof of shields against you. ⁹ He will set a battering ram to hammer your walls and he will demolish your towers with weapons. ¹⁰ His numerous horses will cover you with dust. The noise of the cavalry, the wheels of the chariots and wagons will make your walls shake when they enter your gates as one enters a town through a breach in its walls."

¹¹ Horses' hooves will trample your streets; he will slay your people with the sword and your powerful pillars will crumble to the ground. ¹² They will plunder your riches and loot your merchandise. They will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses. Your stones, timber and soil they will cast into the sea.

¹³ I will silence your songs and the sound of your lyres will be heard no more. ¹⁴ I will make a stark rock of you, a place to dry fishing nets, and you shall never be rebuilt! – I, Yahweh, have spoken."

¹⁵ This is a word of Yahweh to Tyre: At the time of your massacre, will not the coastlands quake, when the noise of your fall and the groaning of the victims is heard? ¹⁶ All the princes of the sea will step down from their thrones; they will remove their robes and take off their embroidered garments. They will put on mourning clothes, sit on the ground,

12. 35, 1-15

15. Jer 47, 1; Zep 2, 4

1. Is 23, 1

16. Rev 18, 9

urgent sense of justice. The Ammonite, Edomite, etc. nations have no right to survive as nations since they have no part in preparing for salvation and Yahweh only used them to purify his people. And so, they must disappear in the turmoil of history.

It would be a misunderstanding of the Bible if we were led to ask God to punish people who do not believe and who even persecute the Church (see 1 Peter). Neither can we now wish for the destruction of an oppressor nation since the race of Christ is at work everywhere. All we have to affirm is that any institution which is opposed to the Gospel message, will disappear:

"Every plant which my Father did not plant, will be uprooted" (Matthew 15:13).

Ezekiel announces the destruction of Tyre through shipwreck images. Compare with the fall of Nineveh (Na 2:3) and of Babylon (Jer 51).

In Revelation (18:9) these words will be remembered and applied to the Roman empire and to its capital, Rome, which was the center of the world at the time of the apostles. What a condemnation for our civilization which always puts economic success in the first place, even if it praises cultural and spiritual values. And nations are ruined, families and people are broken by unemployment, while a few stores offer an abundance of imported goods.

tremble with fear and be appalled because of you.¹⁷ They will be amazed on your account and will take up this lament:

'How you have perished, vanished from the sea, city of renown! Formerly you and your citizens were so powerful on the sea! You imposed terror on all¹⁸ but now the coastlands tremble on the day of your fall. The islands of the sea are terrified at your disappearance.'

¹⁹Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I make you into a city of ruins like uninhabited towns, when I make the ocean rise against you and the mighty waters cover you,²⁰ then I will thrust you down with those who descend to the pit, to the people of long ago. I will throw you into the nether land, into everlasting loneliness, like those who go down to the pit, that you may not return to the land of the living.²¹ Then you will be an object of horror, and even if sought, you will not be found – word of the Lord Yahweh."

A lament for Tyre

■27 ¹The word of the Lord Yahweh came to me in these terms, ²"Son of man intone a lament for Tyre and ³say to her, who is gateway to the sea who trades with people on many coasts: This is what the Lord Yahweh says:

Tyre, you were satisfied with your perfect beauty.⁴ Your borders were in the heart of the sea and your builders perfected your beauty; ⁵all your planks were made of the wood of fir trees, your masts from the cedars of Lebanon and ⁶your oars from the oak of Bashan. Your decks were of cedar from the coast of Cyprus inlaid with ivory.

⁷Embroidered linen from Egypt was used for your sails which served as your ensign. Your awning was made of blue and purple from the coasts of Elishah.⁸ Your oarsmen were citizens of Sidon and Arvad. The most skilled men from Zemer served you as pilots,⁹ veteran craftsmen from Gebal were on board to seal your seams. All the ships of the seas with their crews called on you to barter for your wares.

¹⁰Persia, Lud and Put served in your army as men of war. They brought you splendour and hung their bucklers and helmets on your walls.¹¹ The men of Arvad and Helech watched all around your walls; men of Gamad guarded your towers and hung their shields on your walls completing your magnificence.

¹²Tarshish traded with you because of your abundant wealth, supplying your markets with silver, iron, tin and lead.¹³ Javan, Tubal and Mishech trafficked with you, providing you with slaves and articles in bronze.

¹⁴People of Togarmah exchanged work horses, war horses and mules for your wares.¹⁵ The men of Rhodes traded with you and many coastlands were your customers; in payment they gave ivory tusks and ebony wood.¹⁶ Edom trafficked with you because of your many products and provided your markets with turquoise, purple fabric, embroidered cloth, fine linen, coral and rubies.¹⁷ Judah and Israel sold you wheat from Minnith, millet, honey, oil and resin.¹⁸ Damascus traded with you because of your abundant wares and provided you with wine from Helbon and white wool.

¹⁹Danites and Greeks from Uzal exchanged wrought iron, cassia and calamus for your merchandise.²⁰ Dedan supplied you with saddle blankets.²¹ Arabia and all the princes of Kedar carried on a lively trade with you in lambs, rams and goats.

²²Merchants from Sheba and Raamah provided your markets with all kinds of high grade spices, precious stones and gold.²³ Haran, Canneh, Eden, Asshur and Chilmad²⁴ traded with you in beautiful garments, blue fabric, embroidered cloth, coloured rugs with twisted and tightly-knotted cords.²⁵ The ships of Tarshish carried your merchandise.

You set out for the wide ocean,

²⁶ your mariners led you to the high sea and the east wind wrecked you in the sea.

²⁷ Your riches, wares, merchandise,

your seamen and sailors,

those who repaired your seams,

and assured your trade,

your men of war with all the passengers

sank into the depths of the sea

on the day of your shipwreck.

²⁸ At the cries of your seamen the coasts quaked

²⁹ and the oarsmen came from their ships; sailors and seamen went ashore.

³⁰ They mourn and weep bitterly for you, throw dust on their heads and roll in ashes.

³¹ Because of you they shave their heads and wear sackcloth.

In the bitterness of their hearts they weep and intone a bitter lament for you.

21. Rev 18, 21

13. Rev 18, 13

21. 1 K 10, 15

■ Phoenicia with its ports, Tyre and Sidon was on the coast of Palestine. A very small country, but its people were dedicated to sea trade and they were in contact with all the nations on

the Mediterranean. And so they were very rich and more enterprising than the Israelites. From Phoenicia, pagan influences had reached Israel, especially in the days of Ahab (1 Kgs 16:29).

³² A funeral song is heard:

Who was like Tyre, now silent
in the midst of the ocean?

³³ How many nations you provided
with the goods unloaded from distant
shores!

With your abundant riches and commerce
you enriched the kings of the earth,

³⁴ but now you are shattered by the sea,
engulfed in its depths.

Your wares and all your company have
gone down!

³⁵ All who live on the coasts are appalled
because of you,

their kings shudder, and fall prostrate.

³⁶ The merchants of the nations hiss at
you,

you are an object of dread.

You have gone forever."

About the king of Tyre

28 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in
these terms, ² "Son of man, say to the
prince of Tyre:

You are very proud and self-satisfied:

'I am a god, I sit like a god in the heart of
the sea.'

Yet you are man and not a god;

would you hold yourself as wise as God?

³ You consider yourself wiser than
Daniel:

no secret is hidden from you.

⁴ Your wisdom and know-how have
earned you a fortune,

gold and silver flowed to your treasury.

⁵ Clever in trade, you became wealthy
and as your fortune increased,
your heart became prouder.

⁶ But now Yahweh has spoken to you,
to the one who is like God:

⁷ I am bringing foreigners against you,
the most feared of all the nations.
Their sword will challenge your wisdom
and debase your refined culture.

⁸ They will bring you down to the pit
and you will die in the depths of the sea.

⁹ Will you be able to say 'I am a god'
when your murderers are killing you?

You are a man and not a god.

¹⁰ You will die the death of the
uncircumcised

and perish at the hands of aliens,
for I have spoken – word of Yahweh."

¹¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these
terms, ¹² "Son of man, intone a lamentation for
the king of Tyre and say to him: This is what
Yahweh says:

You were the model of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

¹³ You lived in Eden, the garden of God,
and every kind of precious stone adorned
you,

ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx
and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and emerald.

The trinkets on your robe were made of
gold,

prepared for you on the day you were
created.

¹⁴ I anointed you a guardian angel
on the holy mountain of God
where you walked amidst the spirits of
God.

¹⁵ You were perfect in your ways
from the day you were created
until wickedness was found in you.

¹⁶ Because of your extensive trade
you were filled with violence and sinned;
I then deprived you of your dignity,
driving you away from the mountain of
God,

expelling you from among the guardian
angels;

¹⁷ your heart was proud because of your
beauty.

As your splendour corrupted your wisdom
I have cast you down to the ground
and exposed you before kings,
a spectacle in their sight.

¹⁸ Your many sins and dishonest trade
have filled and defiled your sanctuaries.
Then I made fire break out in you
and reduced you to ashes on the ground
in the sight of all who looked on.

¹⁹ The nations who knew you are
appalled.

You have become an object of terror;
you have gone forever."

²⁰ The word of the Lord Yahweh came to
me in these terms, ²¹ "Look towards Sidon and
prophesy against her. You will say:

²² Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I come
against you, Sidon, and I will be glorified in
you. When I inflict punishment on her and
make known my holiness, they will know I am
Yahweh. ²³ I will send pestilence against her
and shed blood in her streets. The sword is
directed against her from all sides and they will
know I am Yahweh when the victims fall.

²⁴ No longer will there be for the people of
Israel thorns that wound or briars that prick
them among their neighbours. Then they will
know that I am Lord Yahweh.

²⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I

gather Israel from among the nations where she has been dispersed, I will use them to show the nations my holiness and they will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob. ⁴⁶ They will live safely, build houses and plant vineyards. They will live in safety when I punish all those neighbours who treated them with contempt and they will know that I am Yahweh, their God."

Against Egypt

29 ¹ On the tenth day of the twelfth month of the tenth year the word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ² "Son of man, look towards Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and prophesy against all Egypt. ³ Say: This is the word of Yahweh: I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt! Huge monster wallowing in the midst of your streams saying: 'The Nile and its canals are mine; I made them.' ⁴ I will put hooks in your jaws and make the fish of your rivers cling to your scales. I will drag you from your rivers with all the fish clinging to your scales. ⁵ I will throw you and the fish of the rivers into the desert. You will fall on the ground with no one to lift you up or bury you. I will give you as food to the wild beasts and to the birds of the air, and ⁶ all who live in Egypt will know I am Yahweh.

You have been but a staff of reed for Israel. ⁷ When they took hold of you, you broke in their hands; you tore open all their shoulder; when they leaned on you, you wrenched their backs. ⁸ That is why thus says Yahweh: I am bringing the sword against you and I will destroy both men and animals. ⁹ Egypt will be a wasteland and a ruins, and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when Egypt is made a ruins and a wasteland.

You said: 'The Nile is mine. I made it. ¹⁰ Because of that I am coming against you in the midst of your streams. I will reduce Egypt to a lonely ruins from Migdal to Aswan and to the border of Cush. ¹¹ Neither foot of man nor hoof of animal will tread its paths. Egypt will be uninhabited for forty years; ¹² I will make it one among the wastelands and for forty years its cities will be numbered among cities in ruins. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them in other lands.

¹³ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: After forty years I will gather the Egyptians from among the nations where they were dispersed: ¹⁴ I will bring back Egyptian captives to Pathros, the land of their birth. There they will form a small kingdom, ¹⁵ weaker than other kingdoms, no longer strong enough to dominate other

nations. ¹⁶ I will decrease their number, so that they may no longer conquer other lands. No longer will Israel be tempted to trust in Egypt, nor will they sin by turning to Egypt for help. Then they will know that I am the Lord Yahweh."

¹⁷ It happened on the first day of the first month of the twenty-seventh year that the word of Yahweh came to me in these terms:

¹⁸ "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon has mobilized his army for an expedition against Tyre. All are worn out, bald-headed, their shoulders raw, but neither he nor his people have received any reward for this campaign against Tyre.

¹⁹ That is why thus says the Lord Yahweh: I intend to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He will carry off its riches, plunder it and let his army have the loot in place of wages. ²⁰ Because these people have worked for me, I will give Egypt to them as a reward – word of the Lord Yahweh.

"On that day I will lift up the nation of Israel, and as for you, I will let you speak among them again and they will know that I am Yahweh."

30 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ² 'Son of man, prophesy and say: This is the word of Yahweh: Moan! Ah! ³ the day is near; the day of Yahweh is coming! It will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. ⁴ The sword is brought to strike Egypt and anguish will come to Cush. The slain will fall throughout Egypt; people will carry off its riches and its foundations will be torn away. ⁵ Cush, Put and Lydia, all Arabia, Libya and all the people of the covenant will fall by the sword.

⁶ This is the word of Yahweh: "Those who support Egypt will fall; her haughty power will crumble! From Migdal to Aswan, people will be slain, word of Yahweh. ⁷ They will be numbered among desolate lands, and her cities among ruined cities. ⁸ They will know I am Yahweh when I set fire to Egypt and when all her allies are crushed.

⁹ On that day my messengers will leave in ships to shake the people of Cush out of their complacency and they will be in anguish on the day of the fall of Egypt; for that day is coming.

¹⁰ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will put an end to the hordes of Egypt by means of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and ¹¹ his people with him, the most feared among the nations. For I will lead them here to destroy the land.

They will draw their swords against Egypt and fill the land with victims. ¹² I will dry up Egypt's canals and hand over the country to the wicked. I will use the hand of the foreigner to make the land and all it contains a waste. I, Yahweh, have spoken.

¹³ This is word of the Lord Yahweh: I will destroy the idols and wipe out the false gods in Memphis. No longer will there be a prince in the land of Egypt and I will put fear in the land. ¹⁴ I will make a wasteland of Pathros, set fire to Zoan and inflict punishment on Thebes. ¹⁵ I will pour out my fury on Pelusium, the fortress of Egypt, and destroy the throngs of Thebes.

¹⁶ I will set fire to Egypt: Pelusium will writhe in agony. They will enter Thebes through a breach and take her by storm. ¹⁷ The young men of Heliopolis and Bubastis will fall by the sword and the women will be taken captive. ¹⁸ What a dark day it will be in Tahpanhes when I break the leadership of Egypt and destroy her arrogant might! As for this city a cloud will cover it and her daughters will be taken captive. ¹⁹ I will inflict punishment on Egypt and they will know that I am Yahweh."

²⁰ On the seventh day of the first month of the eleventh year, the word of Yahweh came to me. ²¹ Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. No one has treated it for healing or bandaged it to enable him to hold a sword. ²² That is why thus says the Lord Yahweh: See, I am against Pharaoh, king of Egypt. I will break his arms, both the one that is strong and the wounded one as well. ²³ I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them in other lands. ²⁴ I will strengthen the arm of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand; but as for Pharaoh, I will break his arms, making him moan like a mortally wounded man. ²⁵ Yes, I will strengthen the arm of the king of Babylon but make Pharaoh's arm limp. They will know I am Yahweh when I place my sword in the hand of the king of Babylon. ²⁶ I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them in other lands and they will know that I am Yahweh."

31 ¹ On the first of the third month of the eleventh year, the word of Yahweh came to me. ² Son of man, say to Pharaoh, king of Egypt and to his multitude: Who is comparable to you in your greatness? ³ You are like a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches, providing forest shade, and very tall, with top among the clouds.

⁴ It grew. The waters made it grow, and the

streams ascending from the deep springs that watered all the trees of the land through the canals, flowed straight to its place. ⁵ Higher than all the other trees, its boughs increased and its branches grew larger because of the plentiful water. ⁶ The birds of the air nested in its boughs and all the animals brought forth their young under its branches. Numerous nations lived in its shade.

⁷ It became majestic in height and in the thickness of its branches for its roots were turned towards plentiful water. ⁸ The other cedars in the garden of God could not equal it. The pine trees could not equal its boughs nor could the plane trees rival its branches. No other tree in God's garden was comparable to it in beauty. ⁹ I made it beautiful in the abundance of its branches, the envy of the trees in the garden of God in Eden.

¹⁰ That is why thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because it grew tall and reached the clouds and became proud, ¹¹ I will hand it over to the ruler of the nations who will treat it according to its wickedness. I have rejected it. ¹² Foreigners, the most terrible among the nations, have felled it, cut it down on the mountains: its boughs have fallen in all the valleys, its branches lie broken in ravines. All the nations have fled from its shade and abandoned it. ¹³ The birds of the air alight on its broken boughs and the animals are found among its fallen branches. ¹⁴ This is to prevent well-watered trees from attaining such a height and reaching the clouds. For all are destined to die and go below among those who descend to the pit.

¹⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: The day the cedar descended to the nether world I made the depths mourn for it. I restrained its rivers and held back the abundant waters. Darkness covered Lebanon and all the trees of the field were faint. ¹⁶ The nations were shaken at the noise of its fall when I made it depart to the lower regions with those who go down to the pit. Then all the trees from Eden, the finest trees of Lebanon, all that were well-watered were comforted in the earth below. ¹⁷ Those from among the nations who lived in its shade, they too went down together to those slain by the sword. ¹⁸ O tree, splendid and glorious, who among the trees of Eden was comparable to you? But you were made to go down to the lower regions like the other trees of Eden. You lay among the uncircumcised people, victims of the sword, you Pharaoh and all your multitudes, word of the Lord Yahweh."

32 ¹ On the first of the twelfth month in the twelfth year, the word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ² "Intone a lamentation for Pharaoh, king of Egypt. You will say: Lion of the nations, you are lost! You were like a monster of the sea, thrashing the water in the rivers, stirring and muddying the water with your feet.

¹ This is what the Lord Yahweh says: I will spread my nets over you, and an assembly of many nations will haul you up into my net. ⁴ I will throw you on the ground, hurl you into the open field and let the birds of the air settle on you and the beasts of the earth feed on you. ⁵ I will scatter your flesh on the mountains, fill the valleys with your remains and ⁶ drench the earth with your liquids. When I blot you out, ⁷ the skies will darken and the stars become dim; I will veil the sun with a cloud and the moon shall not give its light. ⁸ Because of you I will darken all the lights in the sky and cover the earth in darkness, word of the Lord Yahweh.

⁹ Many nations will grieve when I spread the news of your fall, even people you do not know; ¹⁰ their kings will shudder because of you when I wave my sword before them. All of them will tremble for their life, on the day of your fall.

¹¹For thus says the Lord Yahweh: The sword of the king of Babylon is coming against you. ¹²The sword of the warriors, the most terrible among the nations will destroy your numerous people. They will shatter the pride of Egypt and your multitudes will be exterminated. ¹³I will destroy all your cattle along the shores of the great river, no longer to be trod by man or beast. ¹⁴And then I will calm their rivers and their streams will flow like oil, word of the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁵When I make a wasteland of Egypt and destroy its inhabitants, striking all those who live there, they will know that I am Yahweh."

¹⁶ This is the dirge which the cities of the nations will chant for Egypt and its multitudes – word of the Lord Yahweh.

¹⁷ On the fifteenth day of the month, in the eleventh year, the word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ¹⁸ "Son of man, wail for the multitudes of Egypt and make them descend to the nether world. ¹⁹ For I will send them to the land of shadows with those who go down to the pit. ²⁰ There they will meet all the victims of the sword. Egypt has been taken; she has been

dragged away with her multitudes. ²¹ The mighty heroes in the nether world together with Pharaoh's allies, will say to her: 'Why should you be more favoured than others? Come down and make your bed with the uncircumcised, with those fallen by the sword.'

²² Assyria is there with her entire army; she is surrounded by the tombs of her victims fallen by the sword.²³ Their graves are at the bottom of the pit and her army lies around her tomb; all those who spread terror in the land of the living have been killed by the sword.

²⁴ Elam is there with all her multitude around her tomb, all of them slain, fallen by the sword. They are the uncircumcised, who have gone down to the lower regions, those who spread terror in the land of the living; they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.

²⁵ They have given her a bed among the slain, with all her multitudes, their graves around her, all of them uncircumcised, for they spread terror in the land of the living. They are placed among the victims of the sword and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.

²⁶ Mescech and Tubal are there with the tombs of their multitude around them. All these uncircumcised are there pierced by the sword, for they spread terror in the land of the living. ²⁷ They are not lying with the heroes of former times who went to the grave with all their gear of war; the heroes whose terror filled the land of the living, lie with their swords placed under their heads their shields over their bones.

²⁸ You instead will be among the uncircumcised victims of the sword.

²⁹ Edom is there with her kings and princes who despite their bravery lie with those fallen by the sword. They are placed with the uncircumcised and with those who go down to the pit. ³⁰ All the princes of the north are there and all the Sidonians who have gone down in disgrace with the slain, despite the terror caused by their power. They are shamed and lie with the uncircumcised, victims of the sword. They bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.

he will be comforted because of all his multitudes killed by the sword, word of the Lord Yahweh.³² Although I had him spread terror in the land of the living, Pharaoh will be laid among the uncircumcised victims of the sword, he and his multitudes, word of the Lord Yahweh."

- Jerusalem has been captured. While all the illusions of the Jews and their false prophets are crumbling, Ezekiel understands that they have

come to the end of the trial. In the future, perhaps remote, there is glimpse of a resurrection. The prophet reveals many promises of God in

THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL

The prophet – watchman of the people

o33 ¹The word of the Lord Yahweh came to me in these terms, ²"Son of man, speak to your people and say to them: Imagine that I bring the sword against a country, and the people of that country choose one among them to be their sentry. ³When this man sees the sword approach the land, he shall sound the trumpet to warn the people; 'then if anyone hears the trumpet and does not heed the warning he shall be responsible for his own death,' but the man who gave the warning will save his life. ⁴On the other hand when the sentry sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, the people are not warned and some are killed. In that case I will hold the sentry responsible and he will answer for the victims' death.

⁵For your part, son of man, I have set you as a watchman for Israel, and when you hear my word, you must give them my warning. ⁶When I say to the wicked: 'Wicked man, you shall die for sure,' if you do not warn the wicked man to turn from his ways, he will die because of his sin, but I will also call you to account for his blood. ⁷If you warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you yourself will be saved.

⁸Son of man, you know the people of Israel say: 'We are wasting away because of our sin, and our wrongdoing is weighing us down. How can we live?' ⁹Say to them: As I live, word of Yahweh, I do not want the wicked to die but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! turn from your wicked ways! Why, O Israel, should you die?

¹⁰You, son of man, say to your people: 'The righteous life of the upright will not save him on the day he turns to sin and the wicked man will not be bound to his wickedness on the day he turns from his evil ways; likewise for the upright: he will die. ¹¹When I have said to the righteous: 'You will live,' if he takes advantage of his righteousness to do evil, his former upright life will not be remembered; the evil he is doing will make him die. ¹²And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will certainly die,' but he then turns from his sin and does what is just and right, ¹³gives back what he took as a

pledge on a loan, restores what he has stolen, obeys the decrees that are life-giving and avoids evil, he will live, he will not die. ¹⁴His life in sin will no longer be held against him. He has done what is just and right and because of that he will live.

¹⁵Yet your people say, 'The position of the Lord is not just.' On the contrary it is theirs that is wrong. ¹⁶The upright man who turns from what is just and right and does evil, shall die; ¹⁷and the wicked man who turns from evil to do what is just and right shall live! ¹⁸Though you say: 'The Lord's position is wrong,' I will judge you, Israel, each one according to his ways."

¹⁹On the fifth day of the tenth month in the eleventh year of our exile, a fugitive arrived from Jerusalem to tell me: "The city has fallen."

²⁰Now the hand of Yahweh had been on me the evening before the arrival of the fugitive. When I met him in the morning, Yahweh opened my mouth. My tongue was loosened and no longer was I silent.

²¹The word of Yahweh then came to me in these terms, ²²"Son of man, those who remain among the ruins in the land of Israel reckon: 'Abraham was alone when he received the land as a possession: we are still numerous enough and it is to us that the country has been given.'

²³But you will say to them: thus says the Lord Yahweh: You eat food with blood, you look towards idols, you shed blood, and you want to possess the land! ²⁴You lean on your sword, you do what is detestable, each one dishonours his neighbour's wife and yet you want to possess the land!

²⁵Say to them: 'This is the word of Yahweh: As I live, those who settled among the ruins will fall by the sword; those in the open country I will give as food to the beasts and those in strongholds and caves shall die of the plague. ²⁶I will make the country a wasteland, a lonely place. They will no longer lean on their power and the mountains of Israel shall be deserted with no one crossing them. ²⁷Then they will know that I am Yahweh when I make their country a lonely waste because of all the detestable things they have done.

²⁸Son of man, your people talk about you

11. 18, 32; Lk 15, 7

22. 24, 27

chapters 34-39. This chapter (33) marking the capture of Jerusalem serves as an introduction.

In 33:1-20 we have a slightly different version of what we commented in 3:17 and 18:21.

33:11. In time of misfortune, the wicked lose

all hope; but, the prophet who had always announced misery, raises his voice to encourage conversion and to share God's thinking: *I do not want the wicked to die ... O, people of Israel, why should you die?*

along the walls and at the doors of the houses, each one with his neighbour: 'Come and hear the latest word of Yahweh.'

³¹ They go to you as they go to an assembly and sit in front of you. They listen to your words but do not do what you say. Instead they continue to lie and look only for their own interest. ³² For them you are no more than a singer of lovesongs – a beautiful voice accompanied by beautiful music. They listen but do not practice what they hear.

³³ But when what is foretold comes true – and it is about to happen – they will know that there was a prophet among them."

The shepherds of Israel

+34 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ² "Son of man, speak on my behalf against the shepherds of Israel! Say to them on my behalf: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? ³ But you feed on milk and are clothed in wool, and you slaughter the fattest sheep instead of taking care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak, cared for the sick or bandaged the injured. You have not gone after the sheep that strayed or searched for the one that was lost. Instead you ruled them harshly and were their oppressors. ⁵ They have scattered for want of a shepherd and become the

prey of wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wander over the mountains and high hills; and when they are scattered throughout the land, no one bothers about them or looks for them.

⁷ Hear then shepherds, what Yahweh says: ⁸ As I live – word of Yahweh, – because my sheep have been the prey of wild animals and become their food for want of shepherds, because my shepherds have not cared for my sheep, because you shepherds have not bothered about them but fed yourselves and not the flocks, because of that, ⁹ hear the word of Yahweh. ¹⁰ This is what Yahweh says: I will ask an account of the shepherds and reclaim my sheep from them. No longer shall they tend my flock; nor shall there be shepherds who feed themselves. I shall save the flock from their mouths and no longer shall it be food for them.

¹¹ Indeed the Lord Yahweh says this: I myself will care for my sheep and watch over them. ¹² As the shepherd looks after his flock when he finds them scattered, so will I watch over my sheep and gather them from all the places where they were scattered in a time of cloud and fog. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations

32. Jer 42, 21 33. Mt 7, 24 1. Jer 23, 1; Zac 11, 15 5. Num 27, 17; Mt 9, 36 8. 1 Pet 5, 2 11. Mt 5, 1

+ The Lord Yahweh gathers his scattered flock.

There are two parts to this long comparison in which Yahweh promises to become the shepherd of his flock:

- a revolution.
- a judgment.

Speak on my behalf against the shepherds of Israel. Here, Yahweh announces a radical change in the social life of Israel: he will replace all the shepherds. The expression "shepherd" applies to all civil authorities, and thus, it includes the king, the magistrates and the judges. It does not include the priests and the prophets, contrary to modern usage, since for us the word "pastor (shepherd)" refers only to the spiritual leaders of a community.

Should not the shepherds feed the flock?(2) The flock does not belong to the shepherds. Yahweh condemns the leaders of his people

who found it normal to enjoy power and wealth without first seeing themselves as the servants of the people. We can easily imagine the misery of the Jewish people in the days about which Ezekiel writes, immediately after the catastrophe in Jerusalem.

- *Weak, hungry, sick sheep.*
- *Stray sheep:* wandering without home or work, isolated, alienated by the lies of their rulers.
- *they became the prey of all the nations.* they were taken into exile, or they left their homeland looking for work.

I myself will care for my sheep. Now Yahweh has rejected Israel's leaders who disappeared in the catastrophe and he promises to become Israel's pastor. Yahweh will be the good shepherd and he names the responsibilities of a shepherd: to gather, protect, feed everyone, and to hold back the very powerful.

and gather them from other countries. I will lead them to their own land and pasture them on the mountains of Israel in all the valleys and inhabited regions of the land. ¹⁴I will take them to good pastures on the high mountains of Israel. They will rest where the grazing is good and feed in lush pastures on the heights of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will tend my sheep and let them rest, word of the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and lead back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the fat and strong will be eliminated. I will shepherd my flock with justice.

¹⁷As for you, my flock – says Yahweh – I will distinguish between one sheep and another, between rams and goats. ¹⁸Was it not enough for you to feed on good pasture? Why did you trample under your feet the rest of the pasture? Were you not satisfied with drinking clear water? Why did you muddy the rest with your feet? ¹⁹Must my sheep feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰That is why thus says the Lord Yahweh to the shepherds: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean. ²¹Because with

flank, shoulder and horns you butt the weak sheep until you have driven them away, ²²I will rescue my flock and no longer will they be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.

²³Over them I will put one shepherd, my servant David who will tend them, pasture them and be a true shepherd for them. ²⁴I, Yahweh, will be their God and my servant David a ruler among them. I, Yahweh, have this to say: ²⁵I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts, so that they may live safely in the desert and sleep in forests. ²⁶I will settle them on my holy mountain, sending them rain in season, showers of rich blessings. ²⁷The trees of the field will give their fruit and the soil its produce, while they are safe in their land, and they will know that I am Yahweh.

I will break the bars of their yoke and free them from the power of those who enslave them. ²⁸No longer will they be plundered by the nations or ravaged by wild beasts. They will live in security without anyone causing them to fear. ²⁹I will give them splendid crops; people will not die of hunger or be scorned by other nations.

16. Lk 15, 4; 19, 10

17. Mt 25, 32

23. Jer 23, 4; Rev 7, 17; Jn 10, 16

The days of clouds and fog (12), when God seemed distant and Israel was overwhelmed and without hope, are over. Now Yahweh will gather his people from among the nations. The Kingdom that God has prepared for this discouraged crowd will surpass all they could hope for. Not only will they enjoy material prosperity, but they will live at peace and rest with God. I myself, will let them rest.

As for you, I will distinguish between sheep and sheep. With these words the second part begins: God's judgment.

On one hand, the fat sheep: those that took advantage of the unjust social order. They were not satisfied with having a standard of living higher than the rest, but they trampled the rest of the pasture: they grew nothing on the best land in the country; they deposited abroad the money which would have stimulated economic

development; they prevented the access of many to education and culture.

You butt the weakest sheep with your horns until you have driven them out (21). They took advantage of their power and because justice was at their disposal, they imposed "their" will by force.

I will put one shepherd over them to pasture them, David, my servant. This shepherd is Christ, the new David. As we said with regard to Isaiah 11:1, the Messiah is not announced as one more descendant of David, nor is he to resume the past. He will be another David and he will begin something completely new.

We can easily see here some of the images and ideas on which Jesus reflected and which he used in his parables: the Good Shepherd (John 10:1); the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4) and the Final Judgment (Matthew 25:31).



³⁰ Then they will know that I, Yahweh, am their God and that I am with them and that they, Israel, are my people – word of Yahweh. ³¹ You are my sheep, the flock of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord Yahweh."

Against Edom

35 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me. ² "Son of man, set your face against the mountain of Seir, prophesy against it ³ and say: Thus says Yahweh: I come to strike you, mountain of Seir! I have stretched out my hand against you and I will make of you a mournful solitude. ⁴ I will reduce your towns to ruins, make you a desolation and you shall know that I am Yahweh.

⁵ I know your long-standing enmity and how you handed over the people of Israel to the sword in the day of their disaster, the time of their last punishment. ⁶ Because of that, as I live, word of Yahweh, I intend to give you over to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you. ⁷ I will make of the mountain of Seir a mournful solitude and destroy all who come and go there. ⁸ The mountains will be filled with the slain; the victims of the sword will fall on your hills, in your valleys and ravines. ⁹ I will reduce you to a desolate ruins forever; no longer will your towns be inhabited and then you will know that I am Yahweh.

¹⁰ You said: 'These two nations and these two countries will be mine, we shall take possession of them,' and you disregarded Yahweh who was there. ¹¹ Because of that, as I live, declares Yahweh, I will deal with you according to your hatred towards them and I will make myself known among them when I judge you. ¹² Then you will know that I, Yahweh, have heard all the insults uttered against the mountains of Israel, such as: 'They are devastated and have been given over to us to be devoured.' ¹³ For I heard when you boasted against me without restraint.

¹⁴ Thus says Yahweh: When all the earth rejoices, you will be desolate. ¹⁵ Since you rejoiced when the inheritance of Israel became a deserted ruins, that is how I will deal with you. You will become a desert, Mount Seir, and Edom likewise, and people will know that I am Yahweh.

Israel shall be gathered together

36 ¹ "Son of man, prophesy regarding the mountains of Israel; say to them: Mountains of Israel, hear the word of Yahweh: ² Your enemies have said: 'Aha! these eternal heights have become our possession.' ³ People have envied you and ravaged you on all sides; other nations have taken possession of you, so that you became the subject of talk and gossip. Because of that, ⁴ mountains of Israel, hear this word of Yahweh. Yahweh says to the mountains, the hills, the ravines and the valleys, to the deserted ruins and the empty towns which have become the plunder and target of mockery for other nations around: ⁵ Truly in the fire of my jealousy I will speak against the other nations, namely all of Edom, who with glee and malice in their hearts, have taken possession of my land and plundered its pastures.

⁶ Now you shall prophesy concerning Israel. You shall say to the mountains, the hills, the ravines and the valleys: This is the word of Yahweh who speaks in the fury of his jealousy! Because you have suffered the scorn of the nations. ⁷ Yahweh says: I swear with uplifted hand, the nations surrounding you will suffer scorn. ⁸ But you, mountains of Israel, you shall bring forth branches and produce fruit for my people Israel, for soon they will return.

⁹ Indeed, I have turned in your direction and I have bent towards you; you will be cultivated and sown with seed. ¹⁰ I will increase your population in all Israel; the towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. ¹¹ Both people and animals will increase; they will be fruitful and multiply. I will build up their numbers as in the past and they will know that I am Yahweh. ¹² Men and women of Israel will walk on you again. They will take possession of you; you will be their heritage again, and never again will you let their children perish."

¹³ Yahweh speaks, "People say that you devour men and that you rob your people of children. ¹⁴ But never again shall you devour men or rob your people of children – word of Yahweh. ¹⁵ You shall no longer hear the mockery of the nations or suffer the insults of other lands – word of Yahweh."

¹⁶ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ¹⁷ "Son of man, when Israel occupied her own land she defiled it by her way of life and her actions. To me her conduct was like the uncleanness of a woman in her period.

■ The capture of Jerusalem was not the end of Jewish humiliation. After the conquerors of 587 withdrew, the small country of Edom took

advantage of the situation to invade Palestine and they attempted to take over the Jewish and Israelite territories: *the two nations*.

1. 25, 12; Jer 49, 7

2. 35, 10

9. Is 61, 4



¹⁸ I poured out my fury on them because of the blood they shed in the land and because they defiled it with their filthy idols. ¹⁹ Then I scattered them among the nations and dispersed them in other lands. I judged them according to their conduct and their actions.

²⁰ But when they were brought to other nations, my holy Name was profaned because others said of them: 'The people of Yahweh had to be exiled from his land!' ²¹ Then I was concerned for my holy Name, profaned by Israel among the nations where she had been dispersed. Now you shall say to them:

A new heart

◆ ²² It is not for your sake that I am about to act, but because of my holy Name that you have profaned in the places where you have gone. ²³ I will make known the holiness of my great Name, profaned among the nations because of you, and they will know that I am Yahweh when I show them my holiness among you.

²⁴ For I will gather you from all the nations and bring you back to your own land. ²⁵ Then I shall pour pure water over you and you shall be made clean – cleansed from the defilement of all your idols. ²⁶ I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I shall remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I shall put my spirit within you and move you to follow my decrees and keep

my laws. ²⁸ You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you shall be my people and I will be your God.

²⁹ I will free you from all your uncleanness. I shall summon the wheat and make it plentiful and so keep famine away from you. ³⁰ I shall see that the fruits of the earth and the produce of the fields are plentiful and that you no longer suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.

³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked actions and loathe yourselves for the sins you committed and for your detestable practices. ³² I want you to know that it is not for your sake I am doing this, word of Yahweh. Be ashamed and humbled because of your conduct, Israel! ³³ This is what Yahweh says: The day I cleanse you from all your sins, I shall repopulate the cities and the ruins will be rebuilt. ³⁴ The devastated land will be cultivated wherever passerby saw it desolate. ³⁵ Everyone will say, 'This devastated land is now a garden of Eden and its cities once in ruins and levelled to the ground have been rebuilt and populated.' ³⁶ And the nations that remain around you will know that I, Yahweh, have rebuilt the ruined city and replanted what was desolate I, Yahweh, have spoken and I will do it.

³⁷ Thus say the Lord Yahweh: Once again I shall listen to the plea of Israel and favour them. I shall make their people as numerous as sheep, ³⁸ as numerous as the flock they bring to Jerusalem's Temple at the time of her holy days. In the same way the ruined cities will be filled with flocks of people and they will know that I am Yahweh."

20. Rom 2, 24

22. Dt 9, 5-6

25. 47, 1;

Num 19, 19

26. 11, 19; Jer 31, 31; 2 Cor 3, 3

27. 1 Thes 4, 8

28. Ex 6, 7; Lev 26, 12; Jer 11, 4

30. 1 K 17, 1;

Hos 2, 11; Jer 14

35. Is 51, 3

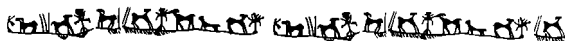
◆ *I shall give you a new heart.* Many think it is as difficult to change the human heart in a spiritual sense as it is in a physical sense: transplants are always delicate. Because some have no hope of changing human beings, they accept them as they are, preferring to overlook mediocrity and sinfulness. Others, become bitter about everything and everyone.

In this text, quite similar to Jeremiah 31:31 and Ezekiel 11:19, God offers to give a *new heart* to those who will be his future people. The experience of the Jewish people showed that human beings are weak and unable to follow the commandments. But, if an individual knows his God personally, to the point of sharing intimately in God's life, is there no possibility of

change and renewal?

This is the meaning of the word to *convert*. To be converted means to come back to God after having been away from him. First, there is a change that takes place in the *heart*, that is to say, in the innermost part of the human being. Then, there is a change of mentality and of attitude. In fact, God is the one who converts people, by loving them, attracting them and giving them his Spirit, transforming them into new beings. I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. This will be the New Covenant.

● *Can these bones live again?* This page announces the restoration of Israel which had been dead in every sense of the word.



"Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh"

o37 ¹The hand of Yahweh was upon me. By his spirit he brought me out and set me in the middle of the valley which was full of bones. ²He made me walk to and fro among them and I could see there was a great number of them on the ground all along the valley and that they were very dry.

³Yahweh said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live again?" I said, "Lord Yahweh, only you know that." ⁴He then said, "Speak on my behalf concerning these bones; say to them:

Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh! ⁵Yahweh says: I am going to put spirit in you and make you live. ⁶I shall put sinews on you and make flesh grow on you; I shall cover you with skin and give you my spirit, that you may live. And you will know that I am Yahweh."

⁷I prophesied as I had been commanded and then there was a noise

and commotion; the bones joined together. ⁸I looked and saw that they had sinews, that flesh was growing on them and that he was covering them with skin. But there was no spirit in them.

⁹So Yahweh said to me, "Speak on my behalf and call on the Spirit, son of man! Say to the Spirit: This is the word of Yahweh: Spirit, come from the four winds. Breathe into these dead bones and let them live!"

¹⁰I prophesied as he had commanded me and breath entered them; they came alive, standing on their feet – a great, immense army!

¹¹He then said to me, "Son of man, these bones are all Israel. They keep saying: 'Our bones are dry, hope has gone, it is the end of us.' ¹²So prophesy! Say to them: This is what Yahweh says: I am going to open your tombs, I shall bring you out of your tombs, my people, and lead you back to the land of Israel. ¹³You will know that I am Yahweh, O my people! when I open your graves and bring

1. Is 40, 1; 54, 7

9. Gen 2, 7; Rev 11, 11; Ps 104, 30; Rom 8, 11

Our bones are dry. The dry and scattered bones represent the Israelites, exiled and dispersed. For many years, the people of Israel had believed that God would manifest his glory to the world by granting them prosperity and by working miraculous liberations on their behalf. But, these were nothing but human dreams. God's plan is to teach his people through centuries of struggling, mistakes and suffering. Nations, like people, cannot reach true maturity without passing through the death of their pride and their ambitions. This is precisely when God sends the word which makes the dead rise.

I will give you my Spirit, that you may live (6). First, God sent his prophets. Their words were not listened to during their lifetime, but they fell on the ground as seed. After a few years, some people will emerge to restore the nation with Ezra and Nehemiah.

When we speak about the resurrection, we always think about the resurrection of persons. John spoke about it in 5:25-28 and he shows how Christ calls dead people to rise from sin or from death. But history shows us that God raises his people not once, but several times, and even daily as can be seen in the present history of our Church.

+ The Jewish nation's "original sin" was its division since Solomon's death.

In the restored Israel the division will be removed and healed: there will be *one people and one shepherd* (see John 10:16).

Even after the exiles came back from Babylon, Israel understood that she had to gather her children who had emigrated all over the world. Jesus, likewise, intended to gather all the scattered children of God (John 11:52). since he did not come for the Jews alone, but also for all those who do not belong to the flock (John 10).

In reflecting on this expanded mission of Jesus' disciples, it became obvious that to gather did not mean bringing everyone to a single land, or to impose a single law upon them. Rather it meant forming one body which would extend everywhere, and in which there would be respect for the uniqueness of each culture, yet common acceptance of the same goals. Such unity is a gift of God and, even though we all seek it, reaching it would mean that we have come to the end of earthly history.

Meanwhile, to be truly the New People of God, the Church must be one even in its visible structure. To become divided would be to revert to the sin of Jeroboam.



you out of your graves, ¹⁴ when I put my spirit in you and you live. I shall settle you in your land and you will know that I, Yahweh, have done what I said I would do."

+ ¹⁵ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, "Son of man, take a piece of wood and write on it: 'Judah and the Israelites loyal to him.' ¹⁶ Take another piece of wood and write: 'Joseph, the branch of Ephraim and the Israelites loyal to him.' ¹⁷ Join one to the other to make a single piece of wood in your hand. ¹⁸ When your people say to you, 'Won't you tell us what this means?' ¹⁹ say to them: The Lord Yahweh says this: I am going to take the branch of Joseph which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel loyal to him and put Judah's branch with them, and they will be as one in my hand. ²⁰ And you will hold in your hand in their sight the pieces of wood on which you wrote.

²¹ You will then say to them: Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I am about to withdraw the Israelites from where they were among the nations. I shall gather them from all around and bring them back to their land. ²² I shall make them into one people on the mountains of Israel and one king is to be king of them all. They will no longer form two nations or be two separate kingdoms. ²³ nor will they defile themselves again with their idols, their detestable practices and their sins. I shall free them from the guilt of their treachery: I shall cleanse

them and they will be for me a people and I shall be God for them. ²⁴ My servant David will reign over them, one shepherd for all. They will live according to my laws and follow and practise my decrees. ²⁵ They will settle in the land I gave to my servant Jacob where their forefathers lived. There they will live forever, their children and their children's children. David my servant will be their prince forever.

²⁶ I shall establish a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I shall settle them and they will increase and I shall put my sanctuary in their midst forever. ²⁷ I shall make my home at their side; I shall be their God and they will be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am Yahweh who makes Israel holy, having my sanctuary among them forever."

Gog and Magog

■ 38 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to me in these terms, ² "Son of man, turn towards Gog of the country of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal and prophesy against him. ³ Say to him: Hear the word of Yahweh: I come to strike you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. ⁴ I will turn you round, fix hooks in your jaws and bring you out, you and your entire army, horses and riders all perfectly equipped, a great army, all with shields and bucklers and brandishing swords. ⁵ Persia, Cush and Put are with them, all with buckler and helmet. ⁶ Gomer and all his troops, and Bethogarmah from the far north with his battalions, a vast throng, are with you.

16. Jer 3, 18

26. Jn 10, 16; Heb 13, 20; Rev 21, 3

■ Chapters 38 and 39 predict an invasion by nations united against the kingdom of Israel, after it is restored. Those countries are to the North, near the Black Sea. A miraculous victory of Yahweh is predicted for that time.

If we omit the end of chapter 39 (vv 17-29), it is almost certain that these pages were not written by Ezekiel, nor do they have anything to do with his mission: but they were inserted here at the time of the Maccabees. As the so-called "prophecies of Daniel", they belong to apocalyptic literature which delighted the Jews some two centuries before Christ and for a hundred years after him (see the introduction to Daniel).

This veiled description of the Syrian invasions in the time of the Maccabees is attributed to Ezekiel, when, in fact, a contemporary of those wars is the author. He expressed his conviction that soon God would crush the Syrian persecutors.

In apocalyptic books, it was customary to use complicated images, to speak emphatically and announce spectacular divine interventions. This complicated style is always heartening to people

with little education wanting to see in it some true and ancient prophecy, applicable to our time. There will always be details which, if taken literally, could apply to planes, tanks, the gas war ... One, even with little biblical knowledge, can easily find the confirmation of one's own dreams.

The apocalyptic pages of the Bible tell us that the history of the world will end with the opposition of those who accept God's offer and of those who reject it. The kingdom of God will not be the world we are building, although we must build it to prepare the new and definitive world which God will bring about in his own way. However, to wait for God to do everything can be illusory and deceptive. Some believers adopt a pessimistic attitude: they think that evil is stronger than good and that there is nothing to be done other than waiting for God to solve everything. Others are eager for "revelations" and they predict "punishment and catastrophes". Others see themselves and their sects, as the reduced group of the saved, and they live withdrawn from the rest, that is, turning their back on real life.



⁷ Get ready, be prepared, you and all your troops massed around you, and take command of them. ⁸ After many days you will be given a mission. In the years ahead you will invade a land recovered from war where the people are gathered from among many nations on the mountains of Israel which had for long been barren. Its people were brought from among the nations and now live in safety, all of them. ⁹ Then you will go up like a storm, like a cloud covering the earth, you and all your troops and the many nations with you.

¹⁰ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: On that day thoughts will come to your mind and you will plan an evil scheme ¹¹ saying: 'I will go up against unprotected towns, against peaceful people living in safety, all of them living without walls, bars or gates. ¹² I will plunder and loot; I will attack the land that is inhabited again. I will go against this people gathered from among the nations, who live by trading and are increasing their cattle at the centre of the world.'

¹³ People of Sheba and Dedan and all the merchants of Tarshish and its villages will ask you: 'Have you come to plunder? Is it to loot that you have assembled such an army?' And they will come with silver and gold, to take away the livestock and to buy your enormous booty.

¹⁴ Therefore prophesy, son of man and say to Gog on my behalf: On that day when my people Israel are living in security you will come from the far north, ¹⁵ you and the throngs with you, all on horses, with many troops – a vast army. ¹⁶ You will come against my people Israel like a cloud about to cover the earth. It will be in the far-off days that you shall come against my people, and I shall let you do so, that the nations may know me, for I shall manifest my holiness through you, O Gog!

¹⁷ Thus says Yahweh: You are the one about whom I spoke in former times through my servants, the prophets of Israel, saying that I would bring you against them in far-off days. ¹⁸ On that day when Gog will come to the land of Israel – word of Yahweh – my fury will be aroused. ¹⁹ In the jealousy and heat of my anger I declare: On that day there will be a great earthquake in Israel. ²⁰ The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the creatures that creep on the ground and every human being on the earth will tremble before me.

Mountains will fall, cliffs crumble and walls collapse. ²¹ I will summon the sword against Gog on all my mountains – word of Yahweh. Each one's sword will turn against

his brother. ²² I will punish Gog with plague and bloodshed. I will send torrential rain, hail-stones and burning sulfur on him and on his battalions and on the many nations with him. ²³ I will manifest myself as the Mighty and Holy One in the sight of these many people, and they will know that I am Yahweh.

39 ¹ Son of man, prophesy against Gog! Say to him: Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I come against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. ² When I have led, directed and brought you from the far north to the mountains of Israel, ³ I shall break the bow in your left hand and snatch the arrows from your right hand. ⁴ You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you, your battalions and the nations with you. And I shall give you over to all the birds of prey and wild beasts ⁵ when you have fallen in the open countryside, for I have spoken, word of Yahweh. ⁶ I shall send fire to the land of Magog and to those living peacefully in the islands and they will know that I am Yahweh. ⁷ I will manifest my holy Name among my people Israel, and never again allow my holy Name to be profaned, and the nations will know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

⁸ All this will come about and take place – word of Yahweh. This is the day I foretold. ⁹ After that citizens of the towns of Israel will make a fire, using your weapons as fuel: small and large bucklers, bows and arrows, clubs and javelins. For seven years they will be used as fuel: ¹⁰ there will be no need to bring wood from the country or to gather it in the forests since they will have your weapons to burn. They will plunder their plunderers and loot those who looted them – word of the Lord Yahweh.

¹¹ On that day I shall give Gog a well known burial place in Israel, the valley of the Abarim, on the east of the sea, the valley where the traveller has to stop. There they will bury Gog and his hordes and they will call it the Valley of the Multitude of Gog. ¹² It will take seven months to bury the dead and cleanse the country. ¹³ All the population will work at burying the dead and this will be their honour on the day I am glorified, word of Yahweh. ¹⁴ Men will work on a regular basis going around the country to bury those lying on the ground and so cleanse the land. For seven months they will go searching. ¹⁵ If, as they go through the land, they come across human remains, they will make a pile of stones beside them until the grave diggers bury them in the Valley of the Multitude of Gog ¹⁶ (the name



of the town is Multitude). In that way the land will be cleansed.

¹⁷ Son of man, the Lord Yahweh says this: Say to every kind of bird and wild beast: Assemble and come together from all parts to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel at which you will eat flesh and drink blood. ¹⁸ The flesh of heroes and the blood of the world's princes. They are all rams, lambs, goats, bullocks, all fattened animals from Bashan. ¹⁹ You will eat all the fat you want and drink blood until you are drunk at the sacrifice I am preparing for you. ²⁰ You will have your fill of horses, riders, heroes and warriors of all kinds – word of Yahweh. ²¹ I will show my glory among all the nations and they will know my judgment and the punishment I shall inflict on them.

²² Then Israel will know from that day onwards that I am Yahweh, their God. ²³ And the nations will know that Israel was exiled because they were unfaithful to me, and this was

why I hid my face from them; I handed them over to their enemies and they perished by the sword. ²⁴ I dealt with them as their defilement and sins deserved, and I hid my face from them.

²⁵ That is why thus says the Lord Yahweh: Now, moved by my compassion for Israel, I am going to bring back the captives of Jacob and I will give glory to my holy name. ²⁶ They will forget their shame and the treachery they committed towards me, when they live safely in their own land with no one to disturb them. ²⁷ When I gather them from among the nations and take them from the land of their enemies, I will show my holiness through them to the many nations. ²⁸ They will know that I am Yahweh their God when, after their exile among the nations, I bring them together in their own land and leave no one behind. ²⁹ Never again shall I hide my face from them because I shall pour out my Spirit on Israel – word of Yahweh."

THE FUTURE TEMPLE

o 40 ¹ In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, fourteen years after Jerusalem had been taken, the hand of Yahweh was upon me. ² In a divine vision he took me away to the land of Israel and put me down on a very high mountain, on the south of which there seemed to be built a city. ³ He took me to it, and there I saw a man who seemed to be made of bronze. He had a flax cord and a measuring rod in his hand and was standing in the gateway. ⁴ The man said to me, "Son of man, look carefully, listen closely and pay attention to everything I show you, since they brought you here for me to show it to you. Tell the people of Israel everything that you see."

⁵ The House was surrounded with a wall, and the man was holding a measuring rod that was three meters long (six great cubits). He

measured the thickness of this construction – one rod; and its height – one rod.

⁶ He went to the east gate, climbed the steps and measured its threshold: one rod deep. ⁷ Each guardroom one rod by one rod; and the walls between the guardrooms five cubits thick; ⁸ and the threshold of the gate inward from the porch of the gate: one rod. ⁹ He measured the porch of the gate: eight cubits; its jambs: two cubits; the porch of the gate was at the inner end. ¹⁰ There were three guardrooms on each side of the east gate, all three the same size; the walls between them all the same thickness on each side. ¹¹ He measured the width of the entrance: ten cubits; and the width all down the gateway: thirteen cubits. ¹² There was a rail in front of the guardrooms; each rail on either side was one cubit. And the guardrooms on either side were six cubits square.

1. Rev 19, 17. 2. 1 K 6, 7. 3. Mt 4, 8. 4. 17, 1. 5. Zac 2, 5. 6. Rev 21, 15

o In the 25th year of his exile (or in 571). Ezekiel received the vision which he presents in chapters 40-48, regarding the new land in Palestine.

The Glory of Yahweh (see 1:4) returns from Babylon to Jerusalem where it takes over the Temple. A river flows under the Temple and spreads, making the land fruitful: it is the sign of all sorts of blessings emerging from the presence of Yahweh in the midst of his people. We also have a description of the division of the land among the twelve tribes, thus restoring the former structure of the people of Israel.

By this vision, Ezekiel assures his compatriots that there is hope for them: the people will come to life again and their mission will be essentially a religious one, since the life of the nation will be centered around the Temple. These chapters are rather tiring for us with their abundance of details about worship. But, let us not forget that a nation cannot rise without commitment to a demanding mission. For their part, the Jews reorganized their community around the Temple and their priests, with the conviction that perfect worship and the observance of the Law would inevitably bring the Kingdom of God (see Ezra and Nehemiah).



¹³ He measured the width of the gate from the back wall of one guardroom to the back wall of the other; it was twenty-five cubits across from window to window. ¹⁴ He measured the entrance: twenty cubits; after the porch of the gate came the outer court. ¹⁵ From the entrance end of the gate to the porch opposite: fifty cubits. ¹⁶ On each side of the gate there were windows with screens both in the guardrooms and in the spaces between, and there were openings all around inside the porch as well, and palm trees decorating the pillars.

¹⁷ He took me through to the outer court. There were rooms and a paved terrace going all the way around; there were thirty rooms on this terrace. ¹⁸ This terrace, which came right up to the sides of the gates and matched their depth, is the Lower Terrace. ¹⁹ He measured across the outer court from the lower gate to the outside of the inner court: a hundred cubits.

²⁰ He measured the length and breadth of the north gate of the outer court. ²¹ It had three guardrooms on each side; the thickness of the walls between them, and its porch too, all measured the same as those of the first gate: fifty cubits by twenty-five cubits. ²² Its windows, its entrance and its palm-tree decoration all measured the same as those of the east gate. There were seven steps up to it, and its porch was at the inner end. ²³ In the inner court there was, opposite the north gate, a gate like the one opposite the east gate. He measured the distance from one gate to the other: a hundred cubits.

²⁴ He took me to the south and there was a gate to the south gate; he measured its guardrooms, wall thicknesses and porch; they were of the same dimensions as the others. ²⁵ All around it and its entrance were windows, like the other windows; it measured fifty cubits by twenty-five cubits, ²⁶ and it had seven steps up to it; its entrance was at the inner end and had palm-tree decorations on its pillars, one on each side. ²⁷ The inner court had a southern gate; he measured the distance southward from one gate to the other: a hundred cubits.

²⁸ He then took me into the inner court by the south gate; he measured the south gate which was the same size as the others. ²⁹ Its guardrooms, wall thicknesses and entrance all measured the same as the others. ³⁰ Its entrance had windows all around. It measured fifty cubits by twenty-five cubits. Its entrance, measured in all, all around, was twenty-five cubits by five cubits. ³¹ The entrance gave on to the outer court. It had palm trees on its pillars, each side, and eight steps leading up to it.

³² He took me to the east gate and measured it. It was the same size as the others. ³³ Its

guardrooms, the thickness of its walls, its entrance all measured the same as the others. It and its entrance had windows all around. Its area was fifty cubits by twenty-five cubits. ³⁴ Its porch gave on to the outer court. There were palm trees on its pillars on either side, and eight steps leading up to it.

³⁵ He took me to the north gate and measured it. Its guardrooms, the thickness of its walls and its entrance all measured the same as the others. ³⁶ It had windows all around. Its area was fifty cubits by twenty-five cubits. ³⁷ Its entrance gave on to the outer court. There were palm trees on its pillars on either side, and eight steps leading up to it.

³⁸ There was a room entered from the entrance of the gates. It was here that they had to wash the holocaust. ³⁹ And on either side of the entrance of the gate there were two tables for slaughtering the burnt offering, the sacrifice for sin and the sacrifice of repayment. ⁴⁰ Going northward up to the gate, there were two tables outside and two more tables at the entrance end of the gate. ⁴¹ There were four tables on the inside and four tables on the outside of the entrance; in all, eight tables on which the sacrifices were offered. ⁴² There were also four tables of dressed stone for burnt offerings, a cubit and a half-long, a cubit and a half wide and a cubit high, on which all the things necessary for killing the burnt offering and the sacrifices were put. ⁴³ Rims, a handbreadth broad, went all around the top, and on these tables was put the flesh of the offerings.

⁴⁴ He took me into the inner court; there were two lodges in the inner court, one at the side of the north gate, facing south, the other at the side of the south gate, facing north. ⁴⁵ He told me, "The lodge looking south is for the priests in charge of the Temple. ⁴⁶ and the lodge looking north is for the priests who serve the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, the only sons of Levi who approach Yahweh to serve him."

⁴⁷ He measured the inner court. It was a quadrangle, a hundred cubits by a hundred cubits, with the altar in front of the House.

⁴⁸ He took me to the Hall of the House and measured its door pillars – five cubits each side; and the width of the entrance was fourteen cubits with a three-cubit wall each side. ⁴⁹ The Hall was twenty cubits by twelve cubits. There were ten steps leading up to it, and there were columns by the door pillars, one on each side.

41 ¹ He took me into the Sanctuary and measured its door pillars: six cubits deep on the one side, six cubits deep on the other. ² The width of the entrance was ten



cubits. The walls on each side of the entrance were five cubits on the one side and five cubits on the other. He measured its length: forty cubits; and its width: twenty cubits.

³ He went in and measured the door pillars at the entrance: two cubits; then the entrance: six cubits; and the walls on each side of the entrance: seven cubits. ⁴ He measured its length: twenty cubits; and its width measured across the end wall of the Sanctuary: twenty cubits. He then said to me, "This is the most holy place."

⁵ He measured the wall of the House: six cubits. The width of the side cells was four cubits, all around the House. ⁶ The cells were one above the other, thirty of them in three stories. ⁷ The supports for the surrounding cells were fixed into the House wall, so that the cells were not recessed into the wall of the House. The width of the cells increased, story by story, for they surrounded the House in the stories that went right around it. ⁸ Then I saw that there was a paved terrace all around the House. The height of this, which formed the base of the side cells, was a full rod of six cubits. ⁹ The outer wall of the side cells was five cubits thick and the pavement formed a verandah outside the cells of the House. ¹⁰ Beyond the rooms was an area twenty cubits wide right around the House. ¹¹ And for access from the side cells onto the courtyard there was one entrance on the north side and one entrance on the south side. The width of the courtyard was five cubits all around.

¹² The building to the west of this surrounding area was seventy cubits by ninety cubits, and the wall of the building was five cubits thick, all around. ¹³ He measured the length of the House: a hundred cubits. The length of the court plus the building and its walls: a hundred cubits. ¹⁴ The breadth of the facade of the House with the quadrangle: a hundred cubits. ¹⁵ He measured the length of the building plus the surrounding area at the back, plus the side depth of its door: a hundred cubits.

The inside of the Sanctuary and the entrance of the court, their thresholds, the window screens, the three sets of doors, one at each threshold, ¹⁶ were all paneled with wood, from floor to windows, and the windows were screened with lattice-work. ¹⁷ From the door to the inner part of the House, and right around the whole wall of the inner room, outside and inside, ¹⁸ were carved cherubs and palm trees, palm trees and cherubs alternating; each cherub had two faces – ¹⁹ the face of a man turned toward the palm tree on one side and the face of a lion toward the palm tree on the other,

all around the House. The cherubs and palm trees were carved ²⁰ from the floor to above the entrance, as also on the wall of the hall. ²¹ The pillars of the House were square.

In front of the Most Holy Place, ²² there appeared to be a wooden altar, three cubits high and two cubits square. Its corners, base and sides were of wood. He said to me, "This is the table before Yahweh."

²³ There was a double door for the Temple, and a double door for the Sanctuary. ²⁴ These doors had two hinged leaves, two leaves for the one door, two leaves for the other. ²⁵ On them, on the doors of the Sanctuary, were carved cherubs and palm trees like those carved on the walls. A wooden screen outside went across the front of the Hall. ²⁶ There were screened windows with flanking palm trees on the walls of the House, and of the cells at the side of the House.

42 ¹ He took me northward into the court and led me to the rooms facing the outer court, and the building to the north. ² They were one hundred cubits long on the north side and fifty cubits wide. ³ On the sides facing the entrance of the inner court and the paving of the outer court was a gallery in front of the triple gallery. ⁴ and in front of the rooms was a walk, ten cubits broad measured inward and a hundred cubits long; their doors looked north. ⁵ The top-floor rooms were narrow because the galleries took up part of the width, being narrower than those on the ground floor or those on the middle floor of the building. ⁶ They were in three stories and had no columns such as those in the court had. Hence they were narrower than the ground-floor ones or the middle-floor ones below them. ⁷ The outer wall parallel to the rooms, facing them and giving on to the outer court, was fifty cubits long. ⁸ the length of the rooms facing the outer court being fifty cubits, while on the side facing the building it was a hundred cubits. ⁹ Beneath the rooms there was an entrance from the east, leading in from the outer court.

¹⁰ In the thickness of the wall of the court, on the south side fronting the court and the building, were rooms. ¹¹ A walk ran in front of them, as with the rooms built on the north side: they were of the same length and breadth, and had similar design and doors in and out. ¹² They were like the entrances of the southern rooms; one entrance at the end of each walk, fronting the eastern wall, being the way in. He said to me, ¹³ "The northern and southern rooms giving on to the court are holy rooms, in which the priests who approach Yahweh will eat the most holy things. In them will be placed the most holy things: the offering, the sacrifice for



sin and the sacrifice of repayment, since this is a holy place. ¹⁴ Once the priests have entered they will not go out of the holy place into the outer court without leaving their liturgical vestments there, since these vestments are holy; they will put on other clothes before going near the room assigned to the people. ¹⁵

¹⁵ When he had finished measuring the inside of the Temple, he took me out to the east gate and measured the whole area of the court. ¹⁶ He measured the east side with his measuring rod: a total of five hundred cubits by the measuring rod. ¹⁷ He then measured the north side: five hundred cubits by the measuring rod. ¹⁸ He then measured the south side: five hundred cubits by the measuring rod. ¹⁹ On the west side he measured five hundred cubits. ²⁰ So he measured the entire enclosing wall on all four sides: length five hundred, breadth five hundred. This separated the sacred from the profane.

43

¹ He took me to the gate, facing east. ² Then I saw the Glory of the God of Israel approaching from the east with a sound like the sound of the ocean, and the earth shone with his Glory. ³ This vision was like the one I had seen when he came for the destruction of the city, and like the one I had seen on the bank of the river Chebar. Then I threw myself to the ground.

⁴ The Glory of Yahweh arrived at the Temple by the east gate. ⁵ The spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court: the Glory of Yahweh was filling the House. ⁶ And I heard someone speaking to me from the Temple while the man stood beside me. ⁷ The voice said, "Son of man, you have seen the place of my throne, where I will place the soles of my feet, and live among the sons of Israel forever; and the people of Israel, they and their kings, will no longer defile my holy name with their prostitutions and the kings, ⁸ setting their threshold beside my threshold and their door beside my door, with a party wall shared by them and me. They used to defile my holy name by their filthy practices, and this is why I destroyed them in my anger. ⁹ From now on if they take their prostitutions and the corpses of their kings away from my presence, I shall live among them forever.

¹⁰ Son of man, describe this House to the people of Israel, to shame them out of their filthy practices. ¹¹ If they are ashamed of their behavior, draw up the plan and show them the design of the Temple, its exits and entrances, its shape, how all of it is arranged, its rules and its laws. Give them all this in writing so that

they can see and take note of its design and the way it is all arranged and carry it out. ¹² This is the law of the Temple: all the surrounding area on top of the mountain is a most holy area.

¹³ Here are the dimensions of the altar (in big cubits, each of a cubit plus a handbreadth.) The base: one cubit high and one cubit wide. The ledge all around it: one span. This is the height of the altar: ¹⁴ from the ground level of the base up to the lower base, two cubits high and one cubit wide; from the lesser plinth to the greater base, four cubits high and one cubit wide. ¹⁵ The altar hearth: four cubits high, with four horns projecting from the hearth. ¹⁶ The hearth being square: twelve cubits by twelve cubits; ¹⁷ and the square base: fourteen cubits by fourteen cubits; and the ledge all around: half a cubit; and the base: one cubit all around. The steps are on the east side."

¹⁸ He said to me, "Son of man, the Lord Yahweh says this: As regards the altar, this is how things are to be done when it has been built for the offering of the holocaust and for the pouring of blood. ¹⁹ To those levitical priests of the race of Zadok who approach me to serve me – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks – you must give a young bull as sacrifice for sin. ²⁰ You are to take some of its blood and put it on the four horns and the four corners of the base and the surrounding ledge. ²¹ In this way you will purify it and make atonement on it. Then take the bull of the sacrifice for sin and burn it in a room of the House apart from the sanctuary. ²² On the second day, you must offer an unblemished he-goat as sacrifice for sin, and the altar is to be purified again as with the bull. ²³ When you have finished the purification you must offer a young bull without blemish and an unblemished ram chosen from the flock. ²⁴ You are to present them before Yahweh, and the priests will sprinkle salt on them and offer them as a holocaust to Yahweh. ²⁵ As a sacrifice for sin, every day for seven days you must offer a he-goat, a bull and an unblemished ram chosen from the flock, for a week. ²⁶ In this way the altar will be atoned for and will be purified and inaugurated. ²⁷ At the end of that time, on the eighth day and afterwards, the priest is to offer your burnt offerings and your communion offerings on the altar, and I will look kindly on you – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks."

New regulations for worship

44

¹ He brought me back to the outer east gate of the sanctuary. It was shut. ² Yahweh said to me, "This gate will be kept



shut. No one will open it or go through it, since Yahweh the God of Israel has been through it. And so it must be kept shut. ³ The prince himself, however, may sit there to take his meal in the presence of Yahweh. But he is to enter through the entrance of the gate and leave through the same way."

⁴ He led me through the north gate to the front of the House, I looked; I saw the Glory of Yahweh filling his House, and I threw myself to the ground. ⁵ Yahweh said to me, "Son of man, pay attention, look carefully and listen closely to everything while I explain to you all the rules of the House of Yahweh and all its laws. Be careful about which men are admitted to the House and which are excluded from the sanctuary. ⁶ And say to the rebels of the people of Israel, the Lord Yahweh says this: There has been enough of all your filthy practices, House of Israel. ⁷ You let aliens enter, uncircumcised in heart and body, to frequent my sanctuary and profane my Temple; you gave me for my food the fat and the blood; and you broke my covenant with all your filthy practices. ⁸ Instead of performing your duties to men in the Holy Place, you have deputed someone else to perform your duties in my sanctuary. ⁹ The Lord Yahweh says this: No alien, uncircumcised in heart and body, is to enter my sanctuary, none of those aliens living among the Israelites.

¹⁰ The Levites who abandoned me when Israel strayed far from me, and followed their idols, must bear the weight of their own sin. ¹¹ They are to be servants in my sanctuary, responsible for guarding the gates and serving the House. They will kill the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and hold themselves at the service of the people. ¹² But since they used to be at their service in front of their idols and made Israel sin, (and I have raised my hand against them) it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks – they must bear the weight of their sin. ¹³ They are never to approach me again to perform the priestly office in my presence, or to touch my holy things and my most holy things; they must bear the disgrace of their filthy practices. ¹⁴ I shall let them work in the House and serve it and do everything to be done in it.

¹⁵ The Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who did their duty to me in the sanctuary when the Israelites strayed far from me, may still approach me to serve me. They may stand in my presence to offer me the fat and blood – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks. ¹⁶ They may enter my sanctuary and approach my table to serve me; they may perform my liturgy.

¹⁷ Once they enter the gates of the inner court, they are to wear linen garments; they are to wear no wool when they serve inside the gates of the inner court and in the House. ¹⁸ They are to wear linen caps on their heads, and linen breeches about their loins; they are not to wear belts that may make them sweat. ¹⁹ When they go out to the people in the outer court, they are to remove the garments in which they have performed the liturgy and leave them in the rooms of the Holy Place, and put on other clothes, so as not to hallow the people with their vestments. ²⁰ They are neither to shave their heads nor to let their hair grow long, but must cut their hair to a reasonable length. ²¹ No priest is to drink wine on the day he enters the inner court. ²² They are not to marry widows or divorced women, but only virgins of the race of Israel; they may, however, marry widows, if it is the widow of a priest. ²³ They are to teach my people what is sacred and what is profane and make them know what is clean and what is unclean. ²⁴ They are to be judges in disputes; they must judge in the spirit of my statutes; they must follow my laws and ordinances at all my feasts and keep my sabbaths holy. ²⁵ They are not to go near a dead man, lest they become unclean, except for father, mother, daughter, son, brother or unmarried sister. ²⁶ After one of them has been purified, seven days must elapse; ²⁷ then on the day when he enters the sanctuary – the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he is to offer his sacrifice for sin – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks. ²⁸ They are to have no inheritance in Israel; I myself will be their inheritance. You are to give them no patrimony in Israel; I myself will be their patrimony. ²⁹ Their food is to be the offering, the sacrifice for sin and the sacrifice of repayment. Everything in Israel consecrated by anathema shall be for them. ³⁰ The best of all your first fruits of every sort and of all that you offer, is to go to the priests; and the best of your dough you are also to give to the priests, so that a blessing may rest on your houses. ³¹ Priests are not to eat the flesh of anything that has died a natural death or been savaged, neither the flesh of a bird nor of any other creature.

45

¹ When you divide the country into portions by lot, you are to allocate a sacred portion of the country to Yahweh: twenty-five thousand cubits long and twenty thousand wide. ² The whole of this land is to be sacred, and of this square area five hundred by five hundred cubits is to be for the sanctuary, with a boundary fifty cubits wide right around. ³ Out of this area you are also to measure a

section twenty-five thousand by ten thousand cubits, in which there shall stand the sanctuary; this is a very holy land. ⁴ This is to be the sacred portion of the country; it shall belong to the priests who officiate in the sanctuary and approach Yahweh to serve him. There they are to have their houses and also a district set apart for the sanctuary. ⁵ An area twenty-five thousand by ten thousand cubits is to be kept for the Levites serving the House to own, with towns to live in. ⁶ You are to give the city possession of an area five thousand by twenty-five thousand cubits, near the land belonging to the sanctuary; this is to be for the whole people of Israel.

⁷ The prince is to have a domain on either side of the very holy land and of the land belonging to the city, and adjacent to both of them, stretching westward from the west and eastward from the east, its size equal to one of the portions between the west and the east frontiers of the country. ⁸ This is to be his possession in Israel. Then my princes will no longer oppress my people; they must leave the rest of the country for the people of Israel, for its tribes.

⁹ The Lord Yahweh says this: Let this be enough for you, princes of Israel! Give up your violence and plundering, practice justice and integrity, crush my people no more with taxation – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks. ¹⁰ Have scales that are fair, a fair ephah, a fair bath. ¹¹ Let the ephah and bath be equal, let the bath hold one tenth of a homer and the ephah one tenth of a homer. ¹² Let the measures be based on the homer. The shekel is to be twenty gerahs. Twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels and fifteen shekels are to make one mina.

¹³ This is the tax that you are to levy: the sixth of an ephah for every homer of wheat, and the sixth of an ephah for every homer of barley. ¹⁴ The dues on oil: one bath of oil out of every ten baths or out of every cor (which is equal to ten baths or one homer, since ten baths equal one homer). ¹⁵ You are to levy one sheep on every flock of two hundred from the patrimony of Israel for the oblation, the burnt offering and the communion sacrifice. This is for the atonement – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks. ¹⁶ Let all the people of the country be bound to give this offering for the prince of Israel. ¹⁷ The prince is to provide the burnt offerings, grain offerings and drink offerings for feasts, New Moons and sabbaths, for all the solemn festivals of Israel. He is to provide the sacrifice for sin, oblation, holocaust and communion sacrifices atoning for Israel.

¹⁸ The Lord Yahweh says this: On the first day of the first month, you must take a young

bull without blemish, to purify the sanctuary. ¹⁹ The priest is to take blood from the sacrifice for sin and put it on the doorposts of the House, on the four corners of the altar base and on the doorposts of the gates of the inner court. ²⁰ You must do the same on the seventh of the month, on behalf of anyone who has sinned through inadvertence or ignorance. This is how you are to make atonement for the House. ²¹ On the fourteenth day of the first month, you must celebrate the feast of the Passover. For seven days everyone is to eat unleavened loaves. ²² On that day, the prince must offer a bull as a sacrifice for sin, for himself and all the people in the country. ²³ For the seven days of the feast, he must offer Yahweh a burnt offering of seven bulls and seven rams without blemish, daily for a week, and one he-goat daily as a sacrifice for sin, ²⁴ with a grain offering of one ephah for each bull and one ephah for each ram, and a hin of oil for every ephah for the oblation.

²⁵ For the feast on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he must do the same for seven days, offering the sacrifice for sin, burnt offering, drink offering and the oil.

The sabbath and the new moon

46 ¹ Thus speaks the Lord Yahweh: The east gate of the inner court must be kept shut for the six working days. On the sabbath day it is to be opened, as also on the day of the New Moon; ² and the prince is to go in through the entrance of the outer gate and stand by the doorposts of the gate. The priest must then offer his holocaust and his communion sacrifice. He must prostrate himself on the threshold of the gate and go out, and the gate is not to be shut again until the evening. ³ The people of the country are to prostrate themselves in the presence of Yahweh at the entrance to the gate on sabbaths and days of the New Moon. ⁴ On the sabbath day the prince shall offer six unblemished lambs and one unblemished ram for the burnt offering. ⁵ The grain offering is of one ephah for the ram, with such oblation as he pleases for the lambs, and a hin of oil for every ephah. ⁶ On the day of the New Moon he shall offer a young bull without blemish, six unblemished lambs and one unblemished ram; ⁷ he must make a grain offering of one ephah for the bull and one ephah for the ram, and what he pleases for the lambs, and a hin of oil for every ephah.

⁸ When the prince goes in, he is to enter by the entrance of the gate, and he must leave by the same way. ⁹ When the people of the country come into the presence of Yahweh at the



solemn festivals to prostrate themselves, those who have come in by the north gate are to go out by the south gate, and those who have come in by the south gate are to go out by the north gate; no one is to turn back to leave through the gate by which he entered but is to go out on the opposite side.¹⁰ The prince is to come with them, coming in like them and going out like them.¹¹ On feast days and solemn festivals the oblation must be one ephah for every bull, one ephah for every ram, what he pleases for the lambs, and a hin of oil for every ephah.¹² When the prince offers Yahweh a voluntary communion sacrifice, the east gate is to be opened for him, and he is to offer his holocaust and his communion sacrifice as he does on the sabbath day; when he has gone out, the gate is to be shut after him.¹³ Every day he must offer an unblemished lamb one year old as a holocaust to Yahweh; he must offer this every morning.¹⁴ Every morning, in addition, he is to offer an oblation of one sixth of an ephah and one third of a hin of oil, for mixing with the flour. This is an eternal law.¹⁵ The lamb, the oblation and the oil are to be offered morning after morning forever.

¹⁶ The Lord Yahweh says this: If the prince gives his sons part of his inheritance, the gift is to pass to the ownership of his sons, and become their heritage.¹⁷ But if he gives part of his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall only belong to the man until the year of liberation and is then to revert to the prince. Only his sons may retain his inheritance.¹⁸ The prince may not take any part of the people's inheritance and thus rob them of their rightful possessions; he must provide the patrimony of his sons out of his own property, so that no member of my people will be robbed of his rightful possessions."

¹⁹ He took me through the entrance at the side of the north gate that leads to the rooms of the Holy Place set apart for the priests. And there before us, to the west, was a space at the end.²⁰ He said to me, "This is where the priests are to boil the slaughtered animals for the sacrifice for sin and the sacrifice of reparation, and where they are to bake the oblation. They shall not carry them into the outer court lest they hallow the people."²¹ He took me into the outer court and led me to each of its four

corners;²² in each corner was a compound; there were four small compounds, forty cubits by thirty, all four being the same size.²³ Each of the four was enclosed by a wall, with hearths all around the bottom of the wall.²⁴ He said, "These are the kitchens where the Temple servants are to boil the sacrifices offered by the people."

The river that flows from the Temple

o 47 ¹ The man brought me back to the entrance of the Temple and I saw water coming out from the threshold of the Temple and flowing eastwards. The Temple faced the east and the water flowed from the south side of the Temple, from the south side of the altar.² He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing the east and there I saw the stream coming from the south side.

³ The man had a measuring cord in his hand. As he went towards the east he measured off a thousand cubits and led me across the water which was up to my ankles.⁴ He measured off another thousand cubits and made me cross the water which came to my knees. He measured off another thousand cubits and we crossed the water which was up to my waist.⁵ When he had again measured a thousand cubits, I could not cross the torrent for it had swollen to a depth which was impossible to cross without swimming.

⁶ The man then said to me, "Son of man, did you see?" He led me on further and then brought me back to the bank of the river.⁷ There I saw a

1. Gen 2, 9; Jn 4, 4; 7, 39; Rev 22, 1; Ps 46, 5

o Note the vision of the river which makes the land fruitful and which starts from the place where God is present. The invisible God manifests himself in the life which he gives to people. The Holy Spirit, imaged in the stream of living water (see John 7:38), makes all the seeds of life blossom again in the world.

The stream flows to the Salt Sea or the Dead Sea (its waters are so salty that there are no fish and no plants can grow on the shores). This serves as an image of the healing that God brings to a world, sterile because of its sins. *Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for medicine.*



number of trees on both sides of the river. ⁸He said to me, "This water goes to the east, down to the Arabah, and when it flows into the sea of foul-smelling water, the water will become wholesome. ⁹Wherever the river flows, swarms of creatures will live in it; fish will be plentiful and the sea water will become fresh. Wherever it flows, life will abound. ¹⁰Fishermen will stand on the banks and spread nets from En Gedi to En Eglaim. Fish of many kinds will be found there, like the fish of the open sea and very plentiful. ¹¹The swamps and the marshes will not become wholesome; they will be used as saltbeds.

¹²Near the river on both banks there will be all kinds of fruit trees with foliage that will not wither and fruit that will never fail; each month they will bear a fresh crop because the water comes from the Temple. The fruit will be good to eat and the leaves will be used for healing.

The frontiers of the land

¹³The Lord Yahweh says this: Here are the boundaries of the territories to be allotted between the twelve tribes of Israel, with two portions for Joseph. ¹⁴You must share it out equally between you, since I swore to your fathers that I would give them this land which now falls to you as your inheritance. ¹⁵Here are the frontiers of the land. On the north, from the Great Sea by the way of Hethlon to the Pass of Hamath and on to Zedad, ¹⁶Berothah, Sibraim lying between the territories of Damascus and Hamath – and to Hazer-hatticon on the borders of Hauran. ¹⁷The frontier will extend from the sea to Hazer-enon, marching with Damascus and Hamath on the north; this is the northern frontier. ¹⁸On the east the Jordan will serve as frontier between Hauran and Damascus, between Gilead and the land of Israel, down to the Eastern Sea as far as Tamar; this is for the eastern frontier. ¹⁹On the south, from Tamar southward to the waters of Meribah in Kadesh, to the torrent of Egypt and the Great Sea; this is for the southern frontier. ²⁰On the west the

Great Sea will serve as frontier straight up towards Hamath; so much for the western frontier. ²¹You are to share out this land among yourselves, between the tribes of Israel. ²²You are to divide it into inheritances for yourselves and the aliens settled among you who have had children among you, since you are to treat them as citizens of Israel. They are to draw lots with you for their inheritance, with the tribes of Israel. ²³You must give the alien his inheritance in the tribe in which he is living – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks.

The distribution of the land among the twelve tribes

48 ¹This is the list of the tribes. In the far north by way of Hethlon to Hamath, to Hazer-enon, with the frontier of Damascus lying to the north, bordering Hamath – each portion extends from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Dan, one portion. ²Bordering Dan, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Asher. ³Bordering Asher, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Naphtali. ⁴Bordering Naphtali, from the eastern to the western frontier: Manasseh. ⁵Bordering Manasseh, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Ephraim. ⁶Bordering Ephraim, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Reuben. ⁷Bordering Reuben, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Judah. ⁸Bordering Judah, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier, is the part you are to set aside, twenty-five thousand cubits wide, and as long as each of the other portions from the eastern frontier to the western frontier. The sanctuary will be in the centre of it.

⁹The part you must set aside for Yahweh is to be twenty-five thousand cubits long and ten thousand cubits wide. ¹⁰This consecrated portion is to belong to the priests, being, on the north side, twenty-five thousand cubits; on the west side ten thousand cubits wide, on the east side ten thousand cubits wide and on the south side twenty-five thousand cubits long, and the sanctuary of Yahweh will be the centre of it. ¹¹This is to belong to the consecrated priests, to those of the sons of Zadok who maintained my liturgy and did not go astray with the straying Israelites, as the Levites went astray. ¹²And so their portion is to be taken out of the most holy portion of the land, at the side of the territory of the Levites. ¹³The territory of the Levites, like the territory of the priests, is to be twenty-five thousand cubits long and ten thousand wide – the whole length being twenty-five thousand and the width ten thousand.



¹⁴ They must not sell or exchange any part of it, and their part can never be alienated, since it is consecrated to Yahweh. ¹⁵ The remainder, an area of five thousand cubits by twenty-five thousands, is to be a non-sacred space for the city, for houses and pastures. The city is to stand in the centre. ¹⁶ Here are its measurements: on the north side, four thousand five hundred cubits; on the south side, four thousand five hundred cubits; on the east side, four thousand five hundred cubits; on the west side, four thousand five hundred cubits. ¹⁷ And the city pastures are to extend two hundred and fifty cubits to the north, two hundred and fifty to the south, two hundred and fifty to the east, two hundred and fifty to the west. ¹⁸ What remains of the part set aside, after keeping out the consecrated portion, consists of ten thousand cubits eastward and ten thousand westward, alongside the consecrated portion; this will bring in a revenue for feeding the people working inside the city. ¹⁹ These people are to be drawn from all the tribes of Israel and shall till this land. ²⁰ The portion is to have a total area of twenty-five thousand cubits by twenty-five thousand cubits. So the sacred portion has a square shape and is located beside the land belonging to the city. ²¹ What is left over on either side of the sacred portion and of the land belonging to the city, shall be for the prince, extending along the twenty-five thousand cubits eastward to the eastern frontier, and extending along the twenty-five thousand cubits westward to the western frontier – running parallel with the other portions. This is the portion for the prince with, in the middle, the consecrated portion and the sanctuary of the Temple. ²² Thus, apart from the property of

the Levites and property of the city which lie inside the prince's portion, everything between the borders of Judah and the borders of Benjamin is to belong to the prince.

²³ Here are the rest of the tribes: from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Benjamin. ²⁴ Bordering Benjamin, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Simeon. ²⁵ Bordering Simeon, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Issachar. ²⁶ Bordering Issachar, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Zebulun. ²⁷ Bordering Zebulun, from the eastern frontier to the western frontier: Gad. ²⁸ The southern border of Gad will be formed by the southern frontier running through Tamar to the waters of Meribah in Kadesh, to the Wadi and the great Sea. ²⁹ This is the inheritance of the tribes of Israel and this is how you will apportion it – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks.

³⁰ Here are the ways out of the city. On the north side, being four thousand five hundred cubits long, ³¹ three gates: the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, the gate of Levi; the gates of the city are to be named after the tribes of Israel. ³² On the east side, which is to be four thousand five hundred cubits long, three gates: the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, the gate of Dan. ³³ On the south side, which is to be four thousand five hundred cubits long, three gates: the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar, the gate of Zebulun. ³⁴ On the west side, which is to be four thousand five hundred cubits long, three gates: the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, the gate of Naphtali. ³⁵ The total perimeter will be eighteen thousand cubits, and the name of the city is to be: *Yahweh-is-there*."

HOSEA

1 ¹ The word of Yahweh was addressed to Hosea son of Beeri, during the reign of Ussiah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah, and of Jeroboam son of Joash, in Israel.

Take a wife: she will betray you

² When Yahweh began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, take a sacred prostitute for your wife and have children born of prostitution, for the land has committed the

vilest of whoredom by turning away from Yahweh."

³ So he married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. And she was with child and bore a son. ⁴ Yahweh told him, "Name him *Jezreel*, for I will soon punish the family of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel. I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵ The days are coming when Israel will be defeated in the Valley of Jezreel."

2. Jer 2, 20

4. 2 K 9-10

INTRODUCTION

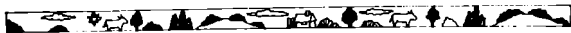
Hosea has come down through history as the prophet deceived by his wife whom he never stopped loving, in spite of her infidelities. God, who had called him to speak in his behalf to an idolatrous and materialistic people, wanted his prophet to have experienced the grief and the shame of a betrayed husband. The prophets reveal a God who feels a love so real and so personal for men that it can be expressed in human words. After being called by God, the prophet received the privilege of feeling and seeing things as God does: Hosea is going to carry the same cross as God's: constantly loving and forgiving a fickle and unfaithful wife. And Hosea will also shout God's indignation at Israel because of their sins.

Hosea began to preach around the year 746, that is to say, at the end of the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, in the northern kingdom of Israel. Right after that would begin the twenty years of decadence which would conclude with the capture of Samaria and the deportation of its inhabitants (721).

Hosea rises to accuse and threaten the people who are unconcerned. He continues to preach while the kingdom is collapsing: he predicts the punishment of the people who are irresponsible and unfaithful to the covenant with their God. But, he understands that God is an educator and that he does not allow the misfortunes and even the destruction of the nation without his reasons. Through such means, Israel will again become what they once were when the Lord took them by the hand and brought them out of Egypt: they will become a poor and humble people, able to follow their God with faith and love.

The book of Hosea begins with the story of the failure of his married life. From that he draws a lesson for Israel, unfaithful to the Lord (chapters 1-3).

Then, in chapters 4-13 we have a mixture of reproaches, threats, invitations to conversion and predictions of the exile. The final paragraph 14:2-10 offers hope for the future, when the Lord has taken away all the riches in which Israel trusted.



⁶ Gomer was again with child and gave birth to a daughter. Yahweh said to Hosea, "Name her *Unloved*, for I will have no more love for the nation of Israel, nor will I forgive them."

⁸ After weaning Unloved, Gomer was with child again and had another son. ⁹ Yahweh said, "Name him *Not-my-people*, for you are not my people, nor am I *I-AM* for you."

+ 2

⁴ Denounce your mother, denounce
– for she is not my wife,
nor am I her husband.

Let her rid her face of her ornaments
and her breasts of her lewd idols;

⁵ or I will strip her naked
as on the day of her birth;

I will reduce her to an arid land,
making of her a desert –
I will let her die of thirst.

⁶ How could I love her children?
They are children of adultery;

⁷ their mother has played the harlot
they are children of debauchery.

She said, "I will go after my lovers,
who give me my bread and water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink."

¹⁰ Yet she would not acknowledge that it was I
who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil,
and the silver and gold
with which this people made their Baals.

"So I will take back my grain when it ripens
and my new wine when it is ready;

6. Jer 31, 33	9. Ex 3, 14	4. Is 1, 18; Mt 6, 1; Is 50, 1	5. Ezk 16, 4	8. Dt 7, 13
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o The Lord asks Hosea to marry one of those women involved in the sacred prostitution of pagan worship. Those wishing to obtain the favours of the god Baal for their fields and their cattle would come to them. This happened often in Israel and only the Lord's true faithful were scandalized. Thus, Hosea begins his marriage with great love, knowing that his wife will keep on being unfaithful to him and to her God. In fact, she goes back to being a prostitute.

Deep down, Hosea is torn apart, always hoping that his fickle and idolatrous wife will change her attitude, but also consumed by jealousy and anger, and tired of always forgiving. He keeps on loving her and in the end he will succeed in redeeming her through his great and merciful love.

Name her Unloved. In Israel every name had some meaning, usually a religious meaning. Here Hosea calls his children names which must shock everyone, thus confirming what he is

teaching the people: Israel will be defeated; they are a people whom the Lord does not love and does not acknowledge as his people.

After Hosea, several prophets will use the words prostitution or adultery to refer to idolatry. They will also say that Israel is called to be the spouse of the Lord:

– Jeremiah will present Israel's sins in a similar way (Jer 2:2; 3:1; 31:1) and Ezekiel, with even more violence (Ez 16:23). On the contrary, in Isaiah, we will have the vision of Jerusalem reconciled and married to the Lord (Is 50:1; 54:6 and 62:4). Also see Song of Songs and Rev. 21.

+ In this discourse we have a merging of Hosea threatening his wife and the Lord reproaching his people.

In Israel nobody denied the Lord, the God of their race. Yet, even though they accepted him as saviour in the national crises, they thought that the fertility of the earth and of cattle de-



- I will take back my wool and my flax
which I gave to cover her nudity.
- ¹² Before her lovers I will lay bare her shame
and no one can rescue her from my power.
- ¹³ I will bring an end to all her gladness,
her monthly feasts and sabbaths.
- ¹⁴ I will lay waste her vines,
and her fig trees, for she said,
"My lovers gave them to me."
I will turn them into thickets
to be ravaged by wild beasts.
- ¹⁵ I will punish her for the feast days
when she brought burnt offerings to the Baals,
decked herself with her gaudy jewels,
ran after her lovers and forgot me, says Yahweh.
- ⁸ With thorns, therefore, I will block her path,
wall her and not let her find her way out.
- ⁹ Pursuing her lovers,
she will not overtake them;
looking for her lovers, she will not find them.
Then she will say, "I will go back to my husband
for I was better off then than now."
- ¹⁶ So I am going to allure her,
lead her once more into the desert,
where I can speak to her tenderly.
- ¹⁷ Then I will give back her vineyards,

12. Jn 10, 28

10. Jer 3, 22; Lk 15, 17

16. Dt 8, 2

pendent on other gods, the Baals, and that the Lord had no power in these matters. And so, the Lord threatens to deprive them of all the fruits of the earth and of the land itself in order for them to see that all these riches come from God alone.

In all ages we tend to entrust the various areas of existence to various gods. Some have "great faith" in Christ to solve their problems, but they worship sex in a way very similar to that of the devotees of Baal. Others revere God publicly, but they establish an oppressive society in which money and strength confer all the rights. The calvary of many people in the Third World reveal the sin of a society destroyed by its idols.

So I am going to allure her, lead her once more into the desert, where I can speak to her tenderly. The Lord is going to deprive Israel of everything so they will again be poor as they were in the desert in the days of Moses. Thus, they will know that everything comes from God and they will put their trust in him. 'I was better off then than now.' This is what the prodigal son will also say in Luke 15:17.

"She will no longer call me *my Lord*." Here, Hosea uses the word *My Baal*. In Hebrew, Baal

means Lord. This was the name given to the Canaanite gods, but the Israelites also honoured the Lord with this title. However, the Lord does not want to be a "Baal" among many, but "The" only husband.

You will be my spouse forever. God is offering men a new covenant, a new alliance with him. Not a new religion with different commandments, but rather a personal relationship born of a purified and renewed heart (Jer 31:31).

John refers to this union 'in enduring love' in 1:17: Jesus is the one who brought it to human kind.

That day on their behalf I will make a covenant with beasts of the field. After the trials, Hosea foresees a happy period when the Lord will give the land back to his renewed people. There will be no more hostile forces from nature, no more wars. *I will make my people rest safe and secure.*

In the end, Hosea succeeds in overcoming his wife's wickedness by his persevering love. He even buys her back from the priest of Baal to whom she had given herself.



make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she will answer me as in her youth,
as when she came out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁸ Yahweh says: On that day
she will call me *my husband*,
and never again: *my Baal*.

¹⁹ I will take the names of Baals from her lips
and no longer will they be invoked.

²⁰ That day on their behalf I will make a covenant
with beasts of the field and birds of the air,
with creatures creeping upon the ground.

I will wipe out the sword and war in the land;
I will make people rest safe and secure.

²¹ You will be my spouse forever,
betrothed in justice and integrity;
we will be united in love and tenderness.

²² I will espouse you in faithfulness
and you will come to know Yahweh.

²³ This is what Yahweh says of those days,

"I will be at peace with the heavens,
and they will respond to the earth;

²⁴ the earth will respond to the grain, wine and oil,
which will come up to the expectation of *Jezreel*.

²⁵ I will sow them for myself in the land;

I will show my love to *Unloved*;

I will say to *Not-my-people*, "You are my people";
and they will answer, "You are my God."

3 ¹ Yahweh said to me, "Go
once more, show your wife
that you love her, although she has de-
ceived you with others. Love her just
as Yahweh loves his people who turn
to other gods and love the sacred
raisin cakes."

² So I bought her for fifteen pieces
of silver and a whole measure of bar-
ley. ³ Then I said to her, "You shall
stay here with me many days without
giving yourself to anyone and without
deserting me for another man. And in
turn I will wait for you."

⁴ For the people of Israel shall be
many days without king or ruler,

without sacrifice or sacred pillar,
without divination or household idol.

⁵ Then the people of Israel shall
turn back, looking for Yahweh, their
God, and for David, their king. In the
last days they will come respectfully
to Yahweh and to his blessings.

2 ¹ Yet the people of Israel shall be like
the sand of the sea, that cannot be
measured or counted. In the place where it was
said to them, "You are not my people," they
shall be called "sons of the living God." ² The
people of Judah and the people of Israel will be
reunited, they will appoint one leader to rule
over them, and they will come up out of the
land. For there will be a great victory in Jez-
reel. ³ You will call your brothers *My-people*,
and your sisters *My-loved-ones*.

18. Jer 2, 2; Rev 3, 7

9, 25; 1 Pet 2, 10

1 K 4, 20; Rom 9, 25

19. Zac 13, 2

1. 2 S 6, 19; Jer 7, 18; 44, 19

2. Ezk 37, 29

20. Is 11, 6; Ezk 34, 25

21. Is 54, 5

5. Jer 30, 9; Ezk 37, 24

25. Rom 11, 31;

1. Gen 22, 17;

4 ¹ Hear the word of Yahweh, Israel! for Yahweh has an accusation to bring against the inhabitants of this land. There is neither truth nor goodness nor knowledge of God in the country; ² only perjury, lies, murder, theft and adultery, with continual bloodshed.

³ That is why the country is in mourning with all who live there wasting away; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, even the fish are dying. ⁴ But let no one apologize or accuse another, for it is you, priest, whom I single out!

⁵ You stumble day and night and the prophets stumble with you, and you make your people fall. ⁶ My people perish for want of knowledge, I also reject you as priests, and since you ignore the law of your God, I, too, will ignore your children.

⁷ All without exception have offended me; they have exchanged me, their Glory, for idols, their shame. ⁸ Since they eat of the sacrifices for sin, they like my people to sin.

⁹ Yet it will be for the people as for the priest; I shall punish both for their conduct and repay them for their deeds. ¹⁰ They will eat and not be satisfied; they will multiply their prostitutions but remain without child, for they have no reverence for Yahweh. ¹¹ Harlotry, wine and liquors have taken hold of their hearts.

¹² My people consult a wooden idol and rely on a rod for information. A spirit of adultery leads them astray and makes them unfaithful to their God. ¹³ They sacrifice on the mountain tops and offer incense on the hills, under the oak, the poplar and the terebinth, wherever the shade is pleasant.

1. Is 3, 13; Mi 6, 1
13. Dt 12, 2; Jer 2, 20

3. Is 24, 4; Zep 1, 3
15. Jos 5, 2

4. Eph 4, 18

6. Jer 5, 4; Mal 2, 1
6. Am 8, 11

8. Is 56, 11
7. Jn 7, 34

11. Is 28, 7
10. Dt 19, 14

■ Other prophets will also condemn the faults and lack of responsibility of the civil and religious authorities: they are causing the suffering of the people (see Is 5:13; Micah 3:1).

In 4:11-14 Hosea continues to accuse the

¹⁴ That is why, if your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery, I will not punish them, for you yourselves go off with harlots and sacrifice with temple prostitutes. A senseless people destroys itself.

¹⁵ If Israel is a prostitute, there is no reason for Judah to be the same. Do not frequent Gilgal or Beth-aven; do not go there to swear. "As Yahweh lives!"

¹⁶ Since Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn cow, will Yahweh pasture it gently as a lamb? ¹⁷ Ephraim is devoted to idols, let Yahweh leave him alone! ¹⁸ After being drunk with wine they go with prostitutes; they prefer shame to glory. ¹⁹ A whirlwind will sweep them away and they will be ashamed of their unholy sacrifices.

Against the royal officials

5 ¹ Hear this, O priests! and you, people of Israel, pay attention! Hear, officials of the king for you are to be judged. You have been a snare at Mizpah and a net on Tabor, ² and a deep pit at Shittim, so I am to punish you all.

³ I know what Israel is like; he cannot hide from me. Ephraim is playing the harlot; Israel is a people which defiles itself.

⁴ Their deeds prevent them from returning to their God; a spirit of prostitution has taken hold of them and they do not know Yahweh. ⁵ The pride of Israel is witness against him; these people have failed.

⁶ With their flocks and herds they will go in search of Yahweh, but they will not find him for he has gone far from them. ⁷ He found they were unfaithful and their children were not his. So now the destroyer will do away with them and their lands will be devastated.

⁸ Blow the horn at Gibeah, the trumpet at Ramah, raise the battcry in Beth-aven! For Benjamin has been defeated. ⁹ The day has come in which Ephraim is ruined. Among the tribes of Israel I will proclaim the truth: ¹⁰ the princes of Judah are like those who remove border stones and I shall pour out my anger on them like a flood. ¹¹ In the same way those of Ephraim are oppressors and trample justice.

¹² I will be like a moth for Ephraim like rot for Judah. ¹³ Ephraim saw he was sick and

priests who are imitating the practices of the pagan priests: fortune-telling and prostitution

◆ Let us not forget that the northern people, called kingdom of Israel, were formed by the tribes of Jacob or the tribes of Joseph (see Gen.

Judah saw his ulcer. Then Ephraim turned to the great King of Assyria for help, but he will not cure you or heal your sores.

¹⁴ I will be like a leopard for Ephraim and like a lion for Judah. I will tear them to pieces

and leave them. When I carry them off, no one will rescue them. ¹⁵ Then I will go away and return to my place until they admit their guilt and come back to me, for in their anguish they will earnestly seek me.

+ 6

¹ Come, let us return to Yahweh.

He who shattered us to pieces, will heal us as well;
he has struck us down, but he will bind up our wounds.

² Two days later he will bring us back to life;
on the third day, he will raise us up,
and we shall live in his presence.

³ Let us strive to know Yahweh.
His coming is as certain as the dawn;
his salvation will rise as the light;
he will come to us as showers come,
like spring rain that waters the earth.

⁴ O Ephraim, what shall I do with you?
O Judah, how shall I deal with you?

This love of yours is like morning mist,
like morning dew that quickly disappears.

⁵ This is why I smote you through the prophets,
and have slain you by the words of my mouth.

⁶ For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice;
it is knowledge of God,
not burnt offerings.

■ ⁷ At Adam they broke my covenant: there they were unfaithful to me. ⁸ Gilead is a city of evildoers, stained with footprints of blood. ⁹ Like thieves in an ambush, so are the priests: they murder on the road to Shechem and commit adultery. ¹⁰ In Bethel I saw their disgraceful conduct; that is where Ephraim played the harlot and was defiled. ¹¹ (For you, too, Judah, I have a harvest stored for when I bring back my captive people and heal Israel.)

7

¹ The sin of Ephraim appears clearly; the wickedness of Samaria is obvious. They cheat one another, they break into houses while bandits raid outside. ² They do not re-

alize that I am mindful of their evil deeds. They are engulfed by their sins which are always before me. ³ They amuse the king with their wickedness and the officials with their trickery. ⁴ They are and remain adulterers, like an oven heated by a baker; he has not to stir the fire from the time the dough is kneaded until it rises.

⁵ On the day of the king his officials get drunk and the king joins hands with the revellers. ⁶ In their plotting they burn like an oven; all night their anger smoulders and in the morning blazes like a fire. ⁷ They are all heated like an oven and they devour their own rulers:

13. 2 K 15, 19 5. Jer 5, 14	14. Am 3, 12 6. Mt 9, 13; 12, 7; Jer 22, 16; Am 5, 22	1. Lam 3, 40	2. Ps 116, 9 7. 2 K 15, 10	4. Is 49, 2; Heb 4, 12; 1 K 18
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35:23). There were two tribes of Joseph: Ephraim, the most important, and Manasseh. When Hosea uses *Ephraim*, *Joseph*, *Jacob*, *Israel*, he is, in fact, addressing only one people.

○ *This deals with Israel's wars. Note the last sentence: The Lord is hiding and leaves his people in darkness so they may come back to seek him.*

+ Men regret their errors, but they are not so sincere as to abandon their sins. They think they

will please God by offering a few sacrifices but they are far from real love which manifests itself in obedience; they prefer to offer the costly sacrifices which they choose rather than doing what God is asking of them.

It is love that I desire, not sacrifice. On one occasion Jesus refuted the Pharisees by quoting this saying (see Matthew 9:13).

■ *Adam, Gilead, Bethel:* places where the worship of the Lord is mixed in with pagan customs.

all their kings fall but none of them calls on me for help.

⁸ Ephraim mixes with other nations. He is like a half-baked loaf; ⁹ the nations around him consume his strength but he is unaware of it. He has become old and he does not know it.

¹⁰ Israel's arrogance is witness against him but even so they will not turn back to Yahweh, their God, or search for him. ¹¹ Ephraim is like a silly pigeon, now calling on Egypt, now turning to Assyria. ¹² But wherever they turn I shall throw my net over them for they rebelled against me and they will fall like birds.

¹³ Woe to them who fled far from me; disgrace will fall on those who deceived me. I wanted to redeem them but they spoke evil of me. ¹⁴ They did not call on me sincerely when they groaned on their beds because of their wheat and wine and turned to me.

¹⁵ When I made them successful and strong, they plotted evil against me. ¹⁶ Now they turn back to me but without sincerity. They resemble a deceptive bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent talk; in the land of Egypt, people will make fun of them.

♦ 8 ¹ Sound the trumpet, sentry! Warn the people of Yahweh because they have broken my covenant and are unfaithful to my Law. ² They cry to me, "We, Israel, acknowledge you, O God." ³ But Israel rejected what is right and this is why the enemy will hunt them down. ⁴ Without my approval they set up kings and without my blessing appointed leaders. With their silver and gold they fashioned idols to their own ruin.

⁵ To me, Samaria, your calf is loathsome and my anger blazes against you. How long will you remain defiled? ⁶ The calf is yours, Israel, a craftsman has made it; it is not God and will be broken into pieces. ⁷ As they sow the wind, they will reap the whirlwind. Like the erect ear of corn they bear no grain and produce no flour, or if they do, foreigners devour it.

⁸⁻⁹ Israel was eaten up when he went to Assyria. Now they will be a worthless object among the nations. Ephraim was a proud donkey but see: he sent gifts to lovers. ¹⁰ Although they send tributes to the nations, I shall

gather them together and Israel will waste away oppressed by the great king.

¹¹ Ephraim built many altars but his altars made him more guilty. ¹² I wrote out for him the numerous precepts of my Law, but they look on them as coming from foreigners.

¹³ They offer sacrifices to me because they are those who eat the meat, but Yahweh does not accept their sacrifices for he is mindful of their sin and remembers their wickedness. They will return to Egypt.

¹⁴ Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces, but I will set fire to their towns and burn their palaces.

The exile is foretold

9 ¹ Do not rejoice and celebrate, Israel, like other nations, for you have deserted your God. You are fond of prostitution gifts and run to every threshing floor where there is wheat. ² This is why threshing floors and vats will not feed you; new wine will disappoint you. ³ No longer will you remain in Yahweh's land. Ephraim will return to Egypt – in fact to Assyria, where they will eat unclean food.

⁴ No more will they be able to pour out the wine offering for Yahweh and no longer will they sacrifice to him. They will have only bread for mourners; all who eat it will be defiled. This food will be for themselves and it will not be taken into the house of Yahweh.

⁵ What shall you do on the feast? You will leave but not for the pilgrimage to Yahweh; rather you will flee because of the invaders. ⁶ Egypt will gather you and Memphis entomb you. Nettles will take over your treasures of silver and thorns creep over your tents.

⁷ The time of punishment has come, the day of retribution is here. The Israelites will know it. The prophets will go out of their mind; the seers will become like mad men because your defeat will be as great as your sins have been.

⁸ Ephraim watches before my God; his prophets try to stop the enemy on every path to protect the house of their gods. ⁹ Yet they are as corrupted as they were long ago in Gibeah. Yahweh will remember their wickedness and punish their sin.

9. Rev 3, 17

11. Mt 10, 16

12. Ekl 12, 13

16. Ps 78, 57

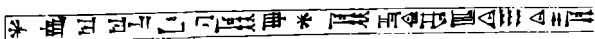
7. Job 4, 8; Pro 22, 8; Gal 6, 7

♦ The prophet is like a guard (see Ez 3:17). Hosea condemns the kings who do not come from God since they were self-appointed at first: in the south, only David's sons were the chosen ones of God. Moreover, they were never concerned about representing God for the people, nor about fulfilling his designs.

Then we have the condemnation of the golden calves placed in Bethel to honor the Lord (see 1 Kgs 12:28).

♦ External practices and sacred banquets following the sacrifice do not make God forget their sin.

Hosea looks at Israel's past. "You will go back



¹⁰ When I found Israel, he was like wild grapes in the desert. I saw your fathers like the first fruits on a fig tree. But no sooner had they come to Baal-peor than they gave themselves to the shameful idol; the abomination won their hearts. ¹¹ The glory of Ephraim has fled away like a bird; it has died stillborn, miscarried, not even conceived. ¹² Had they brought out children, I would take them off before they were adults, for woe to them when I abandon them!

¹³ I saw Ephraim as a plantation in a prairie, but now he will send his sons to be slaughtered. ¹⁴ Give them, Yahweh, what you will; give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry.

¹⁵ It is at Gilgal that their wickedness is seen. There I hated them. I will expel them from my House because of their evil conduct. I will love them no longer for all their leaders are rebels. ¹⁶ Ephraim is blighted; his root is withered; he will produce no fruit. Even when they are with child, the child will die in the womb. ¹⁷ My God will reject them because they did not listen; he will make them wander among the nations.

10 ¹ Israel was a spreading vine, rich in fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; the more his land prospered, the more he adorned his sacred stones.

² Their heart is divided! They shall pay for it. Their altars will be thrown down and their sacred stones broken to pieces.

³ Now they say, "We have no king (because we have no fear of God) and what good would a king do us?" ⁴ They speak like this while taking an empty oath for a useless treaty; their sentence is growing like weeds in a ploughed field.

⁵ The people of Samaria tremble for their idols of Bethel: they mourn for their calf as do the priests who were so proud of it. ⁶ The glorious idol has been taken far away, carried off to Assyria as a tribute to the great king. Ephraim will reap the shame of this; the people of Israel will be disgraced. ⁷ As for the king of Samaria, he has been carried off like foam on water.

⁸ The idolatrous high places – the sin of Israel – will be destroyed. Thorn and thistle will creep over the altars. Then they will say to

the mountains: 'Cover us', and to the hills: 'Fall on us.'

⁹ Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned and rebelled, Israel. Will not the battle against the evildoers of Gibeah overtake you again? ¹⁰ I shall come and punish you, gathering the nations against you because of your double sin.

Admonition and call to conversion

¹¹ Ephraim is a well trained heifer fond of threshing; on her neck I shall place a yoke; Ephraim will be harnessed and plough; the nation of Jacob will break the clods.

¹² Plough new ground, sow for yourselves justice and reap the harvest of kindness. It is the time to go seeking Yahweh until he comes to rain salvation on you.

¹³ For your part you planted wickedness, reaped evil and ate the fruit of falsehood. When you rely on your own strength and your many warriors, confusion will overcome your people. ¹⁴ See: your fortresses are destroyed as when Shalman devastated Beth-arbel and the mothers were crushed to death with their children after the battle. ¹⁵ That is what will happen to you, people of Israel, because of your great evil. That day, at dawn, the king of Israel has already disappeared.

I called my son out of Egypt

+ 11 ¹ I loved Israel when he was a child; out of Egypt I called my son. ² But the more I have called, the further from me have they gone – sacrificing to the Baals, burning incense to the idols.

³ Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; yet little did they realize that it was I who cared for them. ⁴ I led them with cords of human kindness, with leading strings of love, and I became for them as one who eases the yoke upon their neck and stoops down to feed them.

⁵ If they refuse to return to me, they

10. Num 25	14. Lk 22, 29	1. Is 5, 1	8. Lk 22, 30; Rev 6, 16	13. Is 31, 1	14. Ps 132
1. Is 1, 2; Dt 32, 6	2. Ex 4, 22; Mt 2, 15				

to Egypt" (9:3), namely, you will be captive again.

+ Israel is God's spoiled child. In former days God brought them out of Egypt, and ever since then, he has been calling them and trying to draw them to himself, but they keep up their

depraved ways which bring punishment upon them.

I am God and not man (9). Our setbacks which seem to be God's punishment are, in fact, what God considers the most suitable ways to teach us (see Hb 12:7; 2 Mc 6:16; Wis 11:23).

will have to go back to Egypt and be ruled by an Assyrian king. ⁶ Swords will flash in their cities, slaughtering their sons, putting an end to all their plans.

⁷ They insist on turning away from me; they cry out because of the yoke that is upon them but no one lifts it. ⁸ How can I give you up, Ephraim? Can I abandon you like Admah or make you like Zeboiim? My heart is troubled within me and I am moved with compassion. ⁹ I will not give vent to my great anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim for I am God and not man. I am the Holy One in your midst and I do not want to come to you in anger.

¹⁰ You will follow Yahweh when he roars like a lion. When he roars his sons will come trembling from the west; ¹¹ they will come with fear like sparrows from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. For I will bring them to their homes again.

12 ¹ Ephraim has surrounded me with lies; Israel comes to me with deceit. They follow Baal and run after the Saints. ² Ephraim feeds on wind, forever chasing the east wind, always more given to falsehood and violence. They have made a treaty with Assyria and brought oil to Egypt.

³ Yahweh has brought Jacob to trial. He is about to punish him because of his ways and repay his deeds.

⁴ In the womb he supplanted his brother and later he struggled with God, battling until he got the better of an angel. ⁵ The angel, in fact, wept and pleaded with him! He met him again at Bethel and there he spoke to him.

⁶ (Yahweh, the God of armies, Yahweh is his glorious Name. ⁷ You must return to your God, practise love and justice and trust in your God.)

⁸ Canaan has dishonest scales and likes to cheat. ⁹ Ephraim boasts, "I have become rich and possess a fortune; they will find nothing to blame in all my wealth which could be considered sinful." ¹⁰ Yet I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt; I will have you live in tents again as in the days of Meeting. ¹¹ Then I will speak to the prophets, give them many visions and teach them through parables.

¹² The people of Gilead are wicked; but these are all false. They offered sacrifices to

bulls in Gilgal. This is why their altars will become ruins on a ploughed field.

¹³ Jacob fled to the plains of Aram; Israel served to have a wife, working as a shepherd to win her. ¹⁴ Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt through the leadership of a prophet; by means of this prophet he cared for them. ¹⁵ Ephraim, nevertheless, angered him bitterly. The Lord will bring down on him the blood he shed and repay him for his contempt.

13 ¹ When Ephraim spoke all trembled; he was powerful in Israel but became guilty of Baal worship and ruined himself. ² They now continue to sin and make images from molten metal, fashioning idols from silver, the work of craftsmen. And they call them God! They offer human sacrifices and adore calves! ³ That is why they will be like morning mist and like dew which does not last, like the straw swept away on the threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window.

⁴ But I am Yahweh, your God who brought you out of Egypt; you have no God other than me and no saviour but me.

⁵ I knew you in the desert, in a land of scorching heat. ⁶ When they had food they were satisfied and when they were satisfied they became proud and no longer remembered me. ⁷ So I became for them like a leopard, like a tiger I watched out for them, and ⁸ attacked them with the fury of a bear that has lost its cubs. I tore out their heart and like a lion I devoured them; like a savage beast I tore them apart.

⁹ Israel, you had in me a helper, will I be now your destroyer? ¹⁰ Where is your king that he may rescue your cities? Where are your rulers about whom you said, 'Give us a king and commanders.' ¹¹ So in my anger I gave you a king and in my fury I took him away.

¹² The wickedness of Ephraim is deep-set; his sin is stored up. ¹³ The pangs of woman in labour come upon him. But the child is capricious. When it is time he does not leave the womb.

¹⁴ Will I ransom them from the power of the netherworld? Will I rescue them from death? Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O netherworld, is your venom? Yet my eyes will not look with compassion ¹⁵ on the one who excelled among his brothers. Yahweh will send the east wind from the desert to dry up his sources of water and parch his fountains, to strip him of all his treasures.

14

¹ Samaria is guilty for she rebelled against her God. They will fall by the

sword, their little ones will be crushed and women with child ripped open.

■ ² Return to your God Yahweh, O Israel!
Your sins have caused your downfall.

³ Return to Yahweh with humble words. Say to him,

"Oh you who show compassion to the fatherless
forgive our sin, be appeased.
Instead of bulls and sacrifices,
accept the praise from our lips.

**‘Assyria will not save us;
no longer shall we look for horses
nor ever again shall we say ‘Our gods’
to the work of our hands.’**

⁵ I will heal their wavering
and love them with all my heart
for my anger has turned from them.

⁶ I shall be like dew to Israel
like the lily will he blossom.
Like a cedar he will send down his roots;
⁷ his young shoots will grow and spread.

His splendour will be like an olive tree,
his fragrance, like a Lebanon cedar.

* Men will dwell in his shade again.
He will flourish like the grain.
He will blossom like a vine,
and his fame will be like Lebanon with its
cedars.

⁹ What would Ephraim do with idols,
when it is I who hear and make him prosper?
I am like an ever green cypress tree:
all your fruitfulness comes from me.

¹⁰ Who is wise enough to grasp all this?
Who is discerning and will understand?
Straight are the ways of Yahweh;
the just walk in them,
but the sinners stumble.

1. Am 1, 13

3. Ex 22.21

6. Song 4, 11

10. Ps 107, 43; Jer 9, 11; Ecl 8, 11

■ The book of Hosea ends with these encouraging words. After the trials, Israel will seek the Lord who will allow himself to be found. Men's reconciliation with God will be an authentic marriage and it will be accompanied by a rec-

conciliation of humanity with nature. This was already said in 2:17-22 and it will be developed in the Song of songs which will use some of the images taken from Hosea.



The Biblical prophets knew that everything is temporary in our world. In every event threatening the lives of the people, they saw the coming of the Lord who judges this world in order to establish the definitive world.

Joel speaks when the land is invaded by locusts. The people are looking at their ruined fields and their lost crops. Joel looks beyond: *The day of Yahweh is exceedingly great, terrible and dreadful – who can endure it?*

Along with the promise of freedom from this plague, God also announces a happy age in which there will be neither grief nor fear. A day is announced when God will give the Spirit of the prophets to all his children: for the church, Joel is the prophet who announced Pentecost (see Acts 2:17).

1 ¹ This is the word of Yahweh that came to Joel, son of Pethuel.

The attack of the locusts

² Hear this, you elders!

Listen, all you, land dwellers!

Has such happened in your days
or in the days of your fathers?

³ Tell it to your children,

then your children to their children,
and then their children to the next
generation.

⁴ What the cutting locusts left,
the swarming locusts ate.

What the swarming locusts left, the hopping
locusts ate.

What the hopping locusts left,
the destroying locusts ate.

⁵ Wake up, drunkards, and weep! Wail,
drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine
withheld from your mouths. ⁶ A nation num-
erous and mighty has invaded my country.

It has the teeth of a lion and the fangs of a
lioness. ⁷ It has destroyed my vines and ruined
my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and
left white their branches.

⁸ Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth, grieving
for the husband of her youth. ⁹ Grain and drink
offerings are not found in the House of Yah-
weh. The priests who minister before Yahweh
are in mourning. ¹⁰ The fields are in ruin, the
earth mourns, for the grain is destroyed; the
wine fails and the oil dries up.

¹¹ Grieve, O you farmers; wail. O you vine
growers, over the barley and the wheat, for the
harvest of the field has perished. ¹² The vine
wither, the fig tree wilts away; pomegranate,
palm and apple – all the trees of the field dry
up. Oh, how joy has faded away among all
these people!

¹³ Gird yourselves, O priests, and weep;
mourn, O ministers of the altar. Come, spend
the night in sackcloth. O ministers of my God!
For the house of your God is deprived of grain
and drink offering.

¹⁴ Proclaim a fast, call an assembly. Sum-
mon the elders and all who live in the land into
the house of your God, and cry out to Yahweh.

¹⁵ What a dreadful day – the day of Yah-
weh that draws near and comes as ruin from
the Almighty!

¹⁶ Has not the food vanished from before
our very eyes, and joy and gladness too from
the house of our God?

¹⁷ The seed under the clods lies shrivelled;
the granaries are in ruins, the barns are broken
down, for the harvest has dried up. ¹⁸ How the
cattle groan! The herds wander and moan, for
they have no pasture. Even the flocks of sheep
suffer. ¹⁹ To you, Yahweh, I call. Fire has razed
the open pasture; flames have burned the trees.
²⁰ Even wild beasts cry out to you for the
streams have dried up, for the pastures have
been devoured by fire.

2 ¹ Blow the trumpet in Zion,
sound the alarm on my holy
mountain!

Let all dwellers in the land tremble,
for the day of Yahweh is coming.
Yes, the day is fast approaching –
a day of gloom and darkness,
a day of clouds and blackness.
A vast and mighty army comes,
like dawn spreading over the mountain,
such as has never occurred before
nor will happen again in the future.
In front a fire devours,
behind a flame consumes.
The land ahead that appears like a
garden
soon becomes like a desert,
nothing escapes their onslaught.
They look like horses,
they gallop along like chargers.
With the clattering of chariots,
they leap over the mountains;
with crackling like burning stubble,
they charge – a mighty army arrayed for
battle.

Before them nations are appalled,
and every face turns pale.
They attack like warriors;
they scale walls like soldiers.
Marching in line, they move onward
without swerving from their course,
without jostling one another,
everyone of them marches straight
ahead;
amid a hail of arrows they run,
they press without breaking ranks.
They rush upon the city;
they leap over the walls;
they break into the houses,
like thieves enter through the windows.
Before them the earth shakes
and the heavens tremble,
the sun and moon grow dark
and the stars lose their twinkle.
Yahweh thunders before his army,
his vast and mighty forces.
The day of Yahweh is
exceedingly great,
terrible and dreadful – who can endure
it?

Return to me with weeping

◆ ¹² Yahweh says, "Yet even now,
return to me with your whole heart,

with fasting, weeping and mourning.
¹³ Rend your heart, not your garment.
Return to Yahweh, your God – gra-
cious and compassionate."

Yahweh is slow to anger, full of
kindness, and he repents of having
punished.

¹⁴ Who knows? Probably he will
relent once more and spare some part
of the harvest from which we may
bring sacred offerings to Yahweh,
your god.

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion, pro-
claim a sacred fast, call a solemn as-
sembly.

¹⁶ Gather the people, sanctify the
community, bring together the elders,
even the children and infants at the
breast. Let the bridegroom leave his
bed, and the bride her room.

¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the
altar, let the priests, Yahweh's minis-
ters, weep and say: Spare your people,
Yahweh. Do not humble them or make
them an object of scorn among the
nations. Why should it be said among
the peoples: Where is their God?

¹⁸ Yahweh has become jealous for his
land; he has had pity on his people. ¹⁹ Yahweh
has given an answer; he says to them, "I am
sending you grain, new wine and oil which
will fully satisfy you; never again will you be
scorned by the nations.

²⁰ I will drive far from you the enemy from
the North and pursue him towards a land of
draught and desolation: his vanguard to the
Eastern Sea, his rearguard to the Western Sea.
Its stench will rise everywhere. See that I do
great things."

²¹ Fear not, O earth! exult and rejoice for
Yahweh has acted magnificently!

²² Do not be afraid, beasts of the field, for
the desert prairies are green again, the trees are
with fruit, the fig tree and the vine have yielded
their riches.

2. Zep 1, 15	4. Rev 7, 9	11. Mal 3, 2; Rev 6, 17	12. Dt 4, 29	13. Am 5, 21; Ex 34, 6
14. Am 5, 14; Jon 3, 9	17. 1 Mac 7, 36; Ps 42, 4	18. Dt 4, 24		

◆ *Return to me with your whole heart:* an invitation to penance. In times of hardships, public fasts were proclaimed in Israel. People would wear mourning clothes, or they would

replace their clothes with sackcloths, or they would not comb their hair and would cover their faces with ashes. In the Gospel, Jesus will not say that these signs of physical penance, like fasting



²³ Sons of Zion, be glad! Rejoice in Yahweh your God, for he has sent you the blessing of autumn rain and showers – the autumn and spring rains as in the past.

²⁴ The threshing-floors will be full of grain, the vats overflowing with new wine and oil.

²⁵ I will compensate you for the years devastated by grasshoppers, may-bugs, crickets

and locusts – the powerful army I sent against you.

²⁶ You will eat and be satisfied, and you will praise the name of Yahweh, your God, who has done wonders for you.

²⁷ And then you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, I, Yahweh your God, no other! Never again will my people be shamed.

I will pour out my spirit

3

¹ After this, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.

² Even upon my servants and maidens,
I will pour out my Spirit on that day.

³ I will show wonders in the heavens,
and on earth blood and fire and columns of smoke.

⁴ The sun will darken and the moon turn to blood
at the approach of the great and dreadful day of God.

⁵ Then all who call upon the name of Yahweh will be saved.

For on Mount Zion there will be a remnant,
as Yahweh has said;
in Jerusalem some will be saved –
those whom Yahweh will call.

The final battle and salvation

4

¹ In those days and at that time
when I re-establish and prosper Judah
and Jerusalem, ² I shall let all the nations gather

together and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I shall uphold against them the cause of Israel, my people and my heritage. For they have dispersed them among the nations and divided my land. ³ They cast lots for

27. Is 42, 8 1. Acts 2, 17; Num 11, 25 4. Rev 6, 12 5. Rom 10, 13; Rev 14, 1 1. Zac 12 5. Rev 16, 13

to express sorrow and to accompany prayer, are useless, (see Matthew 4:1 and Mark 2:20), but he will make it clear that these external signs of penance are neither everything, nor what is most important.

• Joel announces the *Day of the Lord*, a term indicating God's coming. Judgment and the salvation of the elect, at the same time.

I will pour out my Spirit upon mankind. Already in the days of the Old Testament God communicated his Spirit to the prophets and to saviours (see Is 11:1 and Jgs 11:1). Here, however, it appears as a decisive sign that the Spirit will be given to all believers. *They will dream dreams and see visions.* In those remote days, such were the normal means of prophetic communication. Through these words Joel announces what Isaiah did when he said: *All your children will be taught by God* (Is 54:13 and Jer 31:31).

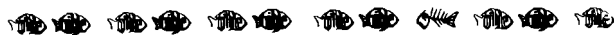
I will show wonders in the heavens. The wave of prophecy will accompany all kinds of

signs indicating a grave crisis in the world. The image of the *sun turning to darkness* expresses both chaos in nature and impossible situations in the life of humankind.

And all will be saved. This will be a time when men will not be able to avoid a decisive choice: hanging on to their former lifestyles or invoking the *name of Yahweh* which means to surrender their lives and hopes to him and to rely on his powerful intervention.

It seems that these three factors were present for the Jewish people in the years following the resurrection of Jesus and previous to the destruction of the nation. This is why Peter quotes this text on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). In these last years of the 20th century, the same can be verified on a world scale.

+ We can apply to this chapter what is said concerning Zechariah 12:14. The prophet uses a crisis in which the Jews were harshly oppressed to emphasize that God is the Lord of history.



my people; they gave a boy for a harlot, and a girl for the wine they drank.

⁴ And you Tyre and Sidon, and all the districts of Philistia, what are you for me? Will you take revenge on me? If you want to do that, swiftly and immediately will I take reprisals against you! ⁵ You who carried off my silver and gold and my finest jewelry to your temples!

⁶ The people of Judah and Jerusalem you sold to the Greeks, removing them far away from their own land. ⁷ But now I am going to summon them from wherever you sold them, and I will return your deed on your head. ⁸ Yahweh says: I will sell your sons and daughters to the Judeans who will then sell them to the Sabaeans in a distant land.

⁹ Make this known among the nations, proclaim the holy war, call the warriors, let men of war advance! ¹⁰ Hammer your ploughshares into swords, your sickles into spears! Let the weak say: I am a warrior! And the meek: I too will fight!

¹¹ Come quickly, neighbouring nations, and assemble! ¹² Rise up, O peoples, and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, nations.

¹³ Bring a sickle for the harvest is ripe;

come and tread for the winepress is full and the vats overflow, so great is their wickedness!

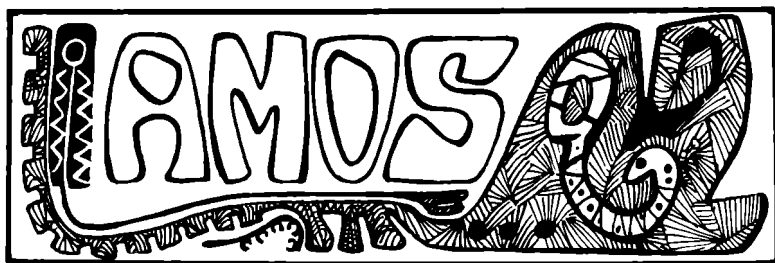
¹⁴ Multitudes and more multitudes in the Valley of Verdict! ¹⁵ The sun and the moon become dark, the stars lose their radiance. ¹⁶ Yahweh roars from Zion and raises his voice from Jerusalem; heaven and earth are shaken. Indeed Yahweh is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the sons of Israel. ¹⁷ You will know that I am Yahweh, your God, dwelling on Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be a holy place, and foreigners will never pass through there again.

¹⁸ On that day the mountains shall drip wine and the hills flow with milk; all the streams of Judah will run with water and a fountain will spring from the House of Yahweh, and water the valley of Shittim.

¹⁹ On the other hand, Egypt will be devastated and Edom will become a deserted wasteland because they committed violence against Judah, and shed innocent blood in their country.

²⁰ But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem through all generations. ²¹ And I shall avenge their blood and not leave it unpunished, for Yahweh dwells in Zion.

9. Zac 14; Eek 38 Zac 14, 8; Jo 4	10. Is 2, 4 20. Jer 17, 25	13. Rev 14, 14	16. Am 1, 2	19. Eek 47, 1;
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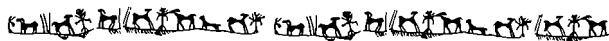


Towards the middle of the eighth century before Christ, the kingdom of Israel seems rich and very prosperous. Small properties have been disappearing and wealth is in the hand of a few rich people, while the poor are increasing. The luxury of the few is an insult to the destitute poor.

Unexpectedly, *Yahweh roars from Zion, his voice thunders from Jerusalem* through Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa, a little village located about nine kilometers south of Bethlehem, in the land of Judah.

God takes him from his flock and sends him to the neighbouring land, to Israel in the north. And so, the prophet starts going through the cities of Israel, denouncing the social injustices and a religion which is satisfied with only external practices. He announces God's punishment and the deportation of Israel, and in the end, he also predicts happy days.

Amos is the prophet of social justice. He reveals to us a God who defends the rights of the poor.



1 These are the words of Amos, one of the sheep-breeders of Tecoa, and the visions which he saw concerning Israel during the reign of Uzziah, King of Judah and Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, King of Israel, two years before the earthquake. ² He said,

"Yahweh roars from Zion, his voice thunders from Jerusalem. The pastures of the shepherds are scorched and the choicest farmland is dried up."

³ Yahweh says this, "Because Damascus has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. Because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron, ⁴ I will send fire upon the people of Hazael that shall devour the strongholds of Benhadad. I will cut off the ruler from the Valley of Aven and him who holds the scepter from Betheden. ⁵ I shall break the protective cross-bar of Damascus."

Condemnation of several nations

⁶ Yahweh says this, "Because Gaza has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. Because they carried a whole people into captivity to deliver them over to Edom, ⁷ I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza and it will devour her strongholds. ⁸ I will cut off the ruler from Ashdod, and him that holds the sceptre from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron and the remnant of the Philistines will perish," says Yahweh.

⁹ Yahweh says this, "Because Tyre has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. Because they delivered over to Edom a whole people and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood, ¹⁰ I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre and it shall devour her palaces."

¹¹ Yahweh says this, "Because Edom has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. Because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity,

because his anger rages forever and his wrath is always wild, ¹² I will send fire upon Teman and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.

¹³ Yahweh says this, "Because the Ammonites have sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent.

Because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border, ¹⁴ I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah and it shall devour her strongholds. Then there will be war cry and battle; then stormwinds will blow. ¹⁵ Their king will go into exile, he and his princes with him," says Yahweh.

2 ¹ Yahweh says this, "Because Moab has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. Because they burned to a cinder the bones of the king of Edom. ² I will send fire on Moab and it shall be destroyed in the midst of the tumult, with warcries and the blast of the trumpet. ³ I will do away with their ruler and all the princes with him," says Yahweh.

⁴ Yahweh says this, "Because Judah has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. Because they rejected the law of Yahweh and did not keep his statutes, but have been led astray by the falsehood after which their fathers walked, ⁵ I will send fire upon Judah and it will devour the fortresses of Jerusalem."

Judgment on Israel

◆ ⁶ Yahweh says this, "Because Israel has sinned, not once but three times and even more, I will not relent. They sell the just for money and the needy for a pair of sandals; ⁷ they tread on the head of the poor and trample them upon the dust of the earth, while they silence the right of the afflicted; a man and his father go to the same women to profane my holy name; ⁸ they stretch out upon garments taken in pledge, beside every altar; they take

1. 2 K 14, 23; 15, 1
Ezk 25, 12

2. Jer 25, 30
4. Lev 26, 14

3. 2 K 10, 32
8. Hos 4, 14; Ex 22, 25

6. Zep 2, 4

9. Ezk 26-28

11. Is 34;

■ Chapters 1 and 2 announce the judgment of God which is coming soon. Amos severely attacks the pagan nations which have drifted away from universal morality and from the rules of human life. Judah, a nation of believers, bears the sin of having forgotten the law of God (2:4).

◆ He reproaches Israel for always trampling on the rights of the poor and with this for falsifying religion. They keep up the religious rituals which are a pretext for drunkenness and prostitution. But they silence the prophets who proclaim the word of God who is the source of authentic religion.

You gave the Nazirites wine to drink (see Lv

6). The followers of a corrupted religion make fun of those men whose lifestyles, even externally are different from their own and express the personal aspect of their religious commitment: *let them drink!* let them be like everyone else because their lifestyles disturb our consciences.

◆ Those listening to Amos do not understand why this man, who is not a priest, nor a member of the "fellow prophets", came to preach to them. And they are scandalized because he sticks his nose into things which, according to them, have nothing to do with religion. The images which Amos uses in these verses have a



the wine of those they swindle and are drunk in the house of their God.

⁹ It was I who destroyed the Amorites before them, whose height was like the height of the cedar, a people as sturdy as an oak. I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below.

¹⁰ It was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to take possession of the land of the Amorites.

¹¹ It was I who raised up prophets among your sons, and Nazirites among your young men. Is this not so, people of Israel? says Yahweh. ¹² But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.

¹³ Behold, I will crush you to the ground, as a cart does when it is full of sheaves.

Punishment is near

3 ¹ Hear this word which Yahweh speaks against you, people of Israel, against the whole family which he brought up from the land of Egypt.

² "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you in a special way for all your wrongdoings."

³ Do two walk together unless they have agreed?

⁴ Does a lion roar in the forest when it has no prey? Does a young lion growl in its den unless it has seized something?

⁵ Does a bird get caught in a snare if the snare has not been baited?

Does a tiger spring up from the ground unless it has caught something?

⁶ If a trumpet sounds in a city, will the people not be frightened?

If disaster strikes a city, has not Yahweh caused it? Yet Yahweh does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets. ⁷ If the lion roars, who will not be afraid? If Yahweh speaks, who will not prophesy?

⁸ Call on the people living in the palaces of Ashur and in the palaces of Egypt. "Come together against the hill of Samaria and see the many scandals and the oppression that is there.

¹⁰ These people do not know how to do what is right, says Yahweh, storing in strongholds what they have taken through violence and extortion. ¹¹ Therefore this is the word of the Lord Yahweh, "The enemy shall surround the land; your strength shall be broken down and your strongholds plundered."

¹² Yahweh says this, "As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion a pair of legs or the tip of an ear, so shall some of you be saved. O Israelites of Samaria who loll on comfortable couches and rest on pillows of Damascus."

¹³ Hear and accuse the nation of Jacob, says the Lord Yahweh, God of hosts, ¹⁴ "On the day that I call Israel to account for his crimes, I will punish as well the altars of Bethel. The horns of the altar will be broken off and fall to the ground. ¹⁵ Then I will strike the winter house and the summer house. The palaces of ivory shall be ruined, and the great house destroyed.

¹⁶ The swift shall be unable to flee and the strong man shall lose his strength. The warrior shall not save himself nor the bowman stand his ground. ¹⁷ The swift of foot shall not escape nor the horseman save himself. ¹⁸ Even the most stout-hearted among the warriors shall flee away naked on that day," says Yahweh.

+ 4 ¹ Listen to this word, you cows of Bashan, you women who live on the hills of Samaria, who oppress the weak and abuse the needy, who order your husbands, "Bring us something to drink quickly!"

² The Lord Yahweh has sworn by his holiness, "The time is coming upon you when you will be dragged away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. ³ Through the breaks in the wall you will go out, straight ahead, driven out all the way to Hermon." It is Yahweh who has spoken.

9. Dt 7, 1; Jos 3, 6

8. 1 Cor 9, 16

11. Num 6, 7

10. Mi 5, 8

14. 1 K 13, 1

12. Is 30, 6; Mi 2, 6

2. Ex 19, 5; Dt 7, 6; Mt 11, 20

1. Ps 22, 13; Is 3, 16; Is 22, 12

2. Jer 16, 16

clear message: he speaks because God forces him to speak.

In 3:9-15, Amos calls on Assyria and Egypt to come to level a society without faith and without law. Let them destroy temples and palaces since all are maintained through exploitation and they promote sin.

+ It is worth noting the way Amos deals with rich and selfish women. He compares them with

nothing less than the cows of Bashan. Bashan is an area on the other side of the Jordan and famous in the Old Testament for its fattened flocks.

These women are getting fat at the expense of the poor and all they know is how to make cocktails. Amos announces the day when they will be taken from the conquered capital and exiled with as much consideration as that given to a herd of cattle.

Prepare to meet your God

■⁴ Come, sinners, to the Sanctuary in Bethel go down to Gilgal and sin even more!

Each morning bring your sacrifices and on the third day your tithes. Burn leavened food for thanksgiving. ⁵ Proclaim in public your freewill offering, for this is what makes you happy, O men of Israel," says the Lord Yahweh.

⁶ "Though I have made your teeth clean of food in every city, though I have made your bread in all your dwellings scarce, yet you did not return to me," says the Lord Yahweh.

⁷ "Though I withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away, though I sent rain upon one town and withheld it from another, ⁸ though people staggered from town to town, and found no water to quench their thirst, yet you never returned to me," says the Lord Yahweh.

⁹ "Though with blight and calamities I have stricken your garden and vineyard, though your fig and olive trees were devoured by the locusts yet you never returned to me," says the Lord Yahweh.

¹⁰ "Though as in Egypt I sent you a plague, though I slew your young men with the sword along with your captured horses, and nauseated you with stench from your own dead, yet you never returned to me," says the Lord Yahweh.

¹¹ "I overthrew you, a divine punishment, as happened to Sodom and Gomorrah; you were like a brand snatched from the blaze, yet you

never returned to me," says the Lord Yahweh.

¹² Therefore I will deal with you in my own way, Israel, and since I will do this to you, prepare Israel to meet your God!"

¹³ For it is he who has formed the mountains and creates the winds; who showers abundant rain on the earth, who turns dawn to twilight, who strides upon the heights of the earth – Yahweh, God of hosts, is his name.

Seek me and you shall live

5 ¹ Listen to this dirge, this lament I pronounce over you, nation of Israel, ² "Virgin Israel is fallen, never to rise again! With none to help her up, abandoned, she lies upon her own land."

³ For the Lord Yahweh says this, "The city that went forth to war a thousand strong shall be left with a hundred, and that which went forth with a hundred shall be left with ten in Israel.

⁴ For Yahweh says this to the nation of Israel, "Seek me, that you may live, ⁵ but not in Bethel nor come to Gilgal, nor pass through to Beersheba. For Gilgal shall be led into exile: and Bethel brought to nothing."

⁶ Seek Yahweh, that you may live, or he will rush like fire on the nation of Joseph and no one will be at Bethel to quench the blaze.

⁷ He who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns dusk to dawn and darkens the day into night, who summons the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the earth – Yahweh is his name. ⁹ He makes destruction flash forth against the strong, and brings ruin upon the fortified city.

⁷ Woe to you who turn judgment into bitterness and do no justice to the land!

¹⁰ You hate him who reproves in court; you despise him who speaks the truth.

¹¹ Because you have trampled on:

4. Gen 28, 22; Lev 2, 1	5. Mt 6, 2	6. Lev 26, 14; Mt 23, 37	10. Ex 9, 3	11. Is 13, 19;
Jer 49, 18	12. Jl 2, 11; Mal 3, 1; Lk 14, 31	13. Mi 1, 3	2. Ezk 19, 1; Lam 1, 1	4. Hos 10, 12
5. Mt 19, 16	10. Is 5, 20; Lam 3, 15	11. Mi 6, 15; Zep 1, 13		

■ Amos recalls the many hardships and trials which gave the people of Israel an opportunity for reflection.

Amos notes the contrast between the luxury, the frequency of the religious celebrations and

the evil behaviour of the people. They think that if they go through the rituals and offer sacrifices, God will not pay attention to their evil ways. But that is not the way it is.



the poor man and extorted levies on his grain, though you have built mansions of hewn stones you will not dwell in them; though you have planted choice grapevines, you shall not drink of their wine.

¹² For I know the number of your crimes and how grievous are your sins: persecuting the just, taking bribes, turning away the needy at the gates. ¹³ See, how the prudent keep silent at this time, for it is an evil time.

The day of the Lord will be darkness

◆ ¹⁴ Seek good and shun evil,
that you may live.

Then Yahweh, the God of hosts,
as you have claimed, will be with you.

¹⁵ Hate wickedness and love virtue,
and let justice prevail in the courts;
perhaps Yahweh, the God of hosts,
will take pity on the remnant of Joseph

¹⁶ Yahweh, God of hosts thus says:
"In every square, wailing will be heard,
in every street, cries of anguish.

Farmers will be summoned to lament
and professional mourners to weep noisily.

¹⁷ There will be lamentation in every vineyard,
for I will pass through your midst, says the Lord.

¹⁸ Woe to you who long for Yahweh's day!
Why should you long for that day?

It is a day of darkness, not of dawn,

¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion
only to run into a bear;

or as if he entered his home,
rested his hand against the wall,
only to be bitten by a viper.

²⁰ Will not the day of Yahweh be
darkness and not light,
gloom without a glow of brightness?

21. Is 1, 11; Jer 6, 20; Ps 50, 8	1. Is 28, 1; Lk 6, 24	2. Lk 18, 11	4. Is 5, 11	10. Hab 2, 20
14. Jer 8, 17; Lk 12, 19	15. 2 K 17, 5	1. J 11, 4	2. Ex 32, 11	3. Jer 26, 3
			4. Is 66, 16	10. Jer 26, 8

◆ God's complaints about his people resemble those of another time expressed through Isaiah: "This people comes close to me only in words, and they honour me only with their lips, while their hearts are far from me" (Is 29:13).

Since the previous disasters are not enough to teach Israel to straighten their ways, Amos announces another disaster. Its nature is not specified since what is unknown usually causes greater fear.

Amos speaks extensively of the *Day of the Lord*. When the Israelites spoke of the Day of the Lord, they meant the day of their triumph when God would come to crush the enemy

nations. Amos turns its meaning around. From then on, when used by the prophets, the Day of the Lord will mean God coming to make his people accountable (see Zephaniah 2). Even in the Gospel and in other books of the New Testament, the Day of the Lord will mean the Day of universal Judgment (see Rom 1:18); but then it will have a more specific meaning: the coming of Christ. He will judge those who rejected his Word and he will fulfill the hopes of those who put their faith in him.

Perhaps Yahweh, the God of hosts, will take pity on the remnant of Joseph. This is the first time the word *remnant* appears in the

²¹ I hate, I reject your feasts, I take no pleasure when you assemble ²² to offer me your burnt offerings. Your cereal offerings, I will not accept! Your peace offerings and your fatted beasts, I will not look upon!

²³ Away with the noise of your chanting, away with your strumming on harps. ²⁴ But let justice run its course like water, and righteousness be like an ever-flowing river.

²⁵ Did you, Israel, bring me offerings and sacrifices for forty years, in the wilderness?

²⁶ Yet now you lift up King Sikkuth and Kiyun, your idols, which you made yourselves. ²⁷ Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says Yahweh whose name is God of hosts.

6 ¹ Woe to those who live at ease in Zion, overconfident on the hill of Samaria!

Woe to you, men of renown, from the first among the nations, to whom the people of Israel come!

² Pass through Kalneh and see; from there go to Hamath the great, then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms were? Is your territory greater than theirs?

³ You hope to postpone the evil day; in fact you bring about a year of violence.

⁴ You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and sprawl on your couches; you eat lamb from the flock and veal from calves fattened in the stall.

⁵ You strum on your harps, and like David, try out new musical instruments.

⁶ You drink wine by the bowlful and anoint yourselves with the finest oils, but you do not grieve over the ruins of Joseph.

⁷ Therefore you will be the first to go into exile; and the feast of sprawlers will be over.

⁸ The Lord Yahweh has sworn by his life, "I hate the proud city of Jacob, I hate his

palaces. I will hand over the city and all that fills it."

⁹ In those days, if ten men are left in one house, they shall die. ¹⁰ Their kinsman will lift the corpses and bring the bones from the house; when he will say to his comrade at the back part of the house, "Are there any more?" the other will say, "No, but hush! We must not mention the name of Yahweh."

¹¹ For, behold, this is Yahweh's command, "The great house shall crumble, and the small house fall to pieces."

¹² Do horses run on craggy cliffs? Does a man plough the sea with oxen. Well, you have turned judgment into a poisonous plant and the sentences of the court into wormwood.

¹³ You rejoice about unimportant matters when you say, "Have we not become powerful by our own strength?" ¹⁴ Yet am I stirring up against you, Israel, a nation that will oppress you from the pass of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah.

Five visions

o7 ¹ This is what the Lord Yahweh showed me. He was forming a swarm of locusts just as the late sowing began to come up. It was the second growth which follows the king's mowing. ² When they were about to finish devouring all the crops of the land, I said, "Lord Yahweh, forgive! How shall Jacob survive, small as he is?" ³ Yahweh repented and said, "It shall not happen."

⁴ This is what the Lord Yahweh showed me: he was calling for burning heat. It consumed the great deep and was consuming the land. ⁵ I said, "Lord Yahweh, stop! How shall Jacob survive small as he is?" ⁶ Yahweh relented and said, "This too shall not happen."

⁷ This is what the Lord Yahweh showed me. He was standing beside a wall with a plumb-line in his hand. ⁸ The Lord asked me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I answered, "A plumb-line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am measuring my people Israel with a plumb-line. I will forgive them no more. ⁹ The high-

13. Lk 23, 9; Mt 2, 3

14. Jer 7, 4; Mt 3, 11

15. Dr 30, 19

16. Ex 12, 12

17. Is 5, 5; Jl 2, 2

18. Mk 13, 19; Is 2, 11; Zcp 1, 14; Jl 1, 15; Is 11, 11;

12, 1

19. Jl 3, 4; Mal 3, 19

Bible. The people of Israel were formed by the descendants of Abraham, the man of faith. But the prophets realize that they are heading for ruin because of their lack of faith; their provinces are taken away from them; their children die. Yet, God will preserve a small group, the Remnant of Israel. They will come back to authentic faith and they will be the "shoot" of the New People of God.

Ephraim, Joseph, Jacob, Israel: all these names refer to the same nation.

o The prophets are never content with simply threatening their people. They are always interceding for them before God (see Ez 33 and 22:30). In the first two visions, Amos tries to stop God's anger. In the third, he runs into God's firm purpose to destroy Israel.

+ Notice the boldness of Amos' action. He went to preach in the national Temple, or to put it another way, in the country's cathedral. He does so though he has no title, or the priest's permission and he begins to denounce the false



places of Isaac are to be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. For I will arise, sword in hand, against the family of Jeroboam."

Conflict with the priest Amaziah

+ ¹⁰Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, then sent word to King Jeroboam of Israel, "Amos is conspiring against you in the very centre of Israel; what he says goes too far. ¹¹These are his very words: Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel shall be exiled from its land."

¹²Amaziah then said to Amos, "Off with you, seer, go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there by prophesying. ¹³But never again prophesy at Bethel for it is a king's sanctuary and a national shrine."

¹⁴Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet or one of the fellow-prophets. I am a breeder of sheep and a dresser of sycamore trees. ¹⁵But Yahweh took me from shepherding the flock and said to me: Go, and from me, tell my people Israel: ¹⁶Now hear the word of Yahweh, you who say: No more prophecy against Israel, no more insults against the family of Isaac! ¹⁷This is what Yahweh says:

Your wife shall be made a harlot in the city, your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, your land shall be divided up and given to others, and you yourself shall die in a foreign land, for Israel shall be driven far from its land."

Fourth vision: the basket of ripe fruit

8 ¹The Lord Yahweh showed me a basket of ripe fruit ²and asked, "Amos, what do you see?" I replied, "A basket of ripe fruit."

Then Yahweh said to me, "My people Israel is ripe for destruction; I will no longer forgive them. ³The songs of the palace will become wailings on that day, says the Lord. Heaps of corpses everywhere, all cast out in silence."

⁴Hear this, you who trample on the needy to do away with the weak of the land. ⁵You who say, "When will the new moon or the sabbath feast be over that we may open the store and sell our grain? Let us lower the measure and raise the price; let us cheat and tamper with the scales, ⁶and even sell the refuse with the whole grain. We will buy up the poor for money and the needy for a pair of sandals."

⁷Yahweh, the pride of Jacob, has sworn by himself, "I shall never forget their deeds."

⁸Shall not the land tremble because of this, and all who dwell in it mourn, while it rises up and heaves like the Nile and settles back again like the river of Egypt?

⁹The Lord Yahweh says, "On that day I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight."

14. 1 S 10, 10; 1 K 20, 35

2. Mt 24, 14; Rev 14, 15

9. Jl 2, 2; Zep 1, 15

15. 2 S 7, 8; Ps 78, 71

5. Ne 10, 32; Lev 19, 35; Hos 12, 8; Mt 6, 11

10. Jer 48, 37; Jer 6, 26; Zac 12, 10

17. Dt 28, 30; Mt 2, 4

8. Hos 4, 3

1. Jer 24, 1

order which allows the accumulation of so much private wealth. Naturally, Amaziah, the king's chaplain, is scandalized. In our days, Amos would have been arrested.

For Amaziah, his priesthood is a well-paid position and he is also convinced that Amos is preaching against his way of earning a living. In those days, there were many prophets making a living from giving advice without having been called directly by God as the great prophets were, and as Amos was as well.

Amos is not a prophet as those were. He is a lay person to whom God entrusted a mission when he calls him personally. Apparently he loses out in the meeting with the religious authorities. It is not said that he used any other weapons than God's word and God knows how to judge his envoys. We do not know if Amaziah

succeeded in throwing him out of the country or if he only forbade him to preach in the well-attended places.

■ *This fourth vision continues the vision of chapter 7:1-9.*

Amos describes the greed of the merchants and of the rich, the exploitation of the needy, the luxury of the wealthy, the bribing of the judges.

I will make them hunger for the word of God (11), namely, in a little while, those who refuse to listen because they lack nothing, will be so afflicted that they will long to hear a word of consolation from God, and that word will not come. But the prophet's words were to be fulfilled in several ways. We can read into them the prediction of the hunger and thirst for God's word, which in later times, would be the hallmark of the believer.



¹⁰ I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your singing into wailing. Everyone will mourn, covered with sackcloth and every head will be shaved. I will make them mourn as for an only son and bring their day to a bitter end."

¹¹ The Lord Yahweh says, "Days are coming when I will send famine upon the land, not hunger for bread or thirst for water, but for hearing the word of Yahweh."

¹² Men will stagger from sea to sea, wander to and fro, from north to east, searching for the word of Yahweh, but they will not find it.

¹³ On that day, fair virgins and strong young men will faint from thirst, ¹⁴ all the young people who swore by the god of Samaria and said: Long life to the god of Dan, long life to the god of Bersheba! They shall fall, never to rise again."

Fifth vision: fall of the sanctuary

9 ¹ I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said, "Strike the top of the columns, so that the beams shake and the roof falls down on the heads of them all. Those who are left I will slay with the sword; not one shall flee, not one shall escape."

² Though they dig down to the netherworld, my hand will take them from there; though they climb up to heaven, I will bring them down from there;

³ Though they hide on the top of Carmel, I will search them out there and take them; though they hide from me in the depths of the sea, I will bid the sea-serpent bite them.

⁴ When they are led into captivity by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them.

For I have set my eye upon them, not for help but for harm.

⁵ When the Lord Yahweh of hosts touches the earth, it melts and all who dwell on it

mourn. The earth rises up and heaves like the Nile and settles back again like the river of Egypt.

⁶ He has built heaven, his upper room, and established the dome of the sky over the earth. He summons the waters of the sea and pours them upon the face of the earth: Yahweh is his name.

⁷ And now Yahweh says, "Are you Israelites more to me than the Ethiopians? Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt as I brought the Philistines from Caphor and Aram from Kir?"

◆ ⁸ My eyes are upon your sinful kingdom. I wanted to destroy it from the face of the earth, but I cannot do away completely with the nation of Jacob, says Yahweh.

⁹ This is what I have ordered: I will sift the nation of Israel among the nations as one sifts with a sieve, letting no pebble pass through. ¹⁰ All sinners among my people shall die, those who say, "Evil will not reach or overtake us."

◆ ¹¹ "On that day I shall restore the fallen hut of David and wall up its breaches and raise its ruined walls and so build it as in days of old."

¹² They shall conquer the remnant of Edom and the neighbouring nations upon which my name has been called. Thus says Yahweh, the one who will do this.

¹³ Yahweh says also, "The days are coming when the ploughman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes overtake the sower. The mountains shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall melt."

¹⁴ I shall bring back the exiles of my people Israel; they will rebuild the desolate cities and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will have orchards and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ I shall plant them in their own country and they shall never again be rooted up from the land which I have given them," says Yahweh your God.

12. Dr 28, 28; Is 55, 6; Hos 5, 6

13. Hos 8, 5

2. Ps 130, 8

9. Dr 28, 64; Eek 5, 10

11. Is 9, 1; 11, 1

12. Acts 15, 16

13. Lev 26, 5

14. Is 61, 4

◆ Following the threats of 9:1-6, verses 9-10 show the assurance which is never lacking in the prophets: God will not completely destroy Israel, he will leave a remnant to fulfill his promises.

◆ In 9:11-14 – written after the exile of Israel – we have the promise of the future re-uniting of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, into a single people of God.

The apostle James will remember this promise to show the will of God to extend the salvation earned by Jesus to all the nations and not only to Israel (see Acts 15:16). Notice that James quotes this text in a different form from

what we read here. This is due to the fact that the apostles were using the Greek translation of the bible, which many times had changed the meaning, not to be unfaithful to the primitive text, but rather because, in the course of time, the Jews had a better understanding of the will of God. For example, here Amos is speaking about Israel "conquering the nations", which at the time, seemed to be a great favour from God. But the Jews who later translated the Bible into other languages, spoke of the "nations seeking God", because, in the meantime, the prophets had pondered over God's plan.



OBADIAH

Obadiah probably wrote after 500 and before the conquest of Edom in 312. His work is filled with calls to revenge which, deep down, show his faith in God's justice.

Against Edom

¹ *The Vision of Obadiah.* This is what the Lord Yahweh says about Edom:

We have heard news from Yahweh, and a messenger has been sent out to the nations to say, "Rise, let us go against Esau."

² I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised.

³ Your arrogance has led you astray, you who live in the clefts of the rock, you who make the heights your home, you who say to yourself:

Who can bring me down to the ground?

⁴ Though you soar like the eagle, though you make your nests among the stars,

I will bring you down again.

⁵ If thieves or plunderers come at night, what a disaster awaits you then!

Would they not ransack till they had enough?

If grape gatherers worked in your vineyard, would they not leave only gleanings?

⁶ See how Esau has been looted, even his hidden treasures pillaged!

⁷ Your allies have driven you to the frontiers; your friends will be your betrayers. Those who partake of your bread set for you a trap in secret.

⁸ Yahweh declares: Shall I not destroy the wise men of Edom on that day, and deprive of sages the mountain of Esau?

⁹ Your warriors, O Teman, will be afraid, and all from Mount Esau will be slaughtered.

¹⁰ For the violence done to Jacob, your brother, you will be disgraced and destroyed forever.

¹¹ You stood aloof in waiting when strangers carried off his wealth, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were as guilty as the rest of them.

¹² Do not come to see and gloat over the misfortune of your brother.

Do not exult over Judah's ruin.

nor brag on the day of her destruction.

¹³ Do not go through the gate of my people on the day of their disgrace,

nor look down upon them in their misfortune

on the day of their adversity,

nor lay your hands upon their possessions on the day of their destruction.

¹⁴ Do not wait at the crossroad

to slay their stragglers,

nor betray their survivors

on the day of their disaster.

¹⁵ For the day of Yahweh is near for every nation.

As you have done to another, so to you will it be done.

Whatever has been your deed will come back upon your head.

¹⁶ For as you have drunk on my holy mountain,

so will the surrounding nation drink, drink and drink up to the brim...

Then they shall be as if they had never been.

¹⁷ But there will be survivors on Mount Zion – a holy remnant.

The house of Jacob will take possession of its own inheritance.

¹⁸ The nation of Jacob will be a fire, the nation of Joseph a flame;

but those of Esau will be a stubble, and they will burn and consume them. And of Esau's house none will remain, for it is Yahweh who has spoken.

¹⁹ People from the Negev will occupy Esau's mountains;

those from the plains,

the land of the Philistines;

they will occupy Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead.

²⁰ The Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess Phoenicia as far as Zarephthah; the exiles from Jerusalem now in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev.

²¹ Deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to rule over the mountains of Esau, – then Yahweh will reign.

JONAH

Few are those, in our days, who are mistaken as to the nature of this book and who ask if Jonah really existed and if he stayed in the belly of a fish for three days.

The book of Jonah is a story, but the author deserved to be considered a prophet because he very clearly underscored some truths which his contemporaries were forgetting.

This delightful narrative criticizes, not the idolatrous or godless people, but the pious Jews themselves who, locked in their nationalism, easily forget that God is the God of all men.

Yahweh sends Jonah to Nineveh

1 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to Jonah, son of Amittai,

² "Go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach against it, because I have known its wickedness." ³ But Jonah decided to flee from Yahweh and go to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, found a ship bound for Tarshish, and paid the fare. Then he boarded it and went into the hold of the ship, journeying with them to Tarshish, far away from Yahweh.

⁴ Yahweh stirred up a storm wind on the sea, so there was a sea tempest, which threatened to destroy the ship.

⁵ The sailors took fright, and each cried out to his own god. To lighten the ship, they threw its cargo into the sea.

⁶ Meanwhile Jonah had gone into the hold of the ship, where he lay fast asleep. The captain came upon him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god. Perhaps he will be mindful of us and will not allow us to die here."

⁷ The sailors said to each other,

"Let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this disaster." So they did, and the lot fell on Jonah.

⁸ They questioned him, "So you are responsible for this evil that has come upon us? Tell us where you are from? What is your country, your nationality?"

⁹ Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship Yahweh, God of heaven who made the sea and the land."

¹⁰ Seized with great fear, the men said to him, "What a terrible thing have you done!" They knew that he was fleeing from Yahweh because he had told them so. ¹¹ "What shall we do with you now to make the sea calm down?" The sea was growing more and more agitated.

¹² He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. It will quiet down, for I know it is because of me that this storm has come."

¹³ The sailors, however, still did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea had grown much rougher than before. ¹⁴ Then they



called on Yahweh. "O Yahweh, do not let us perish for taking this man's life. Do not hold us guilty of shedding innocent blood. For you, Yahweh, have done this as you have thought right." ¹⁵ They took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm again. ¹⁶ At this the men were seized with great fear of Yahweh. They offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows to him.

Jonah in the belly of the fish

2 ¹ Yahweh provided a large fish which swallowed Jonah. He remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

² *From the belly of the fish Jonah prayed to Yahweh, his God:*

³ *In my distress I cried to Yahweh, and he answered me; from the belly of the netherworld you heard my voice when I called.*

⁴ *You cast me into the abyss, into the very heart of the sea, and the currents swirled about me; all your breakers and your billows passed over engulfing me.*

⁵ *Then I thought: I have been cast out from your presence, but I keep on looking to your holy Temple.*

⁶ *The waters engulfed me up to my throat; all around me was the abyss; wrapped about my head were seaweeds.*

⁷ *I went down to the roots of the mountains, the bars of the netherworld closed upon me, but you brought my life up from the pit, Yahweh, my God.*

⁸ *"When my soul was fainting within me, I remembered Yahweh, and before you rose my prayer up to your holy Temple.*

⁹ *Those who worship worthless idols lose your grace
"but I, with songs of praise,
will offer to you sacrifices.
What I have vowed, I will make good –
deliverance comes from Yahweh, my God."*

¹¹ Then Yahweh gave his command to the fish, and it belched out Jonah onto dry land.

The conversion of Nineveh

3 ¹ The word of Yahweh came to Jonah a second time: ² "Go to Nineveh, the great city, and announce to them the message I give you."

³ In obedience to the word of Yahweh, Jonah went to Nineveh. It was a very large city, and it took three days just to cross it. ⁴ So Jonah walked a single day's journey and began proclaiming, "Forty days more and Nineveh will be destroyed."

⁵ The people of the city believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶ Upon hearing the news, the king of Nineveh got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth and sat down in ashes. ⁷ He issued a proclamation throughout Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles, no man or beast, herd or flock, will taste anything; neither will they eat nor drink. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call aloud to God, turn from his evil ways and violence. ⁹ Who

o Jonah refuses to obey the call from the Lord: perhaps because he does not feel responsible for the salvation of the hated Ninevites. He is asleep while the sailors, nice pagans, are trying to save the boat (though this is not religious work, it does interest the pious Jonah too). Jonah delights in thinking about the punishment that God is going to inflict on the pagans of Nineveh. He complains of God's mercy toward the Ninevites, because his own reputation is going to suffer from this.

God guides the world according to a broad

and generous vision. Because he created everyone, he feels responsible for everyone and he wants to save *men and cattle* (4:11) without looking to their race or religion. Jonah represents those believers who, although they know God, have a petty and resentful spirit and who lie about the good done by men without religion because they are afraid that people might make a comparison unfavourable to Christians.

– The Ninevites' conversion (Lk 11:30).

– The comparison with the three days that Jonah spent in the fish (Matthew 12:40).

1. Job 7, 12; Mt 12, 40 2. Lk 11, 30 3:5. Jl 1, 14; Est 4, 1; Lk 11, 30



knows? God may yet relent, turn from his fierce anger and spare us."

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened upon them.

God loves everyone

4 ¹ But Jonah was greatly displeased at this, and he was indignant. ² He prayed to Yahweh and said, "O Yahweh, is this not what I said when I was yet in my own country? This is why I fled to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and full of love, and you relent from imposing terrible punishment. ³ I beseech you now, Yahweh, to take my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ But Yahweh replied, "What right have you to be angry?"

⁵ Jonah then left the city. He went to a place east of it, built himself a shelter and sat under its shade to wait and see what would happen to Nin-

veh. ⁶ Then Yahweh provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade over his head and to ease his discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant.

⁷ But the next day, at dawn, God sent a worm which attacked the plant and made it wither. ⁸ When the sun rose, God sent a scorching east wind; the sun blazed down upon Jonah's head, and he grew faint. His death wish returned and he said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

⁹ Then God asked Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" Jonah answered, "I am right to be angry enough to wish to die."

¹⁰ Yahweh said, "You are concerned about a plant which cost you no labor to make it grow. Overnight it sprang up, and overnight it perished. ¹¹ But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot distinguish right from left and they have many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned for such a great city?"

9. Job 16, 17; Jl 2, 14 10. Mt 12, 41 1. Lk 15, 28 2. Ex 34, 6 3. 1 K 19, 14 11. Jud 2, 5; Rev 7, 4

INTRODUCTION TO MICAH

Micah is Isaiah's contemporary. He spoke about the same situation and yet, it is easy to oppose the two: Micah, a man from the country; Isaiah, distinguished and learned.

Micah was from Moresheth, a village at the edge of the lowland through which all the armies of Assyria or Egypt were passing. He was well acquainted with the suffering and the destruction of war and also with the exploitation of the peasants. One day, God called him and gave him *strength, justice and courage* to go and denounce Israel's sins. He spoke in the name of a God whom nobody loved and he violently denounced the injustices which were practised everywhere. Just like Isaiah, in condemning the society in which he lived, he announced the prosperity that the Lord was preserving for Jerusalem in future days.

Some of the words which Micah addressed to Israel, whose ruin was imminent, were later modified to adapt them to the situation of Jerusalem and of the kingdom of Judah, when they were going through a similar crisis.

MICAH



1 ¹This is the word of Yahweh which came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He received it in visions concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Against Samaria and Jerusalem

+ ²Hear all you peoples, let the earth listen and all who are in it. Let Yahweh witness against you from his holy temple.

³For see, Yahweh comes forth from his place, he comes down and treads upon the heights of the earth.

⁴Beneath him mountains melt like wax before the fire; valleys are opened up as when torrents pour down the hillside.

⁵All this for the crime of Jacob, for the sin of the nation of Judah. What is the crime of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the sin of the nation of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?

⁶Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country, a place for planting vineyards. I will scatter her stones down into the valley and lay her foundations bare.

⁷All her carved images will be dashed to pieces and her filthy idols burnt by fire. I will make a waste heap of all her idols for they were made with harlot's wages, and to harlot's wages they will return.

⁸For this reason I lament and wail, go barefoot and naked. I shall howl like a jackal and wail like an ostrich. ⁹For her wound cannot be healed; rather it has come to Judah. It

has reached the capital of my people, Jerusalem.

¹⁰Exult not in Gath; break down and weep in Acco. In Beth-leaphra roll in the dust. Sound the bugle. ¹¹O people of Shaphir and do not let the dwellers in Zaanan come forth. Mourning greatly, Beth Ezel: your treasures are taken away.

¹²Surely they trembled, the people in Maroth, when calamity came down from Yahweh to the gates of Jerusalem.

¹³Hitch the horses to the chariot, citizens of Lachish. In you the rebellions of Israel were found and because of you Zion began to sin.

¹⁴Therefore you must give a redress to Moresheth-Gath. The houses of Achzib have become deceitful to the kings of Israel.

¹⁵Again I will bring the conqueror to you, people of Maresha, and the elite of Israel will come up to Adullam.

¹⁶Shave your hair for your delightful children. Make yourself bald as an eagle for they have been deported far from you.

Against the rich

2 ¹Woe to those who plot wickedness and plan evil even on their beds! When morning comes they do it, as soon as it is within their reach.

²If they covet fields, they seize them. Do they like houses? They take

+ The Lord is about to leave the Temple where he is present: so hidden that everyone has forgotten him.

1.5. The first sin of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah is found in their capitals. They are the cities that have ruined the country: those who thrive by exploiting peasants live in the cities and it is there that the riches of the land are transformed into palaces for a few.

We need only look at the capital cities of some countries to verify what Micah was saying: the wealth of a country is spent on things as unpro-

ductive as were the idols and prostitution of that time.

In 1:8: *barefoot and naked*, other than the sackcloth, which was the only clothing of captives (see Isaiah 20).

In 1:10: Micah predicts a new invasion and he describes it by playing on the names of various stages on the way.

■ He denounces the exploiters, those who always have legal means to despoil little people. We must not forget that the Bible had a code of laws – for ahead of any other nation – to defend

3. Am 4, 1

8. Jer 8, 18; Is 10, 26

2. 1 K 21; Is 5, 8; Am 4, 1

them. They seize the owner and his household, both the man and his property.

³This is why Yahweh speaks, "I am plotting evil against this whole brood, from which your necks cannot escape. No more shall you walk with head held high for it will be an evil time."

⁴On that day they will sing a taunting song against you and a bitter lamentation will be heard, "We have been stripped of our property in our homeland. Who will free us from the wicked who allots our fields."⁵Truly, no one will be found in the assembly of Yahweh to keep a field for you.

⁶What will you say to that? For there is no reply. Disgrace will not pass away; these words will strike the nation of Jacob.

⁷They answer, "Is the might of Yahweh weakened? Is this his way of working things out? Has he not good words for the people whose ways are upright?"

⁸But it is you who oppress my people and are his enemies. You strip off the garments of those who pass by confidently; ⁹you drive the women of my people from the home they love; you rob my blessing from their children forever.

¹⁰Now listen to this: Get up! Forward! Go on! You are those who go roped up.

¹¹If a deceiver were to come and say, "I will preach to you of wine and strong drink," he would be the prophet for this people.

A comforting word

¹²I shall assemble you, nation of Jacob, and gather the remnant of Israel. I will bring them: together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture. ¹³With a leader in their midst. See: their king goes before them, Yahweh is leading them!

Leaders and prophets oppress the people

3 ¹Then I said, "You rulers of the house of Israel, is it not your duty to know what is right?"

²Yet you hate good and love evil, you tear the skin from my people and the flesh from my people and the flesh from their bones.

³You eat my people's flesh and break their bones to pieces; you chop them up like meat for the pan and share them like flesh for the pot."

⁴When they cry, Yahweh will not answer them; he will hide his face from them because of their evil deeds.

⁵This is what Yahweh says of the prophets who lead my people astray:

You cry: 'Peace' when you have something to eat, but to anyone with nothing for your mouths, it is 'War' that you declare. ⁶So night will come to you without vision, and darkness without divination. Then sin will set

6. Is 30, 10; Jer 11, 21	7. Hos 9, 7	8. Dt 24, 13	9. Ex 22, 21; Dt 27, 19; 2 K 4, 1; Ne 5, 5
13. Is 52, 11; 62, 10	1. Hos 5, 1; Is 5, 20	3. Eek 34, 10	4. Jer 11, 11

the rights and the lives of the poor, the widows, etc. See Dt. 23:16.

Everybody, of course, is furious with the prophet who disturbs the established injustice.

Verses 12-13 probably do not come from Micah's hand. They may have been added here later (see Ez 34).

♦ He denounces those who are mostly responsible: the civil and religious authorities.

There were prophets everywhere; they became prophets in the way someone is elected to a particular position. They practised private

consultation regarding the future and good luck. But the real role of a prophet does not consist in getting people, who pay him for his wisdom (or deceit), out of trouble, but rather in denouncing evil.

9-11 is again accusing the leaders and the civil servants who feel sheltered from the misery and from the disasters scouring the country. The long-standing confidence in Jerusalem, a city protected by the Lord, reassures them in their false peace: this is why Jerusalem will be destroyed. Eighty years after this curse, Jeremiah's contemporaries had not forgotten it (Jer 26:18).



for the prophets and the day will be dark for them.

⁷ Then the seers will be disgraced and the diviners put to shame. They will all cover their faces because no answer will come from God. ⁸ But as for me, I am filled with might, with the spirit of Yahweh, with justice and courage, to declare to Jacob his transgressions, to Israel his sins.

⁹ Hear this, leaders of the nation of Jacob, rulers of the house of Israel, you who despise justice and pervert what is right, ¹⁰ you who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with crime. ¹¹ Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests prophesy for money, and yet they rely on Yahweh and say, "Is Yahweh not in our midst? No evil, then, will come upon us." ¹² Therefore, because of you, Zion will become a field, Jerusalem will be a heap of ruins and the temple mount a forest with sacred stones.

4 ¹ In the last days, the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be set over the highest mountains and will tower over the hills. ² All the nations will stream to it, saying, "Come, let us go to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, so he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths. For the Teaching comes from Zion and from Jerusalem the word of Yahweh."

³ He will rule over the nations and settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not raise sword against nation; neither will they train for war any more. ⁴ But each one will sit in peace and freedom under a fig tree or a vine of his own,

for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken.

⁵ While peoples walk, each in the name of his god, we shall walk in the name of Yahweh, our God, forever and ever.

⁶ Yahweh declares, "On that day I will assemble the lame and gather the banished, those whom I have afflicted. ⁷ I will make the lame a remnant and those driven out a mighty nation. Yahweh will reign over them on Zion from now and forever.

⁸ As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O city of Zion, city of the king, your former dominion will be restored, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

⁹ Now, why do you wait? Would it be that you have no king and your counsellor has perished? Why are you in anguish like a woman in labour? ¹⁰ Write and howl, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour, for now you must leave the city and camp in the open country. To Babylon you must go; there you shall be rescued and Yahweh will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.

¹¹ But now many nations are massed against you; they say, "Let Jerusalem be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion." ¹² But they do not know Yahweh's thoughts, nor do they understand his purpose: that he has gathered them like sheaves on the threshing floor.

¹³ Arise and thresh, O Zion, for I will give you horns of iron and hooves of bronze, and you shall crush many peoples. You shall devote their plundered wealth to Yahweh, their treasures to the Lord of the whole earth.

¹⁴ Strengthen the walls of your fortress, for they have laid siege against us. With a rod they want to strike the cheek of Israel's ruler.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah

5 ¹ But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, so small that you are hardly named among the clans of Judah, from you shall I raise the one who is to rule over Israel. For he

6. Zac 13, 4 9. Hab 2, 12 11. Is 1, 23
Jer 51, 44; Rev 2, 7; Zac 8, 20 5. Eek 34
L. 2 S 8, 15; 7, 9; 11, 1 S 16, 1

12. Jer 26, 18; Mt 23, 38 2. Is 2, 2; Mt 5, 14;
10. Eek 38, 8 13. Jer 51, 33; Dt 33, 17

o Here we find an oracle similar to Isaiah's 2:2. Verses 9-10 announce the Exile. The text 11-13 is different: it resembles Isaiah's poems about Zion, the invincible (see Is 29:1 and 31:4).

Verses 6-7 show the assurance of God's people in the midst of hostile forces in the world.

■ But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, from you shall I raise the one who is to rule over Israel.

That is to say that the Messiah will come from the line of David whose roots are in Bethlehem. It is not clear that he must be born in Bethlehem, in spite of the fact that Micah seems to oppose this peaceful king, born in a rural area, to the useless kings of the capital. Later, many believed that the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem: see John 7:42. Matthew's Gospel shows how this prophecy was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus (Mt 2:6).

comes forth from of old, beyond any known time.

²Yahweh, therefore, will abandon Israel until such time as she who is to give birth has given birth. Then the rest of his deported brothers will return to the people of Israel.

³He will stand and shepherd his flock with the strength of Yahweh, in the glorious Name of Yahweh, his God. They will live safely while he wins renown to the ends of the earth.

⁴And this shall be peace.

When the Assyrian invades our land and sets foot on our territory, we will raise against him not one but seven shepherds, eight leaders of men.

⁵They will rule Assyria with the sword, and Babylonia with the bared blade. They shall deliver us from the Assyrians when they come into our land, when they set foot within our borders.

⁶Then the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples, like dew dropping down from Yahweh, like showers falling upon the grass. For they do not put their hope in man or expect anything from humankind.

⁷The remnant of Jacob will then be in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion in a flock of sheep, trampling down as it goes, mangling its prey, and no rescuer in sight.

⁸May your hand be raised high over your foes, and all your enemies perish.

⁹"On that day – Yahweh speaks – I will drive away your horses;

I will wreck your chariots,

¹⁰I will demolish your cities

and tear down your strongholds.

¹¹I will do away with your witchcraft and rid you of soothsayers.

¹²I will abolish your carved images, the sacred stones from your midst, so that you no longer worship the work of your hands.

¹³I will pull down your sacred poles and destroy all your idols.

¹⁴In raging fury I will take vengeance upon the nations that have not obeyed me."

O my people what have I done to you?

+ 6 ¹Listen to what Yahweh said to me, "Stand up, let the mountains hear your claim, and the hills listen to your plea."

²Hear, O mountains, Yahweh's complaint! Foundations of the earth, pay attention! For Yahweh has a case against his people, and will argue it with Israel.

³"O my people, what have I done to you? In what way have I been a burden to you? Answer me.

⁴I brought you out of Egypt; I rescued you from the land of bondage; I sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead you.

⁵O my people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, plotted, and what Balaam, son of Beor, answered him. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, how you have come to know Yahweh's righteous paths."

⁶"What shall I bring when I come to Yahweh and bow down before God the most high? Shall I come with burnt offerings, with sacrifices of yearling calves? ⁷Will Yahweh be

2. Is 7, 14; Mt 2, 6 3. Ps 78; 70; Jer 23, 4
9. Ag 2, 22; Zac 9, 10 1. Dt 32, 1; Is 1, 2

4. Ps 72, 7 7. Gen 49, 8; Num 23, 24
2. Ps 50, 6 3. Is 43, 23

+ O my people, what have I done to you? Yahweh argues with his people: God's love and his people's indifference.

The Jews no longer know what God wishes. When they are in trouble or they feel an inclination for religion, they think of expensive things: offerings and even the sacrifice of their children, according to the pagan customs.

Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly

with God. The answer is short and clear:

- Do justice is Amos' message.
- To love mercy: see Hosea 2:21
- To walk humbly with God: see Isaiah.

The psalm of hope which concludes the book was inserted here later, in the time of Exile. The end (7:7) resembles Hab 7:4: the just knows that while evil reigns, the just continue hoping for God's justice.

pleased with thousands of rams, with an overabundance of oil libations? Should I offer my first-born for my sins, the fruit of my body for my wrongdoing?"

⁸ "You have been told, O man, what is good and what Yahweh requires of you: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

⁹ The voice of Yahweh calls to the city, in order to save those who fear his Name."

¹⁰ "Is there still within you unjust wealth and accursed short measure? ¹¹ Shall I approve your false scales and your bags of false weights?"

¹² O city whose rich are full of violence, whose citizens speak falsehood, men of deceitful tongue! ¹³ See, I am striking you a grievous blow, making you desolate because of your sins. ¹⁴ You shall eat but not be satisfied and your insides will go on crying.

What you overtake, you will not carry off, and those who escape I will hand them over to the sword. ¹⁵ You shall sow but not reap. You shall tread your olives, but not anoint yourselves with the oil. You shall tread the grapes but not drink the wine.

¹⁶ You keep the rules of Omri and follow the examples of Ahab's court. So I will give you up to devastation, so that your citizens become an object of derision. You shall bear the scorn of the peoples."

7 ¹ How I sorrow! For I am like the gatherer of summer fruit, like the gleaner of the vintage, when there are no grapes to eat, none of the early figs I crave.

² The godly have vanished from the earth and not one upright man is to be found. All lie in ambush to shed blood, one hunts another with a net. ³ Their hands are skilled at doing evil. The official demands a bribe, the judge judges for a price and the mighty decides as he pleases.

⁴ Their kindness is like a brier, their justice worse than a thorn hedge. But the time of punishment has come, as foretold by your sentries, and now is the time of confusion.

⁵ Do not rely on a friend nor trust an intimate companion. Be guarded in speech with the woman who shares your bed. ⁶ For son

treats father like a fool, daughter rebels against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. The enemies of each one are those of his household.

⁷ As for me, I will watch expectantly for Yahweh, waiting hopefully for the God who saves me. My God will hear me.

Poem of exile – Jerusalem will rise

⁸ Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; though I fall, I will rise again. Though I now dwell in darkness, Yahweh is my light.

⁹ I will bear the rage of Yahweh – for I have sinned against him – while he examines my cause and defends my rights. Then he will bring me out to the light and I shall probe his justice.

¹⁰ Then my enemy shall also see and shame will cover her. Did she not say, "Where is Yahweh, your God?" My eyes, then, shall rejoice: See how she is trampled like mud in the street!

¹¹ The day is coming when your walls will be rebuilt and your boundaries extended. ¹² On that day they will come to you from Assyria to Egypt, from Tyre to the Euphrates, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain, ¹³ while the earth will remain desolate because of its citizens and their deeds.

¹⁴ Shepherd your people with your staff, shepherd the flock of your inheritance that dwells alone in the scrub, in the midst of a fertile land. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead ¹⁵ as in the days of old, in the days when you went out of Egypt.

Show us your wonders. ¹⁶ On seeing this the nations will be put to shame in the midst of all their might. People will lay their hands upon their mouths and they will not believe the news.

¹⁷ They shall lick the dust like snakes, like creatures that crawl upon the ground. They will come trembling out of their strongholds: they will be in fear of you.

¹⁸ Who is a god like you, who takes away guilt and pardons crime for the remnant of his inheritance.

Who is like you whose anger does not last? For you delight in merciful forgiveness.

¹⁹ Once again you will show us your loving kindness and trample on our wrongs, casting all our sins into the depths of the sea.

²⁰ Show faithfulness to Jacob, mercy to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

7. Ex 34, 20

12. Hos 12, 8

Mal 3, 24

16. Is 63, 7

8. Dt 10, 2; Is 1, 17; Hos 2, 21; Mr 23, 23

14. Dt 28, 30

7. Is 8, 17; Hab 2, 1

17. Gen 3, 14; Ps 18, 43

16. 1 K 21, 25

8. Is 33

20. Lk 1, 73

10. Lev 19, 35

2. Ps 14, 1

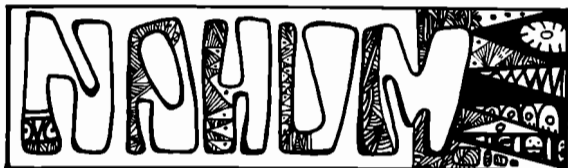
3. Jer 5, 1

12. Zac 9, 10; Ps 72, 8

11. Pro 20, 10

6. Mr 10, 35; Lk 12, 53;

14. Ps 74, 1



Nahum prophesied when the Assyrian power was collapsing, at the death of Ashurbanipal, the last king in 626. In 612 the Medes and Babylonian allies attacked and destroyed Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians. However, even before that, the Assyrians had been losing their control over the people whom they enslaved and who thoroughly hated them. The Jews were among them. Nahum's poems show the heart of a patriot who believes that the Lord governs the history of people.

What do you plot against Yahweh?

1 ¹ Oracle against Nineveh. This is the book of the vision which Nahum of Elkosh has seen.

² Yahweh is a jealous and avenging God, Yahweh takes vengeance in his wrath;

³ Yahweh is slow to anger though immense in power. Yahweh punishes the guilty. In storm and whirlwind is his path; clouds are the dust of his feet.

⁴ He rebukes the sea and dries it; he drains rivers of their water. Bashan and Carmel wither; the blossoms of Lebanon fade.

⁵ Before him the mountains quake and the hills melt; the earth trembles and all the peoples.

⁶ Who can stand before his fury? Who can face his blazing anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are rent asunder.

⁷ Yahweh is good for those who hope: in the day of trouble he shelters them. He remembers those who trust in him when the flood engulfs them. He utterly destroys his adversaries and pursues his foes into darkness.

⁸ Oppression will not rise a second time. Yahweh will bring to an end whatever you plot against him. Yahweh gives his foe no quarter, he stores up fury for his enemy.

⁹ They will be entangled among thorns like drunkards, and be consumed like dry stubble, until the one who counsels villainy

and plots evil against Yahweh has come from them.

¹² Thus Yahweh says to Judah: "Though they be strong and many they will be annihilated. Though I had afflicted you, no more shall I afflict you.

¹³ I will break their yoke from your neck and tear away your shackles."

¹⁴ To the king of Nineveh, here is Yahweh's decree. "No descendants shall bear your name. I will abolish from your temple the carved image and the molten idol. I will make your tomb an object of shame.

2 ¹ See, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, one who proclaims peace.

Judah, celebrate your feasts and carry out your vows. For the wicked have been destroyed, they will not attack you any more.

Nineveh shall fall

² Against Nineveh a destroyer advances. Watch the road, man the fortress; brace yourselves, muster all your forces.

³ Yahweh will now restore Jacob's magnificence, like Israel's splendour.

For they had been plundered, laid waste as a ravaged vineyard.

⁴ The shields of his soldiers are red; his warriors are crimson-clad. His chariots gleam as if on fire when mustered in battle array, while prancing horses and frenzied horsemen

wait impatiently for bloody action.

⁵ As chariots storm through the streets and dash madly through the squares, they look like flashing torches or darting lightning bolts.

⁶ The picked troops are called out; ranks break at their charge.

Having set up the mantelet they rushed toward the rampart.

⁷ The river gates are thrown open, and the palace defense collapses.

⁸ The goddess is taken captive together with all her handmaids, moaning like doves and beating their breasts.

⁹ Nineveh looks like a pool with its waters running away:

All flee: "Stop, stop!" but no one comes back.

¹⁰ All kinds of wealth, gold and silver – it is an endless treasure, a heap of the most precious things.

¹¹ Waste and ruin, desolation and emptiness,

failing hearts and trembling knees, terror and agony on all blanched faces!

¹² Where now is the lion's cave, the den of the cubs where the lion would bring his prey,

and the cubs lie down undisturbed?

¹³ The lion tore to pieces for his whelps, and strangled for his mates;

he filled his caves with prey and his dens with mangled flesh.

¹⁴ Yahweh Sabaoth speaks:

I have come against you. I will send up your chariots in smoke, give your cubs to the sword; wipe the earth clear of your plunder, and your envoys' voices will be heard no longer.

The city of blood

3 Woe to the bloody city, city of lies and booty. O city of unending plunder! ² But what! Crack of whips, rumble of wheels and clatter of hoofs! ³ See the frenzied chargers, the

flashing swords and glittering spears, the heaps of the wounded, the dying and the dead – we stumble over corpses!

⁴ The harlot is paying for her harlotries,

her deadly charms, her sorceries. She traded nations with her prostitutions

and caught peoples by her spells.

⁵ "I am against you," Yahweh Sabaoth says.

"I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your disgrace.

⁶ I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make of you a shameful show,

⁷ so that all who look on you will turn their backs in disgust and say: Nineveh – a city of lust – is in ruins. Who will mourn for her?

Where can we find any to be her comforter?

⁸ Are you any better than Thebes by the Nile, surrounded by water, her rampart the river, and the water her wall?

⁹ Ethiopia and Egypt were her stay. Put and Libya were her allies,

¹⁰ yet she was carried away and held captive among the exiles. Her infants were dashed to pieces at the head of every road; lots were cast for her nobles, and her great men were bound in chains.

¹¹ You, too, shall drink of this: you will also hide from your enemies.

¹² Your fortresses are like fig trees laden with early-ripening fruits which fall, when shaken, into the waiting mouths of men.

¹³ Look at your troops – they are wide open!

The bars have been consumed by fire.

4. Rev 17; 18, 3; Rev 19, 2; 18, 23

12. Rev 6, 13

15. Jl 2, 3

5. Is 47, 2

16. Eek 28, 16

8. Eek 29, 3

18. Jer 51, 39

10. 2 K 8, 12

■ This introductory song presents the central theme of Nahum's prophecy: the Lord is concerned about being acknowledged on earth as the only God: in everything that takes place in nature, and above all, in his faithfulness towards his friends.

Trusting in God's words, in a terrible poem

Nahum prophesies the destruction of Nineveh blow by blow: it symbolizes liberation from all kinds of slavery.

Through Nahum, the Bible welcomes the happiness of all the little people when they see the destruction of the powerful who ignored all their rights and dominated them through terror.

and the enemies freely enter.

¹⁴ Brace yourselves for the siege: draw water,

strengthen the bulwark,
tread the clay and the mortar
and repair the brickwork.

¹⁵ There the fire will devour you
and the sword will cut you down
though you were numerous as locusts,
beyond count like grasshoppers.

¹⁶ You had multiplied your
merchants
more than the stars of the sky;

¹⁷ like grasshoppers were your
officials
and your soldiers like swarms of
locusts

which settle on the walls on a cold
day.

But the sun appears; they fly away
and they are gone, no one knows
where.

¹⁸ O king of Assyria, your shepherds
slumber,
your nobles lie down fast asleep,
while over the mountains your
people scatter,
and no one gathers them up.

¹⁹ Nothing can heal your wounds;
your injury is fatal.
All clap their hands
when they hear about your fall.
for who has not suffered constantly
the plague of your cruelty?



The prophet Habakkuk is the first one to dare call God to account. For centuries now, faith had been proclaiming God's justice. However, this justice had not always been obvious. After many had kept silent about their doubts, Habakkuk is the first biblical author who questions boldly: Why does the Lord allow injustice to triumph? Why, when he punishes one oppressor, does he replace him with someone worse?

The answer is twofold:

- The Lord keeps the secret of his way of ruling the world and all he asks is that we remain faithful: *the upright will live by his faithfulness.*
- The prophet contemplates the glory of the Lord who will judge in the end.

Habakkuk spoke his oracles from 605-600, when Nebuchadnezzar, who had just destroyed the cruel Assyria, was becoming very powerful himself and was plundering Israel.

Why do you make me see injustice?

1

¹ These are the words and visions of Habakkuk, the prophet.

² Yahweh, how long will I cry to you
for help while you pay no attention to me?
I denounce the oppression and you do not save.

³ Why do you make me see injustice
and wish me to look on tyranny?
All I see is outrage and looting.

⁴ The Law has been put aside
and just decrees are no longer issued.
The wicked overrule the upright
and nothing is seen but crooked laws.

First reply

⁵ Look, traitors, and pay attention; be amazed and astounded, for I am going to do in your own days, something that you would not believe if you were told it.

⁶ I am going to call the Chaldeans, that terrifying and violent people who raid to the ends of the earth, to seize the lands of others. ⁷ I call a terrible and dangerous nation who obey no other law but their own will. ⁸ Their horses are speedier than leopards, fiercer than wolves on the plain; their riders gallop on and come from afar, they swoop like the eagle descending on its prey.

⁹ When they launch themselves for an attack, pushed forward by the desert wind, they round up prisoners like sand. ¹⁰ This people makes fun of kings and laughs at princes; they make light of fortified cities, for they build up an embankment and seize them. ¹¹ Thus they come and go like the wind! Their strength is their god!

Second complaint of the prophet

¹² But you, are you not Yahweh from past ages? You, my holy God, you cannot die. You have set this people to serve your justice and you have made them firm as a rock to fulfill your punishment.

¹³ Yahweh, your eyes are too pure to tolerate wickedness and you cannot look on oppression. Why, then, do you look on treacherous people and watch in silence while the evil-doer swallows up one better than himself?

¹⁴ You treat human beings like the fish in the sea, like reptiles who are nobody's concern. ¹⁵ This nation catches all on its hook, pulls them out with its net and piles them up in its dragnet. ¹⁶ Pleased and delighted at their catch, they offer sacrifices to their net and burn incense to their dragnets, since these supplied them with fish in plenty and provided them with food in abundance. ¹⁷ Will they continue, then, to constantly empty their nets, slaughtering nations without mercy?

Second reply: the upright will live by his faithfulness

+ 2

¹ I will stand in my watchtower
and take up position on my battlements;
I will be alert to see
if I can make out his reply,
what is his answer to my question.

² Then Yahweh answered me and said,

"Write down the vision,
enscribe it on tables so it can be easily read,
³ since this is a vision for an appointed time;
it will not fail but will be fulfilled in due time.

5. Is 29, 9; Acts 13, 41

12. Ps 90, 1

13. Ps 5, 6

1. Is 21, 8

2. Is 8, 1; Jer 30, 2; Rev 1, 19

3. Dn 8, 19; 10, 14; Heb 10, 27; 2 Pet 3, 9

o Two complaints from the prophet and two answers from God:

1:1-4: First complaint: Why so much wickedness in Judah?

1:5-11: God's ironic answer: shortly the Chaldeans will restore order by invading and plundering everything.

1:12-16: Second complaint: Why does the Lord use such means as the Chaldean invasion to restore his justice?

2:1-4: The Lord's answer: One day it will be clear that the good and the evil are not

treated in the same way. Those who remain faithful will be saved.

+ The divine answer remains mysterious. Later, God will clearly reveal how he rewards the just beyond this life. But, before that moment comes, it is difficult to clarify the mystery: Apparently the misfortunes which were announced as God's punishment equally affected everyone. After Habakkuk, Jeremiah will ask the same question (Jer 12:1); faced with the unbelief of his companions, Ezekiel will try to reaffirm the justice of the Lord with regard to everyone (Ez 18);

If it delays, wait for it,
for it will come and will not be deferred.
“The proud will never possess my favour,
the upright, on the other hand,
will live by his faithfulness.”

⁵ The grasping conqueror is always ready to devour, he enlarges his mouth like the netherworld; he is as insatiable as death, he seizes on all the nations and monopolizes all

the peoples for himself. “But will not all the people mock him, as with one voice? Will they not write fierce satires to show him up? They will say,

Against the oppressor

■ Woe to him who amasses countless goods
belonging to others and fills himself with extorted pledges.

⁷ Your creditors will come suddenly,
your money collectors will waken
and take away all your goods.

⁸ Since you have plundered so many nations,
shedding blood, stripping the land,
their cities and homes, all the remaining nations
will turn on you and strip you bare.

⁹ Woe to him who raises his house on unjust profits
and fixes his nest so high that he thinks
he can thereby escape misfortune!

¹⁰ You have willed the disgrace of your house;
by conquering numerous peoples,
you draw evil on your own head.

¹¹ The very stones of your walls
cry out against you
and the rafters reply from the roof.

¹² Woe to the one who builds a city
on bloody foundations
and sets up a town by means of evil.

4. Rom 1, 17; Gal 3, 11; Heb 10, 38

5. Is 5, 14

6. Is 5, 8

8. Jer 50, 29; Rev 19, 6

9. Is 14, 13; Jer 49, 16

11. Lk 19, 40

12. Mi 3, 10

the book of Job will look for the solution; but its answer will only be a partial answer.

■ Habakkuk predicts the destiny of the conqueror who, for a while, will terrorize the world. Then, we have five curses against the triumphant Chaldean:

- The first three: The Chaldean has plundered and exploited countries that are less strong and less rich.
- The fourth: The Chaldean has humiliated them, just like someone who gets his neighbour drunk.
- The fifth: In spite of his triumphs, the Chaldean will not achieve what really matters, the knowledge of the Lord.

The last verse: *Yahweh lives in his holy Temple: let the whole earth be silent before him!* Introduces the triumphant manifestation of the Lord in the following chapter.

◆ The prophet calls on the Lord begging him to reveal himself. And then, he describes his triumphant coming through a series of poetic images recalling his past interventions in the history of Israel: passing through the Red Sea, Sinai, Deborah's victory.

I wait confidently for the day of distress (see Is 8:11). Yet in God my Saviour will I exult: these words are found in Mary's canticle (Lk 1:47). In the midst of crises and anguish, the just one walks upon the heights.

13 Has Yahweh of hosts not willed
that the work of the nations go to the fire
and the peoples toil for nothing?

15 Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours and drugs them to make them drunk so that everyone looks at their nakedness. **16** This will bring you more shame than glory. You will also drink and uncover your foreskin. The cup turns over in Yahweh's hand and pours out onto you: disgrace will swallow your glory.

17 The violence you did in Lebanon will befall you and the animals will devour you, since you slaughtered human beings, destroyed the country with its cities and put an end to all who lived there.

18 What use is a statue? Why do the sculptors make them? Why these images and deceiving answers? Why do their makers trust them and produce mute idols? **19** Woe to the one who says to a piece of wood, "Wake up," and to a dumb stone, "Get up." Can it give any answer? For, even though it is plated with gold and silver, there is not a single breath of life in it.

20 But Yahweh lives in his holy Temple: let the whole earth be silent before him!

Prayer of Habakkuk

1 Prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet.
To the tune of a dirge.

2 I have heard, Yahweh, of your renown;
I stand in awe of your work, O Yahweh.
In the middle of years make it known;
in your wrath even, remember mercy.

3 God comes from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.

His glory shrouds the heavens,
his praise fills the earth.

4 his splendour is like the daylight
with rays flashing from his hand,
radiating from his hidden power.

5 Pestilence goes before him,
plague follows close behind.

6 He stands and the earth sways;
he looks and the nations tremble.
The ancient mountains crumble,
the time-honoured hills collapse.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,
the pavilions of Midian in anguish.

8 Was your anger against the rivers,
Yahweh?

Was your wrath against the sea
that you drive your steeds
with your invincible chariots?

9 You bare and ready your bow
and set upon it your arrow.

With rivers you cleave the earth.

10 At your sight the mountains writhe.
Torrents of water ragingly sweep by,
the deep roaring, lifting its waves high.

11 The sun and moon stood still
at the glint of your flying arrows,
at the gleam of your flashing spears.

12 You stride the earth in wrath,
you trample the nations in rage.

13 You came out to redeem your people
to save your anointed one –
you crushed the head of the wicked,
you laid him bare from head to foot.

14 You pierced with your shafts his
warriors
who came like whirlwind to scatter us in
joy,
to devour the wretched quietly.

15 You trampled the waters with your
horses,
amid the churning of the great seas.

16 I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound.
Decay crept into my bones;
my legs tottered under my body.
Yet I wait confidently for the day of
distress,
when my people surrendered to the
enemy.

17 For though the fig trees blossom not,
nor there be grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fail
and the fields produce no food,
though the flock be lost from the fold,
and the herd be gone from the stalls,
18 yet in Yahweh will I rejoice,
in God my saviour will I exult.
19 My Lord Yahweh is my stronghold;
he makes my feet as fleet as the
hinds;
he steadies my steps upon the heights.

*For the choirmaster: with stringed
instruments.*

13. Jer 51, 58	14. Is 11, 9	15. Gen 9, 20	18. Is 40, 19; 44, 9; Ps 115, 4	20. 1 K 8, 30;
Mt 1, 2; Rev 8, 1; Zep 1, 7; Zac 2, 17	3. Na 1, 7; Jdg 5, 4	6. Is 42, 15; Ps 68, 8		
8. Dt 33, 26	9. Zac 9, 13	10. Ex 19, 18	12. Is 63, 3	16. Dn 8, 18; 10, 8
17. Hos 9, 2; Jer 5, 17	18. Lk 1, 47	19. Is 61, 10; Mt 7, 7; Ps 18, 34; Dt 32, 13		

Zephaniah



In the year 630 approximately, Zephaniah's voice breaks the silence, after seventy years without hearing the word of God. Isaiah had concluded his mission around 690, and after that, the faithful of Judah went through more than fifty years of persecution during the reign of Manasseh.

1 ¹Yahweh spoke to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Ammon, in Jerusalem.

²He asserted solemnly, "I will wipe out everything from the face of the earth. ³I will put an end to men and animals, to the birds of heaven and the fish of the sea. I will wipe humankind from the face of the earth. ⁴I will raise my hand to punish Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will bring out of that place all the remnants of Baal with their priests. ⁵I will also drive away those who kneel on the roofs to worship the stars, those who invoke at the same time Yahweh and Milcom, ⁶those who are separated from Yahweh and no longer look towards him or consult him.

⁷Silence before the Lord Yahweh! For his day is near: Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his invited guests. ⁸Yahweh says, "On the day that sacrifice is made, I will punish the officials, the king's sons and all who clothe themselves in foreign fashion. ⁹I will also give the corresponding punishment to everyone who jumps over the threshold without stepping on it and fill the House of their Lord with the fruits of their crimes and thefts.

¹⁰On that day, a great cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the new city and a frightful noise from the nearby hills.

¹¹Wail, inhabitants of the sunken village, for all the traders have disappeared, all who counted the silver have perished.

¹²On that day I will explore Jerusalem with torches, to punish those who have sunk in their vices and think in their hearts: Well, Yahweh does not do good or evil! ¹³Their riches will be pillaged, their houses demolished.

You have built house but will not live in them. You have planted vineyards but you will not taste the wine.

A day of wrath

◆ ¹⁴The great day of the Lord is near, it already comes.

Its sound is so frightening that even the valiant cries out in terror.

¹⁵It is a day of wrath, anguish and distress;

a day of destruction and devastation, of gloom and darkness;

it is a day of dark clouds

¹⁶and fog when the trumpet sounds the call for battle,

and the enemy attacks the fortresses and the high fortified towers.

¹⁷I will bring misfortune on these people and they will grope along like the blind, for they did not respect Yahweh. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their remains will lie like dung.

¹⁸Neither their gold or their silver will rescue them when the anger of God burns against them. The land of Judah will be burned in the fire of his zeal when he destroys even the traces of all who dwell in that land.

2 ¹Gather together and assemble O shameless people, ²that you may be scattered by the wind like a heap of straw when the anger of Yahweh comes upon you!

³Seek Yahweh, all you poor of the land who fulfill his commands, do

1. 2 K 22, 1
2 K 22, 14

3. Jer 7, 20
11. Is 23, 8

5. Dt 4, 19; 2 K 21, 3
13. Mt 6, 1

7. Acts 2, 20
14. Jl 2, 1

8. Rev 19, 17
15. Am 5, 18

10. Ne 3, 3;



justice and are meek, and perhaps you will find refuge on the day Yahweh comes to judge.

⁴ Gaza shall be a desert, Ashkelon completely destroyed to its very foundation. ⁵ Woe to the nation of the Cherethites on the seacoast, for Yahweh has spoken against it: 'O Canaan, land of the Philistines, I will destroy you so that no one will be left in you.

⁶ The seacoast shall be like pastures where the shepherds and their flocks go and the lambs gather. ⁷ This region will belong to the remnant of the tribe of Judah; there they shall bring their flocks to graze and they will sleep at night in the houses of Ashkelon, when Yahweh their God comes to visit them and bring their captives back.

⁸ Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel says, "I have heard the affronts of Moab and the mockery of the Ammonites who insulted my people and extended their boundaries at the expense of my territory.

⁹ Therefore I swear that, as I live, Moab shall become like Sodom, and Ammon like Gomorrah, as desert indeed. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, the survivors of my nation shall receive them as an inheritance. ¹⁰ This shall be their lot, in payment for their pride, for they insulted the people of the God of hosts and have enriched themselves at my people's expense." ¹¹ Yahweh will be inflexible with them when he comes to overthrow all the gods of the earth. ¹² Then the pagans who live on the islands shall worship him, each in his own land.

"The threat of my sword also hangs over you, Ethiopians." ¹³ Yahweh will raise his hand against the north and reduce Assyria to ruins. ¹⁴ He will leave Nineveh in utter desolation, barren as the desert. Herds of all kinds of animals shall find shelter in her, and even the pelican and the heron shall dwell in her ruins during the night; the owl shall hoot from the window and the raven from the threshold.

4. Is 14, 28; Jl 3, 4
3. Eek 22, 25

8. Is 15-16
4. Jer 23, 11

9. Gen 19, 24
9. Is 6, 5; Mal 1, 11

13. Na 2-3
10. Is 18, 7

15. Is 47, 8

2. Jer 6, 6

◆ Zephaniah presents the day of Yahweh in a threatening way. The Jews maintained that the coming of the Lord had to be a liberation for the people. The Lord had to save them from their enemies and allow them to continue to live without justice or faith. But the prophet knows that the Lord will achieve his own designs; his salvation is not what the indifferent imagine and it will begin with the destruction of those who are not converted.

○ This is the first vision of God's people, a poor and meek people.

¹⁵ The cedar has been uprooted! So will be the end of the happy city that felt secure in her own power and said to herself: I and no one but I. Why is it now a heap of ruins where animals take shelter? Everyone who passes by her hisses, making signs with the hand.

Against Jerusalem

3 ¹ Woe to the rebellious, the defiled, the city that oppresses. ² She did not pay attention to the call nor accept the correction; she did not trust Yahweh nor did she approach her God. ³ Her kings are like roaring lions, her rulers like evening wolves that do not leave even a bone for the next day. ⁴ Her prophets are blabbermouths and treacherous people; her priests defile whatever is sacred with no respect for the Law.

⁵ However, Yahweh is in her midst; he is righteous and never commits injustice. Every morning he says what must be done, without failing a single day; but the unjust do not even feel ashamed.

⁶ I have wiped out the nations, demolished their watchtowers, left their streets abandoned, and no one walks in them; their cities have been levelled, without even a man or an inhabitant to be seen.

⁷ I thought: If you took into account my correction! Then you would always have before your eyes my many punishments. But you were eager to behave still more corruptly.

⁸ Therefore, wait for me, says Yahweh, for the day when I come to accuse, when I have the nations gathered and the kingdoms assembled to vent my wrath on you with all the fury of my anger. Then the fire of my jealous wrath will burn the whole land.

⁹ At that time I will give truthful lips to the pagan nations that all of them may call on the name of Yahweh and serve him with the same zeal. ¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia those who trust me will come together with the dispersed Israelites and bring offerings to me.

The destruction on the Day of the Lord had left a Remnant in Zion. This is the first time that those who wait for God are called poor. It is not mainly a question of being economically poor, but rather of having the attitude of those who have nothing and are open to receive everything from God. The word poverty formerly implied failure; but now, it will be the condition needed to seek God. After that time, the "poor of the Lord" will mean all those in Israel who hope to find God. The Gospel, especially the Gospel of Luke, will proclaim the happiness of the poor (see Lk 6:20).



God in the midst of the meek

o ¹¹ On that day you will no longer be ashamed
for all the times you have been unfaithful to me;
I will have removed from your midst
your boastful arrogance
and you will not feel proud any more
on my holy mountain.

¹² I will leave within you a poor
and meek people who will seek refuge only in God.

¹³ The remnant of Israel will not act unjustly
nor will they speak falsely,
nor will deceitful words be found in their mouths.
They will eat and rest with none to threaten them.

¹⁴ Cry out with joy, O daughter of Zion;
rejoice, O people of Israel!
Sing joyfully with all your heart,
daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵ Yahweh has lifted the sentence of your condemnation
and has driven your enemies away.
Yahweh, the King of Israel is with you;
do not fear any misfortune.

¹⁶ On that day they will say to Jerusalem:
Do not be afraid nor let your hands tremble,

¹⁷ for Yahweh your God, the saving warrior is with you.
He will jump for joy on seeing you,
for he has revived his love.
He will cry out with joy
and celebrate a feast because of you.

¹⁸ Turn away from that evil I warned you
about,
the same that weighs upon you.

¹⁹ On that day I will face your oppressors;
I will save the lame sheep
and bring the lost back into the fold.
I will give you renown
and honour in all the lands

where humiliation was your lot.

²⁰ On that day I will bring you to this place
and gather you to make you famous
and honourable among all the peoples of
the earth,
when I bring back the captives before your
eyes,
this is Yahweh's word.

11. Is 54, 4 14. Is 12, 6; 54, 1; Zac 2, 14; 9, 9
19. Ezk 34, 16; Mi 4, 6; Is 61, 9

15. Js 40, 2

17. Jer 32, 41; Is 62, 5

The Lord will be in Jerusalem to share his happiness with them. The Holy God suddenly shows that he is like a young man in love who is not concerned with social considerations.

Cry out with joy, O daughter of Zion;

Yahweh is with you; do not fear any misfortune. In the Gospel of Luke, the same words are addressed to Mary at the Annunciation: "Rejoice, the Lord is with you. Do not fear, Mary you will bear the Saviour" (Lk 1:28).

HAGGAI

Haggai is the first of the postexilic prophets. These three: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi proclaim the word of God in an entirely new age. The former prophets were denouncing Israel's sins and announcing the imminent judgment. But now, after the trials of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile in Babylon, the Jewish community must rebuild the nation, and this is when the prophets demand that first, the Temple must be rebuilt.

It is a fact that the Jews – and this is true for us, too – had to serve God before asking him for the solution to their problems. But Haggai's message is prophetic in another sense: it initiates a new stage in Sacred History in which the growth of the Jewish people will be achieved on the basis of their faithfulness to the Law and on their worship. The Temple already is the Dwelling place of God among his people, but they also have to wait for a mysterious coming of God, on the day when he comes to visit his people.

Against those who think only of their own house

1 ¹ In the second year of the reign of Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, a word of Yahweh was directed to the prophet Haggai for the benefit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

² "So says Yahweh of hosts: This people claim that the time to rebuild the House of Yahweh has not yet come. ³ Well now, hear what I have to say through the prophet Haggai: ⁴ Is this the time for you to live in your well-built houses while this House is a heap of ruins? ⁵ Think about your ways: ⁶ you have sown much but harvested little, you eat and drink but are not satisfied, you clothe yourselves but still feel cold, and the laborer puts the money he earned in a tattered purse.

⁷ Now think about what you must do: ⁸ go to the mountain and look for wood to rebuild the House. This will make me happy and I will feel deeply

honoured, says Yahweh. ⁹ You expected much but it turned out to be very little. I blew away what you had piled up. Why? Because my House lies in ruins while each of you goes running home. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens have withheld rain, and the earth has not produced anything. ¹¹ I sent drought upon the valley and the hills, upon the wheat and the vines, the oil and whatever the soil produces, upon men and animals, and upon any work of your hands."

¹² Now, when Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, ¹³ and all the people heard these words of the prophet Haggai whom Yahweh had sent to speak to them, they paid attention to what Yahweh had told them and the people were filled with respect for God.

¹⁴ Then Haggai, the messenger of Yahweh, passed on to the people this word of Yahweh, "I am with you." Then Yahweh moved the heart of Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the people, and they began rebuilding the House of Yahweh of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

2 ¹ On the twenty-first day of the seventh month of the second year of the reign of Darius, this word of Yahweh was sent through the prophet Haggai, ² "Give this mes-



sage to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest, and to all the people:

The glory of the new temple

■ ³ Is there left among you one of those who saw this house long ago in the time of its glory? What do they think of what they see now? Is it not a very little thing? ⁴ But I say to you, Zerubbabel, Joshua and my people: do not be discouraged. ⁵ Begin to work, for I am with you, says Yahweh of hosts (in fulfillment of the covenant I made with you when you came out from Egypt.) Do not be afraid, for my spirit is in your midst. ⁶ Within a short while I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the continents. ⁷ Then I will shake all the nations and bring in the treasures of the whole world. I will fill this House with glory, says Yahweh. ⁸ I will have as much silver and gold as I wish. ⁹ The renown of this Temple will be greater than before, and in this place I will give peace, says Yahweh of hosts.

¹⁰ On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh was directed again to the prophet Haggai, ¹¹ to ask the priests to resolve the following case in accordance with the Law: ¹² "If a man brings consecrated meat wrapped in his cloak, and the edge of his cloak touches bread, cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will all these become consecrated food?" They immediately answered, "No."

¹³ Haggai went on to say, "But if someone becomes unclean by having touched a dead

body, and then touches any of these things, will all these become unclean?" This time the priests said, "Yes."

¹⁴ Then Haggai said to them, "So it is with this people and this nation before me, says Yahweh, so with everything they do and all they offer here: all is unclean."

¹⁵ "Pay attention to this from now on: how was it with you before the rebuilding of the Temple was begun?" ¹⁶ You expected twenty sacks of wheat, but there were only ten. You thought of drawing out fifty measures of wine but there were only twenty. ¹⁷ I spoiled all your work with blight, mildew and hail. Yet none returned to me, says the Lord. ¹⁸ Pay attention, then, from now on, since the first stone of the Sanctuary of Yahweh was laid. ¹⁹ See if the wheat, the vine, the fig tree and the pomegranate go on yielding little! From this day on I will bless your olive trees."

Promises to Zerubbabel

○ ²⁰ The word of Yahweh came again to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the same month, ²¹ "Say to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah: ²² I will overthrow the thrones of the kings and destroy the power of the nations. I will overturn the chariot and its driver; the horses and their riders shall tumble down to the ground. They will kill one another. ²³ Yahweh of hosts says: On that day I will take you, Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, and for me you will be like a ring on my finger with my initials on it. For I have chosen you, says Yahweh of hosts."

3. Ezr 3, 10	6. Heb 12, 26	7. Is 60, 7
14. Is 1, 13	17. Am 4, 9	

9. Zac 8, 12	10. Zac 7, 3	13. Lev 22, 4
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■ With utter frankness, Haggai points out how modest is the work they have achieved. It is better this way, since they did not build the Temple for the sake of the Temple and to be proud of it, but rather to show they are surrendered to the Lord.

"Do not be afraid, for my spirit is in your midst: (2:5). We already pointed out that the presence of the Spirit achieves union. Here, the prophet emphasizes that the fruit of the Spirit consists in removing fear.

"Soon, I will fill this House with glory," the very poverty of the Temple invites God to hasten the time of his visitation to fill it with his glory. In a short time, the Lord will end this transitory world in which the Jews are living and he will establish his kingdom.

+ The question posed to the priests was in line with the mentality of those days (see commentary on Lv 8:11 and 11:1): there are "clean" or "holy" things and persons that can come in

contact with God and others which are "unclean" or "profane" that cannot enter the Temple. Besides "uncleanliness" is seen as something which can be transmitted through contact.

The conclusion is the following: These people are unclean as long as they do not provide for their God a house worthy of him; thus, all their prayers and offerings are unclean simply for having passed through their hands.

○ Just like Zechariah (Zec 6:12), Haggai thinks that Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, might be the Messiah who will restore the nation of Israel. He does not clearly say so, but as he suggests it in interpreting a word of God as congratulating Zerubbabel. The prophet was wrong on that; his mistake shows how divine truth and human interpretation – always fallible – can be intertwined even in the words of an authentic prophet.

Zechariah

Just as Haggai, Zechariah took part in the "restoration" of God's people and of the Temple, when the Jews had just come back from Babylon (520 B.C.).

When they returned from exile, the fabulous promises made by the prophets while they were captive in Babylon, had not been fulfilled (see Is 40:55). And so, they kept hoping, Zechariah sees their building of the Temple as a symbol: a new age has begun and the Lord is preparing for the day of his transcendental salvation. The visions found in the first six chapters are teaching the Jews gathered in their Temple, that they must be watchful and wait for the Day of the Lord.

THE SECOND PART OF THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Chapters 9-14 are the work of another prophet who lived two centuries later, possibly when the famous conqueror, Alexander, came to the Eastern countries. He teaches the Jews that they must not be afraid: the victory of God and the coming of his kingdom will take place in the midst of very painful events.

o1 ¹In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo:

²"Yahweh was very angry with your ancestors. ³Therefore tell the people that this is what Yahweh Sabaoth says: 'Return to me and I will return to you.' ⁴Do not be like your ancestors whom the earlier prophets warned, reiterating to them Yahweh Sabaoth's words: 'Turn from your evil ways and your wicked deeds.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me. Yahweh asks you. ⁵"Where are your ancestors now? Those prophets also died ⁶but my words and decrees entrusted to my servants, the prophets, overtook your ancestors. They repented and said: "Yahweh Sabaoth has treated us just as he had determined to do, according to our ways and deeds."

The visions

⁷On the twenty-fourth of Shebat, the eleventh month, in the second year of Darius, the

word of Yahweh came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, in the following manner.

⁸In a vision at night, I saw a man riding a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine, and behind him were red, brown and white horses. ⁹I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel with whom I was talking answered, "You will know."

¹⁰The man standing among the myrtle trees spoke, "They are those whom Yahweh sent to patrol the earth." ¹¹These then reported to Yahweh's angel standing among the myrtle trees, "We have patrolled the whole earth and found it peaceful and tranquil."

¹²The angel of Yahweh spoke, "O Yahweh of hosts, how long will you be without mercy for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah which you have afflicted in anger these seventy years?"

¹³Yahweh replied with comforting words to the angel who spoke to me. ¹⁴This angel then turned to me and said, "Proclaim this word which Yahweh Sabaoth speaks: 'I am very

1. Ag 1, 1
9. Rev 6, 1

4. Jer 3, 22; James 4, 8
10. Dn 1, 6

6. Is 55, 11; 1 K 8, 46; Dn 9, 10

8. Am 7, 1; Dn 7, 1

o Zechariah is blessed with a series of night visions in which the plan of God, fixed and determined in heaven, is revealed to him. The events will certainly take place.

First vision, 1:7-17: apparently nothing in the external situation leads one to think that the day of the Lord is drawing near. However, the Lord is watching and



jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, ¹⁵ but I am very angry with complacent nations. At first I was only a little angry with Jerusalem, but they made things worse.' ¹⁶ Therefore Yahweh says: I will turn again with mercy to Jerusalem, where my house will be rebuilt and the measuring line stretched."

Then Yahweh Sabaoth said, ¹⁷ "Proclaim this as well: My towns will once more overflow with prosperity; Yahweh will again comfort Zion and make Jerusalem his favourite."

The second vision

2 ¹ I raised my eyes and saw four horns. ² I asked the angel who spoke to me what these were, and he answered, "These horns are the nations that scattered Judah and Jerusalem." ³ Yahweh then showed me four blacksmiths, and I asked, "What are they coming to do?"

⁴ He answered, "Here are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one dared raise his head. But these blacksmiths have come to strike down the power of the nations that scattered the people of Judah."

The third vision

⁵ Raising my eyes again, I saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, "Where are you going?" ⁶ He answered, "I'm going to measure Jerusalem, to find its width and its length." ⁷ As the angel who spoke to me came forward, another angel met him ⁸ and said, "Run and tell this to that young man: 'Jerusalem will remain unwall because of its multitude of people and livestock.' ⁹ For this is the word of Yahweh: 'I myself will be around her like a wall of fire, and also within her in Glory.'"

¹⁰ "Come, come! Flee from the land of the north," says Yahweh to all those whom he scattered to the four winds of heaven.

¹¹ "Come, escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." ¹² For thus Yahweh Sabaoth says, after his Glory sent me to condemn the nations that have plundered you, "Whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye." ¹³ Look, I will raise my hand against them, and they will be plundered by their slaves." Thus you will know that Yahweh Sabaoth has sent me.

A call to the daughter of Zion

+ ¹⁴ "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for I come to dwell among you" says Yahweh.

¹⁵ "On that day, many nations will join Yahweh and be my people, but my dwelling is among you." ¹⁶ The people of Judah will be for Yahweh as his portion in his holy land. He will choose Jerusalem again.

¹⁷ Keep still in Yahweh's presence, for he comes, having risen from his holy dwelling."

Fourth vision: the Messiah comes soon

3 ¹ He showed me then the high priest Joshua standing before the Angel of Yahweh. At Joshua's right side stood Satan, ready to accuse him. ² But the angel of Yahweh said to Satan, "May Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem – may he rebuke you! Is not this man a burning brand snatched from the fire?"

³ Clad in filthy garments, Joshua stood before the Angel. ⁴ who said to those in front of him, "Take off his filthy garments." Then turning to Joshua, he said, "See, I have taken away your guilt. Now I will clothe you with rich garments." ⁵ He added, "Put a clean turban

12. Jer 25, 11; Dn 8, 13

14. Is 54, 7; Hos 11, 8

16. Is 51, 3

4. Dn 7, 8; Rev 13, 1

5. Rev 21, 5

9. Is 48, 20; Rev 18, 4

12. Dt 34, 10

14. Zep 3, 14; Is 52, 9

17. Zep 1, 7; Acts 2, 20

2. Jud 9; Am 4, 11

he does not forget Jerusalem.

– Second vision, 2:1-4: the powers which will destroy their political enemies are already in place.

– Third vision, 2:5-9: if now the Jews have to protect Jerusalem with walls, shortly God will provide complete security.

+ Following we have one of the two calls to the captives: a call to rejoicing because God lives with his people. This text gives us even more motives for rejoicing. In the Bible the expression *Daughter of Zion*, is one of the many names for the People of God, that is to say, the church.

Zechariah speaks of the church in promising

that God will be permanently at work there so that all the people of the earth may be gathered in it.

■ This new vision of the high priest, Joshua seems to predict the renewal of the priesthood. At the beginning, Joshua is identified with the whole people, sad and in mourning to atone for sin. Later, it means Joshua alone and it announces the future priesthood, that of Christ, appointed by God as the mediator between him and men.

I am going to bring my servant the Branch. The eternal Saviour will be the seed springing from among men.



on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, as the Angel of Yahweh looked on.

⁷ The Angel of Yahweh gave Joshua this assurance. ⁸ "Listen to this word of Yahweh Sabaoth: If you walk in my ways and heed my charge, you shall rule my house and keep my courts, and I will give you free access among those standing here. ⁹ Listen further, O high priest Joshua and your associates who join in council with you: I am going to bring my servant the Branch. ¹⁰ See the stone I have set before Joshua – a stone with seven eyes. I myself will engrave an inscription on it, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. ¹¹ On that day, you will invite one another under your vines and fig trees." This is what Yahweh Sabaoth says."

The fifth vision

4 ¹ The angel who talked with me returned and shook me as one does to wake another from sleep. ² He asked, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on top. On the stand are seven lamps and there are seven pipes to feed them. ³ There are also two olive trees, one at the right of the bowl and another at the left." ⁴ I asked the angel, "What are these, my Lord?" ⁵ He replied with a question, "Don't you know what they are?" I answered, "No, my Lord." ⁶ He explained, "These seven are the eyes of Yahweh which range throughout the earth."

⁷ I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees to the right and left of the lampstand?" ⁸ Then I asked him a second time, "What are the two olive branches beside the two golden pipes from which fresh oil is poured out?" ⁹ His reply was a question, "Don't you know what these are?" I answered, "No, my Lord." ¹⁰ He said, "These are the two anointed with fresh oil, who serve the Lord of the whole earth."

¹¹ Yahweh Sabaoth says, "What are you, O mighty mountains? You will be levelled before Zerubbabel. He will quarry from you to the last stone which crowns the Temple amid shouts of: blessing, blessing on it!"

¹² The word of Yahweh then came to me, ¹³ "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this House; his hands also shall finish

it. Then you will know that Yahweh Sabaoth has sent him to you. ¹⁴ For even they who despise small things will rejoice on that day to see the crowning stone in the hands of Zerubbabel."

This is a word of Yahweh for Zerubbabel, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit."

The sixth vision

5 ¹ Again I raised my eyes and saw a flying scroll. ² He asked me, "What do you see?" And I answered, "A flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide."

³ He said to me, "This is the curse going forth throughout the earth. On one side it is written that every thief shall be banished; on the other side, that everyone who swears falsely shall be expelled. ⁴ I will send it out to the house of the thief, as well as to the house of one who swears falsely. It will lodge there and destroy the house – timber, stone and everything."

The seventh vision

⁵ Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said, "Look up and see what this is that is coming forth." ⁶ I asked, "What is it?" He answered, "This is a bushel container. This is the guilt of the people throughout the land." ⁷ The lead cover was lifted, and there sitting inside was a woman. ⁸ "This is wickedness," he said and thrust the woman inside the bushel stopping the opening with the lead cover.

⁹ I looked up and saw two winged women coming; their wings were like that of a stork. As they lifted the bushel into the air, ¹⁰ I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "Where are they taking the bushel?" ¹¹ He answered, "To Babylon, to build a house for it and set it down on the base."

The eighth vision

6 ¹ Once more I raised my eyes and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains of bronze. ² The first chariot had red horses, the second black, ³ the third white, and the fourth dapple grey. ⁴ I asked the angel talking with me, "What are these, my Lord."

⁵ The angel replied, "These are the four winds of heaven, going forth after presenting

7. 1 K 2, 4
Rev 2, 9

8. Is 11, 1; Jer 23, 5; 33, 15
8. Is 28, 16; 1 Pet 2, 4

9. Ex 28, 36
10. Ag 2, 3

10. 1 K 4, 25
4. Ezr 6, 11

2. Ex 25, 31,

◆ *Fifth vision: the new Israel will be subject to civil and religious authorities and both will be faithful to God.*

Sixth vision: the wicked and the thieves will be expelled from the new city.

Seventh vision: evil itself will be cast out.

The eighth vision recalls the first. The messengers of the Lord are at work in the world preparing for the realization of God's plan of salvation.



themselves before the Lord of the whole earth. ⁶ The chariot with black horses goes towards the north country, the one with white horses towards the west, and the one with dapple grey horses towards the land of the south."

⁷ As the reds asked to start off and to patrol the earth, the angel said to them, "Go, patrol the earth!" and they went. ⁸ Then he cried out to me, "Look, those have just gone to the land of the north and they will set my spirit at rest in the land of the north."

⁹ The word of Yahweh came to me,

¹⁰ "Take offerings from the returned captives, from the hands of Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, and go this very day to the house of Josiah, Zephaniah's son, where they have arrived from Babylon. ¹¹ Take silver and gold and have crowns made, which you will set on the head of the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak.

¹² Repeat to him these words of Yahweh Sabaoth: 'Here is the man whose name is Branch. From where he is he will branch out and build the temple of Yahweh. ¹³ It is he who will build the temple of Yahweh, and this will be his glory. He will sit and rule upon his throne. A priest will sit at his right, and there will be harmony between both.' ¹⁴ As for the crowns, they will remain in the temple of Yahweh as a memorial of what Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah, Zephaniah's son have done. ¹⁵ Those from afar will come and help build the temple of Yahweh, and you will know that Yahweh Sabaoth has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently listen to the voice of your God Yahweh."

7 ¹ On the fourth day of Chisley, the ninth month in the fourth year of Darius, the king, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah.

² The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regemmelech with their men to win the favour of Yahweh ³ and to question the priests of the House of Yahweh, God of hosts, and the prophets, "Must we mourn and fast in the fifth month as we have done these many years?"

The true religion

⁴ And the word of Yahweh, God of hosts came to me: ⁵ "Speak to the inhabitants of the land and to the

priests; say to them: When you fasted and mourned in September and December for seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? ⁶ Were you not those who decided to eat and to drink or not to do so. ⁷ Remember the message that Yahweh proclaimed through earlier prophets when Jerusalem was peacefully inhabited and the surrounding region as well, when the Negeb and the western foothills were settled?"

⁸ Yahweh said and ⁹ now says through me: Render true judgment, be kind and merciful to each other.

¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the alien or the poor, do not plot evil in your heart against one another.

¹¹ But they refused to listen and stubbornly turned their back, stopping their ears. ¹² They made their hearts hard as diamonds so as not to hear the Law or the words that Yahweh, the God of hosts spoke by his spirit through the earlier prophets. ¹³ Then Yahweh, God of hosts in his great anger proclaimed that just as they had not listened when he called to them, so when they cried to him he would not listen. ¹⁴ Yahweh said he would scatter them as in a whirlwind among nations they did not know and the land behind them would be devastated without anyone passing through it. In that way a pleasant land was made desolate."

+8 ¹ The word of Yahweh, the God of hosts was directed to me in this way,

² "I am intensely jealous for Zion, stirred by a burning anger for her sake. ³ Yahweh says: I will return to Zion and live in her midst. Jerusalem shall be called *City of faithfulness*

12. 3, 8	3. Lam 2, 18; Jl 2, 12	5. Is 58, 5; Mt 6, 16	10. Dt 24, 17; Am 8, 4; Is 1, 16
11. Is 6, 10; Ezk 2, 4			

o The authority is asked whether it is fitting to continue fasting. The prophet repeats the teachings of other prophets before him, a teaching summed up in Hosea's phrase: "I want love, says God, not sacrifices." Christ will say the

same to those who are more concerned about performing religious rituals than about living in authentic love for God.

Today, there are still people who believe that: by sacrifices and gifts they can bargain with God



and the Mountain of Yahweh of hosts, the *Mountain of holiness*."

⁴Yahweh, God of hosts speaks, "Old men and women will again sit in the squares, each with a stick in hand on account of their great age. ⁵The squares of the city will be filled with girls and boys playing."

⁶Yahweh, God of hosts declares, "If that seems impossible in the eyes of those who have returned from exile, will it be impossible for me as well?" – word of Yahweh.

⁷Yahweh, God of hosts says, "See, I am going to save my people, ⁸bringing them from the east and from the west and they will live in Jerusalem. They will be my people and I shall be their God in truth and in justice."

⁹Yahweh, God of hosts declares, "In these days you have just heard the words of the prophets, because on this day the foundation stone is laid for the reconstruction of the Temple. Now do not be discouraged. ¹⁰Before these days there was no salary for man nor food for beasts, people could not travel because of the ambushes, and I myself let everyone quarrel with his neighbour. ¹¹But from now on I will deal differently with this people."

¹²Yahweh says, "I am sowing peace. The vine will give its fruit, the earth its produce, the heavens its dew and to the remnant of this people I will give all these things.

¹³It will so happen that just as you were a curse among the nations, now I will save you, Judah and Israel, and make you a blessing. Have no fear and let your hands be strong!"

¹⁴This is what Yahweh, God of hosts, says: "Just as I resolved to do you harm because your fathers angered me and I did not relent, ¹⁵so now in these days am I determined to deal kindly with Jerusalem and Judah. Have no fear! ¹⁶This is what you must do: Speak the truth to one another; let those who judge give peace through honest sentences ¹⁷and do not plot evil in your heart against one another. Refrain from false oaths for it is what I detest – word of Yahweh.

¹⁸The word of Yahweh came to me, saying: ¹⁹"This is what you will say for my sake: From now on the fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will be days of joy, happy feastsdays. Only be peacemakers and sincere people."

²⁰Yahweh, the God of hosts speaks, "People will come from other nations, people from great cities. ²¹The inhabitants of one town will talk with those of another. Then they will say: 'Come, let us go and implore the favour of Yahweh, and I, too, will seek Yahweh.' ²²Many great peoples and powerful nations will come seeking Yahweh, God of hosts, in Jerusalem and pray to him."

²³Yahweh, the God of hosts assures you, "In those days ten men of different languages spoken in various lands, will take hold of a Jew by the hem of his garment and say: 'We, too, want to go with you for we have heard that God is with you.'"

3. Is 62, 12	4. Is 65, 20	6. Gen 18, 24; Jer 32, 27	8. Jer 31, 33	10. Ag 2, 15	20. Is 2, 2
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and obtain his favours. And yet, true religion is what Zechariah is saying: To think according to the truth, to do things honestly, to be kind and merciful with others, to respect widows, orphans, strangers and the poor, and not to entertain negative thoughts in our hearts against our neighbour (see Is 58 and James 1:27).

+ God is expressing all his love for the chosen people who are personified in their city, Jerusalem. He promises prosperity and the happiness of salvation. But, above all, he brings them to discover their role in the world: to be the point of

gathering for all the people.

For us, these are words of hope, but they also require us to behave in such a way that unbelievers may really become aware that God is present in us. We can apply what was said about Is 65 here: we must guide our countries toward this peace, full of rejoicing that only God can bring it about.

In 8:8 notice the expression: "They will be my people and I will be their God." This is the typical messianic promise and the sign of the new covenant.

SECOND PART OF THE BOOK

9 *An oracle; word of Yahweh.*

¹Yahweh dwells in the land of Had-rach and Damascus for the cities of Aram be-long to him as do all the tribes of Israel, ²and Hamath as well, on its border, Tyre and Sidon, the people supposed to be skillful. ³Tyre built herself a stronghold and piled up silver like dust, gold like the mud in the street. ⁴But the Lord will take away her possessions and throw down her power on the sea and she herself will perish by fire.

⁵Ashkelon will see and be afraid; Gaza, too, will tremble and Ekron as well for her hope will fade. The king will disappear from Gaza and Ashkelon will be without inhabitants. ⁶People of low birth will occupy Ash-dod. I will put an end to the pride of the Philis-tines. ⁷I shall take the meat with blood from his mouth and his unclean food from between his teeth. Only a remnant of them will be left and they will become like a clan among the Ju-deans. The people of Ekron will be like the Jebusites at the present time. ⁸I shall camp as a guard near my House to protect it from all who come and go. No longer shall an oppres-sor crush them now that I am aware of their affliction.

Your king comes, riding on a donkey

◆ ⁹Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout for joy, daughter of Jerusalem! For see, your king is coming,

just and victorious,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
¹⁰No more chariots in Ephraim,
no more horses in Jerusalem,
for he will do away with them,
The warrior's bow shall be broken
when he dictates peace to the nations.
He will reign from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹As for you, for the sake of your covenant sealed with blood, I shall release your prison-ers from the ancient cistern. ¹²The prisoners who wait in expectation will return to you, O Zion; today I declare that I will repay you double for your exile. ¹³I shall bend my bow – Judah – and Ephraim shall be my arrow. I shall send your sons, O Zion, against the Greeks! For me you shall be a warrior's sword.

¹⁴Yahweh will appear above them, his arrows flashing like lightning. He will sound his horn and come in a storm from the south. ¹⁵Yahweh, God of hosts, will protect them; they will triumph and trample sling stones underfoot. They will drink blood like wine and be filled with it like the bowls of the drink of fering, like the horns of an altar.

¹⁶On that day, Yahweh, their God, will save them and pasture them like a flock. ¹⁷How happy! how beautiful it will be! Grain will make young men flourish and new wine, the maidens!

Trust in the Lord

10 ¹Ask from Yahweh the spring rain, and Yahweh, who makes storms, will send showers of rain and make grass sprout in each one's field.

²The home idols utter empty words and diviners have false visions, dreams that fore-tell illusions and offer empty comfort. ³In con-sequence the people stray like sheep without a shepherd. Against these shepherds my anger is aroused and I will punish the leaders.

When Yahweh of hosts visits his flock, the nation of Judah, he will make it his proud war horse. ⁴He will provide the foundation, the tent peg, the bow in battle and all the leaders. ⁵They will be like warriors trampling mud in battle they will fight recalling that Yahweh is with them and rout those on horses.

⁶I will strengthen the nation of Judah and save the descendants of Joseph. I will bring them back for I have compassion on them and they will be as if I had never rejected them, for I am Yahweh, their God, who hears their cry.

⁷Ephraim's men will be considered heroic

9. Zep 3, 14; Ps 95, 1; Gen 49, 11; Mt 21, 5
14. Ex 19, 16; Mt 24, 31

10. Is 2, 4; Ps 72, 8
15. Is 66, 19; Ezk 38, 3; Jl 4, 6

11. Ex 24, 4
17. Jer 31, 12

12. Jer 38, 6
2. Ezk 34, 5

■ This is the beginning of the second part of the book (see introduction). The prophet announces a liberation of the people after a very cruel trial. A mysterious Shepherd (another name for the Messiah) will achieve this liberation when, having been rejected and killed by his people, he will arouse feelings of repentance in

them. These texts remind us of the Songs of the Servant of the Lord in the second part of the book of Isaiah.

◆ Announcing a humble Messiah. When he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus will want to fulfill this prophecy literally (see Matthew 21:5).

and feel joyful as if warmed by wine. Their children will rejoice on seeing it; their hearts will exult in Yahweh.

⁹Yahweh says: I shall whistle and gather them together for I have redeemed them and they shall be as numerous as before. ¹⁰Then I shall spread them among the nations, but from the most distant lands they will remember me. There they will raise their children and then return.

¹¹I shall bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I shall give them again the land of Gilead and Lebanon but these will not suffice for them. ¹²They will pass through the sea of Egypt and the depths of the Nile will be dried up. Then the arrogance of Assyria will be cast down and Egypt will no longer have a king. ¹³I shall strengthen them, says Yahweh, and they shall advance confident in my Name."

11 ¹Open your gateways, Lebanon, to let fire devour your cedars. ²Lament, cypresses, for the cedar has fallen. The majestic ones have been brought low. Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the impenetrable forest has been cut down. ³The sighs of the shepherds re-echo because their beautiful plain has been ravaged. The young lions' roar re-echoes because the fruitful valley of the Jordan is laid waste.

The example of the good shepherd

⁴Yahweh, my God, said to me: "Pasture the sheep to be slaughtered. ⁵for their buyers slay them with impunity, whereas those who sell them say: 'Praised be Yahweh! I am rich!' Even their shepherds have no pity on them. ⁶Yahweh says: I shall have pity no longer on the inhabitants of this land, and I am handing over each one to the power of his shepherd; although their king may oppress the land, I shall not rescue this people from their power."

⁷So I became the shepherd of the sheep to be slaughtered and provided myself with two staffs – one I called *Favour* and the other *Bonds*. I then pastured my flock, ⁸doing away

with three leaders in one month I lost patience with them and they, for their part, were disgusted with me. ⁹So I said, "No longer shall I shepherd you: whatever is to die, let it die and let what is to perish, perish, and let those who are left devour each other's flesh." ¹⁰Then I took and broke my staff *Favour* to break the covenant I had made with all nations. ¹¹It was broken off that day and the sheep merchants who watched knew it was Yahweh who had spoken.

¹²I then said to them, "If you agree, give me my wages, otherwise let it go." So they weighed out my wages, thirty pieces of silver. ¹³And Yahweh said to me, "Throw it into the treasury, this splendid sum at which they valued me!" So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the treasury in Yahweh's House.

¹⁴I then snapped in two my second staff *Bonds*, doing away with the friendship between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵Then Yahweh said to me, "Take another disguise, one that is fitting for a foolish shepherd ¹⁶for I am going to raise up another shepherd who will care nothing for lost sheep nor will he search for strays, or bind up the injured and pasture those that survive. No, but he will eat the fat ones and tear off their hoofs."

¹⁷Woe to the worthless shepherd who abandons his flock!
May the sword strike his arm
and his right eye!
Let his arm wither
and his right eye be blind!

The final battle

12 ¹An oracle. This is the word of Yahweh concerning Israel; Yahweh, who spread out the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth and formed the spirit of man within him ²foretells this, "See, I am making of Jerusalem a cup that will send the nations reeling; it will happen when Jerusalem is besieged.

³On that day I shall make Jerusalem an

4. Eek 34, 8 10. Hos 2, 20; Jer 2, 3 13. Mt 27, 3 17. Jn 10, 12 2. Is 54, 22; Jer 25, 15

• This is a parable. The prophet plays the role of the Lord himself. It seems to mean the following: Because the people did not want to be led by the Lord, the Lord will deliver them to evil shepherds who will take advantage of them. The Lord is dismissed for thirty silver pieces. A mysterious gesture which the Gospel will recall in dealing with Judas' betrayal (see Mt 27:10). Elsewhere in the Bible God threatens the evil rulers. Here, he reproaches the people who, somehow, have the shepherds they deserve.

• This chapter announces the tragedy which will move the Jewish people: all the nations will be opposed to them and they will be saved by God. Verses 8-11, which John will recall in Jn 19:37 and Rv 1:7, show the death of Christ in a veiled way. The Jews will be converted when they see the one they have pierced. From his sacrifices the fountain mentioned in 13:1 will spring forth, a fountain of forgiveness and of holiness.

Note that Hadadrimmon was a Phoenician god; the inhabitants of the plain of Megiddo



immovable rock for all the nations around her. All the nations will be united against her and all who try to lift the rock will be badly injured."

⁴Yahweh says: "On that day I will make every horse wild with fright, every rider demented. All the horses of the nations will be blinded but I will watch over Judah and ⁵the leaders of the clans of Judah will say to themselves: 'Jerusalem is invincible because Yahweh is with us.'

⁶On that day I will make the leaders of the clans of Judah like a brazier of fire in a woodland and a flaming torch among the sheaves. They will devour right and left all the nations around them, while Jerusalem will continue to hold its site.

⁷Yahweh will first save the towns and villages of Judah so that David's people and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not feel more important than the rest of Judah.

⁸On that day Yahweh will strengthen the inhabitants of Jerusalem in such a way that the weaklings among them shall be like David and David's people like God, like an angel of Yahweh before them.

⁹On that day I will threaten with destruction all the nations that came against Jerusalem.

¹⁰I will pour out on the family of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit which will make them look towards me with love and confidence. They will mourn for the slain as for an only child and weep bitterly as for a first-born. ¹¹The mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning of Haddadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

¹²Each family will mourn individually: the family of David by themselves and their wives separately; the family of Nathan by themselves and their wives separately, ¹³the family of Levi by themselves and their wives separately,

the family of Shimei by themselves and their wives separately ¹⁴and the same with the other families, each family by themselves and their wives separately.

+13 ¹On that day a spring will well up for the family of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse themselves of sin and defilement.

Yahweh, God of hosts says: ²On that day I will wipe out the names of idols from the land and never again will they be mentioned. ³I will also remove the prophets and their unclean spirits and expel them from the land. If a prophet does prophesy, his parents, father and mother, will say to him: 'You shall live no longer for you uttered lies in the name of Yahweh.' His own father and mother will stab him when he prophesies.

⁴On that day the prophets will be ashamed of their prophetic visions and no longer wear a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. ⁵Instead, each of them will say: 'I am not a prophet, I am a farmer, the land has owned me since my youth.' ⁶And if anyone says to him: 'What are these wounds on your hands?' He will answer: With these I was wounded in my friend's house."

Final persecution

■ ⁷Sword, awake and strike my shepherd, the man who is near to me!" says Yahweh, God of hosts. "Strike the shepherd and let the flock be scattered!" Yahweh threatens, "I will turn against the little ones, ⁸and in all the land, two-thirds shall be destroyed and one-third left. ⁹This third shall be cleansed by fire; I shall refine them as silver is refined; I shall test them as gold is tested. They shall call upon my Name and I will hear them. I will say, 'They

10. Jn 19, 37; Rev 1, 7	12. Eek 8, 14	13. 2 S 5, 14	1. Eek 47, 1; 36, 25	2. Mi 5, 11
5. Am 7, 14; Mt 7, 15	6. 1 K 18, 28	7. Mt 26, 31	9. Mal 3, 2; Hos 2, 25	

celebrated his death every year.

+ In the final days, an answer will be given to the thirst for forgiveness which the Bible itself aroused in the faithful (see Jn 7:37 and 20:22). The fountain mentioned here is like the river coming from the Temple (Ez 47).

I will remove the prophets and their unclean spirits. The days of the great prophets are over and the author of these lines realizes that the only prophets left are fortune tellers, liars

and charlatans. There is no room for those in a community which has received all the truth that God can reveal to us in the person of his Son.

■ Another text referring to the good shepherd, whom Yahweh strikes. This means that the shepherd will be wounded and that the Lord will use this event for his plan of salvation. See what was said in Is 66:8 about this form of expression of the Jews.

Matthew remembers this place in 26:31.



are my people," and they shall say, "Yahweh is my God."

Another description of the final battle

◆ **14** ¹The day of Yahweh will come when people will divide spoils in your midst. ²I will let all the nations come against Jerusalem to attack it. The city will be taken and houses pillaged, women violated. Half of the city will be deported but the rest will not be removed. ³Then Yahweh will go forth and fight against the nations as he does on the day of battle. ⁴On that day his feet will rest on the mount of Olives, facing Jerusalem on the east and the mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west by a deep valley leaving half of the mountain to the north and half to the south. ⁵You will flee through my mountain valley for it will extend as far as Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Yahweh will come and all his holy ones with him.

⁶On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. ⁷It will be a unique day, known to Yahweh, without day or night and when evening comes there will still be light.

⁸On that day living water will flow from Jerusalem, half to the sea in the east, half to the sea in the west; it will never dry up in summer or in winter. ⁹Yahweh will be king of all the earth. On that day there will be Yahweh alone and only his Name.

¹⁰All the land will be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon in the Negeb, but Jerusalem shall be outstanding on its heights, from the Benjamin Gate to the First Gate, to the Corner Gate and from the tower of Hananel to the royal winepress. ¹¹Its people shall no

longer fear any disaster. Jerusalem shall be inhabited and secure.

¹²And this is how Yahweh will punish all the nations that made war on Jerusalem: each one's flesh will rot even as he stands, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, their tongue in their mouth. ¹³A similar plague shall strike the horses, mules, camels and donkeys, and all the animals in their camps. ¹⁴On that day Yahweh will cause great panic among them: they will take hold of one another and attack one another while ¹⁵the men of Judah fight in Jerusalem. The wealth of all the neighbouring nations will be left in that place, gold, silver and garments in great quantities.

¹⁶The survivors of all the nations that fought against Jerusalem will come, year by year, to worship Yahweh, God of hosts and celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁷If any peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King Yahweh, God of hosts, they will have no rain. ¹⁸If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they too will be afflicted with the plague destined for those who do not go up to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁹That shall be the punishment of Egypt and of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles.

²⁰On that day, even the bells of the horses shall be inscribed: 'Consecrated to Yahweh.' ²¹The cooking pots of the Temple will be as sacred as the bowls of offering that are used for the altar, and even the ordinary cooking pots of the people of Jerusalem and Judah will be consecrated to Yahweh, God of hosts. So everyone who offers sacrifice may use them for cooking. Still more: from that day, there will no longer be merchants in the House of Yahweh, God of hosts.

2. Is 66, 18; Ezk 38

8. Rev 22, 5; Ezk 47, 1

4. Mi 1, 4

13. Ezk 38, 21

5. Gen 28, 12

17. Dt 16, 13

6. Job 1, 6; 2 Thes 1, 10; Ps 89, 6

21. Jn 2, 16

◆ This chapter describes with amazing images the kingdom of God which will be established after the great trial. A vision of the heavenly Jerusalem which the apostle John will renew in Revelation. All the nations of the world have found the living God and they come to adore him. This resembles the end of chapter 66 of Isaiah.

Yahweh will come and all his holy ones with him (5). These are his angels, responsible for his

works, just as in Ps 89:6; 138:2; 149:1. See Mt 16:27.

In the new Jerusalem, religion will not be an activity apart from other human activities: men and women will no longer be believers at Mass on Sundays and the rest of the week, the same as everybody else, mediocre and sinful. Rather everything will be holy. Zechariah says this by using ideas peculiar to his time (v. 20-21).

Malachi



Shortly after Haggai and Zechariah, this prophet intervenes to correct several evil customs within the community. Through Malachi, the Lord argues with those who call him to account, but who do not acknowledge his love. "You say..."

1 ¹ These are the words that Yahweh directed to Israel through Malachi.

² When Yahweh says, "I love you," you reply, "How do you show that love?" So Yahweh asks you, ³ "Was Esau not Jacob's brother: Yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau. See how I left his mountains desolate and abandoned his land to the jackals of the desert. ⁴ If Edom decides to rebuild its ruins, after having been destroyed, Yahweh of hosts says: They may rebuild, but I will demolish. You will call them: 'Accursed country' and: 'Nation with which Yahweh is forever displeased.' ⁵ You will see this with your own eyes, then you will exclaim: The power of Yahweh goes beyond the borders of Israel.

Where is your respect for me?

⁶ The son honours his father, the servant respects his master. Now if I am a father, where is the honour due to me? If I am your master, where is your respect for me? This is what Yahweh of hosts wants you to know, priests who despise his name. But you will only ask: How have we despised your name?

⁷ You present contaminated foods on my altar, yet you say: How did we defile you? You think that my table does not deserve respect. ⁸ When you bring a blind animal as a sacrifice, or when you present one that is lame or

sick, are you not doing wrong? Go present these to the governor; will he be pleased and receive you well" says Yahweh of hosts.

⁹ So now, ask God that he may have mercy on us. But if it goes badly for us because of your sin, are you those who should entreat him? ¹⁰ Who among you would close my doors that you may no longer come to kindle fire upon my altar in vain? I am not pleased with you, says Yahweh of hosts, nor am I pleased with your offerings.

¹¹ See, from the rising of the sun to its setting, all the nations revere my Name and everywhere incense is offered to my Name as well as a pure offering. I am rightly esteemed among the nations, says Yahweh of hosts. ¹² But you despise my Name when you say: 'The Lord's table is dirty and his food is good for nothing.' ¹³ When you complain that you do not like this food you despise me, says Yahweh. You bring a stolen animal, lame or diseased, to offer to me in sacrifice. Do you think that I will accept it? ¹⁴ Cursed be the cheater who, after promising me a bull from his herd, sacrifices a stunted animal. For

4. Ex 32, 29

15. Eph 5, 25

16. Mt 19, 6

o The sin of those who offer their surplus to God. From the rising of the sun... Malachi observes that, if the Jews are God's people, they cannot avoid doing what other people do, who, in their own way, worship God sincerely even though they do not know his revelation.

The sin of the priests who do not know how to teach the Law as it is their responsibility to do. If they do not commit themselves to educate the people of God as to their obligations, God will not allow them to continue their external rituals.



I am a great King and my Name will be respected through all the nations, says Yahweh of hosts.

Warnings for the priests

2 ¹ This warning is also for you, priests. If you do not listen to it or ² concern yourself to glorify my Name, says Yahweh of hosts, I will send the curse on you and curse even your blessings.

³ I will curse you for none of you takes his ministry seriously. Right now, I am going to break your arm, throw dung in your face, the very dung of your animals, and sweep you away with them. ⁴ And you will realize that it was I who threatened to put an end to my covenant with Levi, your father, says Yahweh.

⁵ My covenant with him spoke of life and peace, and I gave him these; it also spoke of respect and he respected me and revered my Name. ⁶ His mouth taught the true doctrine and nothing evil came from his lips; he walked in accord with me, being peaceful and upright, and brought back many people from their wickedness. ⁷ The lips of the priest speak of knowledge, and the Law must be found in his mouth, since he is the messenger of Yahweh of hosts.

⁸ But you, says Yahweh of hosts, have strayed from my way, and moreover caused many to stumble because of your teaching. You have broken my covenant with Levi. ⁹ Therefore I let all the people despise you and consider you unworthy, because you do not follow my ways and you show partiality in your judgments.

¹⁰ Do we not all have the same father? Has the same God not created all of us? Why, then, does each of us betray his brother, defiling the Covenant of our ancestors?

¹¹ Judah has been unfaithful, a grave sin has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem: Judah has defiled the sacred inheritance of Yahweh by loving and marrying the daughters of a foreign god. ¹² Let whoever does this be cut off from the homeland of Jacob and let there be

no one to defend him in the tribunal or present an offering for him to Yahweh.

Respect for marriage

¹³ You also commit another offense. As Yahweh refuses to look at your offerings and does not take them into account, you come weeping and wailing and cover the altar with tears. ¹⁴ And then you ask: 'Why?'

It is because Yahweh has seen how you dealt with your first wife, the wife of your youth. You betrayed her although she was your companion with whom you made a covenant. ¹⁵ Has God not made a single being and given him breath? And what does he seek but a family given by God? Do not betray, then, the wife of your youth.

¹⁶ I hate divorce, says Yahweh, the God of Israel, and those who are actually covering their violence. Be very careful, and do not betray.

¹⁷ You annoy Yahweh with your discourses and you dare say: 'How did we annoy him?' You annoy him whenever you say that Yahweh looks favourably on those who do evil, and lets everything go well with them, or when you ask: 'Where is the God who does justice?'

I send my messenger to prepare the way

3 ¹ Now I am sending my messenger ahead of me to clear the way; then suddenly the Lord for

2. Dt 4, 37

3. Gen 27; Eek 25, 12

4. Rom 9, 13

8. Dt 15, 21

11. Zep 3, 9

The sin of those who dismiss their wives. The Law and customs allowed divorce with specific guarantees for the wife. Malachi says what Jesus will teach with full authority in Matthew 19:1: the will of God for marriage is that the two remain together as one. The one who betrays his wife cannot encounter God.

+ Now I am sending my messenger. To those complaining that God does not reveal his justice, nor reward sufficiently those who serve

him, Malachi responds by declaring that the Lord will come soon. And he announces the coming of a messenger of God who will be responsible for preparing the way for him, and that will be the sign of his coming soon. The paragraphs 3:1-2 and 4:22-24, complementing each other, point to John the Baptist. The Gospel will recall them in Lk 1:16; 7:27; Jn 3:21. Also see Mark 9:9.

■ Then comes the discussion with those ex-

whom you long will enter the sanctuary. The envoy of the covenant which you so greatly desire already comes, says Yahweh of hosts.² Who can bear the day of his coming and remain standing when he appears? For he is like fire in the foundry and like the lye used for bleaching.

³ He will be as a refiner or a fuller. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. So Yahweh will have priests who will present the offering as it should be.⁴ Then Yahweh will accept with pleasure the offering of Judah and Jerusalem, as in former days.

⁵ Yahweh says: I will dwell among you to do justice and demand the immediate punishment of the sorcerers and the adulterers, of those who swear false oaths, who oppress the wage-earner, the widow and the orphan, who do not respect the rights of the foreigner. They do all this and have no fear of me.

■ ⁶ I, Yahweh, have not changed in anything; just as you, children of Jacob, are always the same.⁷ Since the day of your ancestors you stray from my ordinances and do not practise them. Return to me and I will return to you, says Yahweh of hosts. But you ask: 'Why do we have to return?' ⁸ Can a man deceive God? Yet you cheat me and moreover ask: 'How did we cheat you?' ⁹ I point out your sacred tributes and the tenth which is due to me. ¹⁰ Cursed be you who cheat me! Cursed be all the nation! Turn over into the temple treasury the tenth part of all, that there may be food in my House. Then you may test me says Yahweh of hosts, to see if I will not open the gates of heaven and bring blessed rain to you up to the last drop. ¹¹ I will drive away the locusts that they may not devour your fields, and let not the vines wither in your land, says Yahweh. ¹² Then all the na-

tions will congratulate you for you will excel among the lands.

¹³ You say very harsh things about me, says Yahweh, and yet you say: 'What harsh things did we say against you?' ¹⁴ You say: 'It is useless to serve God. There is no benefit in observing his commandments or in leading an austere life for his sake. Happy are the shameless!' ¹⁵ Those who do evil succeed in everything; though they provoke God, they remain unharmed.

¹⁶ Then those who respect Yahweh began talking among themselves. Yahweh listened and heard what they said. He ordered at once that the names of those who respect him and reverence his Name be written in a record.

¹⁷ And he declared, 'They will be mine on the day I make my choice. I will have mercy on them as a father has on his obedient son.' ¹⁸ Then you can distinguish the good from the bad, those who obey God from those who disobey him.

4 ¹⁹ The day already comes, flaming as a furnace. On that day all the proud and evil-doers will be burned like straw in the fire. They will be left without branches or roots. ²⁰ On the other hand the sun of justice will shine upon you who respect my Name and bring health in its rays. You will come out leaping like fattened calves. ²¹ You will trample on the evil-doers and they will be like ashes scattered on your way when I do this, says Yahweh.

I will send Elijah soon

²² Remember the law of my servant Moses, the laws and ordinances I gave him at Mount Horeb for the whole of Israel. ²³ I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the day of Yahweh comes, for it will be a great and terrible day. ²⁴ He will reconcile the parents to their children, and the children with their parents, so that I may not have to curse this land when I come.

1. 3, 19

5. Ezk 16

7. Hos 2, 25; Zac 1, 3

11. Dt 28, 8

15. Ps 37, 1; 73

16. Ezk 13, 9; Rev 21, 27

20. Lk 1, 78

23. Mt 17, 9

24. Lk 1, 17

pecting material favours as a reward for their devotion; they wish to be rewarded for having done no evil. God agrees to dialogue with such believers and through Malachi, he speaks to them in

the only language they can understand: if they do good, one day they will see the Sun of justice and they will jump around like calves and trample the wicked underfoot.

DANIEL



The author of the book of Daniel must have been one of the teachers of the Law who, in the days of the great persecution at the time of the Maccabees, encouraged the spiritual resistance of his people. And he must surely have included himself among those guides in the faith whom God would reward in a special way (Dn 11:33 and 12:3). While the Maccabees were heading the armed resistance against the oppressors, these masters of the Law, suspicious of politics and weapons, limited themselves to giving an example of faithfulness to God's Covenant and to his laws.

The core of his message is in chapters 7-12 and it can be summarized as follows:

- the great persecution against the Jewish people is part of God's plan for salvation;
- the persecuting kings, especially Antiochus Epiphanes - remembered so many times in a figurative way - will not succeed in destroying the believing people;
- long after the persecution, the kingdom of God will come.

But the author also adapted the stories found in chapters 1-6 to his message. These stories were teaching the Jews settled in foreign countries and, at times, serving the kings there, that they could not compromise the demands of the faith and the practices of the Law, under any circumstances, whether in terms of foods (1:8) or the rejection of idolatrous worship (2 and 6).

WAS THERE A MAN NAMED DANIEL?

The Jewish community compiling the biblical books placed the book of Daniel, not among the prophets of the 6th century (the time of Daniel), but rather among the books of the second century before Christ. The book was not placed among the prophets, but under the heading of writings about religious teaching. They did this because they were aware that the "story" of Daniel and his visions was not a historical account, but rather literary fiction.

We must realize that in the two centuries before Christ, this way of speaking about present events as if God had revealed them to some famous person of the past, was very fashionable. And so they would tell of this person's visions, predicting events happening in the present, and then tell how this visionary received the religious interpretation of these events from God: the saving plan of God was being fulfilled.

In those days, there existed an art of using symbolic numbers (three and a half, six, seven ten), and symbolic colors (white was a sign of victory), and of having angels intervene. This category of books was called *apocalypse*, or, revelations. There are two of them in the Bible: the apocalypse of Daniel and John's.

In Oriental writings *Daniel* was the name of an ancient sage (Ez 14:14). From there emerged the character of Daniel, a prophet and a sage, who would have lived among the exiles in Babylon. His words and example were to enlighten the Jews in contact with the pagans.

There are three very famous passages in this book. In 7:9-14 we have the text referring to the Son of Man. Jesus refers to this text when he presents himself as the Son of Man (Mk 13:26 and 14:62). In another text, (Dn 12:13), we have the announcing of the resurrection of the dead. Also, the prophecy in 9:21-27 has lent itself to many commentaries about the end of the world. We will see, however, that it refers to many things except the end of the world.



1 ¹ In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign as king of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem. ² The Lord delivered into his hands King Jehoiakim of Judah, and some of the vessels from the temple of God as well. These he carried off to the land of Shinar and placed in the treasure house of his god.

³ King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his chief eunuch Ashpenaz to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility: "young men without physical defect, handsome, intelligent and wise, well informed, quick to learn and understand, and suitable for service in the king's palace. They were to be taught the language and literature of the Chaldeans." ⁴ They were allotted a daily portion of food and wine from the king's table and were to be trained for three years, after which they were to enter the king's service.

⁵ Among these were young men of Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ⁷ whose names the chief eunuch changed – Daniel to Belteshazzar, Hananiah to Shadrach, Mishael to Meshach, and Azariah to Abednego.

Daniel refuses to eat unclean food

■ ⁶ As Daniel was resolved not to make himself unclean with the king's food or wine, he begged the chief eunuch to spare him this defilement. ⁹ By the grace of God, the chief eunuch had been sympathetic to Daniel, ¹⁰ but he was afraid of the king, and so he said, "If the king, who has allotted your food and drink, sees that you look more emaciated than the other young men of your age, he might think ill of me. It will put my life in danger to give into your wish."

¹¹ Daniel then turned to the steward whom the chief eunuch had put in

charge of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days. Give us only vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ and see how we look in comparison with the young men who eat food from the king's table. Then treat us in accordance with what you see."

¹⁴ The steward agreed and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ at the end of which they looked healthier and better fed than any of the young men who ate the king's food. ¹⁶ So the steward continued to give them vegetables instead of the choice food and wine.

¹⁷ To these four youths God gave wisdom and proficiency in literature, and to Daniel the gift of interpreting visions and dreams.

¹⁸ At the end of the period set by the king for the youths' training, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them and found none to equal Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These four became members of the king's court. ²⁰ In any matter of wisdom and discernment about which the king consulted, he found them ten times better than all the magicians, enchanters in his whole kingdom. ²¹ Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

◆ **2** ¹ In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he had a series of troubling dreams which rendered him sleepless. ² The king summoned magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldean diviners to interpret his dreams. When they arrived and stood in his presence, ³ the king

5. 2 K 25, 29
Gen 41, 12

8. 2 Mac 6, 18; Jud 10, 5; Tob 1, 11; 2 Mac 5, 27
1. Gen 41, 8

9. Est 2, 9

17. 5, 5;

■ At times, the observance of the law seems difficult to believers, especially when they are living among those who do not share their faith. Are they no less free than their companions? This text declares that the divine commands are a source of life and strength for those who follow them.

Because of his faithfulness, Daniel will obtain the knowledge of divine things as he will demonstrate, over and above his human culture; this

gift from God is obtained only through faithfulness and sacrifice.

◆ The Chaldean sages were mixing science with magic to become prestigious in the eyes of their compatriots, quite given to superstition. To say someone was Chaldean meant he was a sage, a magician or a wizard. Such practices were forbidden to the Jews according to the law of Moses (Dt 18:9).

Here the Chaldean magicians are ridiculed.



said, "I had a terrible dream and I want to know its meaning."

⁴ The Chaldeans answered in Aramaic, "Live forever, O King! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give you its meaning."

⁵ But the king replied, "You have to tell me the dream and interpret it too. That is my decision. If you won't do it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses razed to the ground."

⁶ But if you can tell me the dream and its meaning, I will give you presents and reward you with great honor."

⁷ They insisted, "Let the king tell us his dream and we will explain what it means."

⁸ The king said, "You are only trying to gain time, for you know what I will surely do," that if you do not tell me my dream there is only one sentence for you. You have conspired to mislead me with a deceitful interpretation, hoping that times will change. But if you can show me that you have the ability to know what my dream is, I can be sure that you also have the power to understand its meaning."

¹⁰ The Chaldeans exclaimed, "No man on earth can do what your majesty asks. Never has any king, however great and mighty, asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or diviner. ¹¹ What the king demands is too difficult. No one can tell him that except the gods who do not live among men."

¹² This made the king so furious that he ordered all the wise men of Babylon executed. ¹³ Upon issuance of the decree to put the wise men to death, a search was also made for Daniel and his companions to have them killed. ¹⁴ Daniel, however, talked prudently with Arioch, the

commander of the king's guards who had gone out to kill the wise men. ¹⁵ "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Daniel asked, and Arioch explained. ¹⁶ Daniel then went to the king and asked for the suspension of the execution to give him time to interpret the dream.

¹⁷ Daniel returned home and informed his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ¹⁸ He asked them to implore God's mercy regarding this mystery, so that they would not perish with the rest of Babylon's wise men. ¹⁹ Then in a night vision, the mystery was revealed to Daniel. He blessed the God of heaven:

²⁰ Blessed be God's name forever and ever.

for his are wisdom and power.

²¹ He changes times and seasons;

He sets up and deposes kings.

He gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to the discerning.

²² He reveals things deep and hidden;

he knows what lies in darkness;

for the light dwells with him.

²³ I give thanks and praise to you, O God of my fathers.

You have given me wisdom and power;

you have shown me what we asked for –

you have made known to us the dream of the king.

²⁴ After this Daniel went to Arioch, the commander appointed by the king to execute the wise men of Babylon. Daniel said to him, "Do not execute the wise men yet. Bring me to the king, and I will interpret his dreams." ²⁵ At once Arioch took Daniel to the king and said, "Here is a man found among the Judean captives who says he can interpret the king's dream."

²⁶ The king asked Daniel, who had been named Beltheshazzar, "Can you tell me what my dream was and what it means?"

Daniel interprets the dream

o ²⁷ Daniel answered, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner

11. Gen 41, 16

22. 1 Cor 2, 10; 1 Tim 6, 16

28. 2 Cor 2, 10

They claim to discover the future, but they are unable to say what the king's dream was before he relates it.

o Several writers of the time were thinking that history would bring a succession of four empires. Because they were pessimists, they



can interpret the king's dream. ²⁸ But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he was shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future. I will tell you the dream and visions you had.

²⁹ As you lay in bed, O King, your thoughts turned to the future, and he who reveals mysteries showed you what is to happen. ³⁰ This mystery has been revealed to me not because I am wiser than anybody else but so that you may know what it means and what went on in your mind.

³¹ In your vision you saw a statue – very large, very bright, terrible to look at. ³² Its head was of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. ³⁴ As you watched, a rock cut from a mountain but not by human hands, struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, smashing them. ³⁵ All at once the iron, clay, bronze, silver and gold crumbled into pieces as fine as chaff on the threshing floor in summer. The wind swept them off and not a trace was left. But the rock that struck the statue became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

³⁶ That was the dream. Now the interpretation. ³⁷ You, O king, are king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given dominion, strength, power and glory, ³⁸ and into whose hand he has placed mankind, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, making you ruler over them. You are that head of gold.

³⁹ After you, another kingdom inferior to yours will rise. Then a third kingdom of bronze will rule the whole world. ⁴⁰ Last shall be a fourth kingdom strong as iron and just as iron breaks and crushes everything else, so will it break and smash all the others. ⁴¹ The partly-clay and partly-iron feet and toes mean that it will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron, just as you saw iron mixed with clay. ⁴² And as the toes were partly iron and partly clay, the kingdom will be partly strong and partly weak. ⁴³ Just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, the people will be a mixture but will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

⁴⁴ In the time of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom never to be destroyed or delivered up to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and put an end to them. And it will endure forever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of your vision of a rock cut from a mountain not by human hands, the rock which struck the statue and broke into pieces the iron, bronze, clay, silver and gold. The great God has shown the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation reliable."

⁴⁶ King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and ordered that oblation and incense be offered to him. ⁴⁷ The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings and the revealer of mysteries. That is why you were able to reveal this mystery."

30. Gen 41, 16

34. Is 31, 8

35. Rev 20, 11

38. Gen 1, 28

44. 1 S 7, 16; Lk 1, 33

thought that from the beginning of creation, things had taken a turn for the worse, and that it would continue to get worse. They would express this by placing the golden age at the start, and the iron age – the age of weapons – at the end.

In this book the four consecutive kingdoms are those of Nebuchadnezzar, the Medes, the Persians and that of Alexander of Macedonia,

the conqueror (kingdom of iron). From the latter would come the Persian-Syrian rule which will be destroyed by an extraordinary intervention of God.

This is the lesson from the dream: Men alone cannot straighten out the history of people which is always getting worse. However, God will intervene and he will establish his own universal kingdom.



⁴⁸ The king gave Daniel a high position and showered gifts on him. He made him governor of the entire province of Babylon and in charge of all its wise men. ⁴⁹ At Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators of the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the king's court.

The golden statue

3 ¹ King Nebuchadnezzar had a golden statue, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, erected on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² Then he summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come for the dedication of the statue. ³ All those summoned came together for the dedication and stood before the statue set up by King Nebuchadnezzar. ⁴ There a herald proclaimed aloud, "Nations and peoples of every language, you are hereby commanded ⁵ to fall down and worship the golden statue as soon as you hear the music played on the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all other instruments. ⁶ Whoever fails to do this will at once be thrown into a burning furnace." ⁷ At this command, all the people of every nation and language who heard the sound of music on the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and other instruments fell down and worshipped the statue set up by King Nebuchadnezzar.

The Jews: accused and condemned

+ ⁸ It was then that Chaldean diviners came to the king accusing the

Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Live forever, O king! ¹⁰ You issued a decree that upon hearing the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and other musical instruments, everyone must fall down and worship the golden statue, ¹¹ and whoever failed to do so was to be thrown into a burning furnace. ¹² There are some Jews, those whom you appointed administrators of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who gave no heed to your order. They would not serve your gods or worship the golden image you set up."

¹³ Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were immediately brought before the king. ¹⁴ King Nebuchadnezzar questioned them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden statue I have set up? ¹⁵ If you hear now the sound of horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and other instruments, will you fall down and worship the statue I made? If you won't, you know the punishment: you will immediately be thrown into a burning furnace. And then what god can deliver you out of my hands?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we need not defend ourselves before you on this matter. ¹⁷ If you order us to be thrown into the furnace, the God we serve will rescue us. ¹⁸ But even if he won't, we would like you to know, O king, that we are not going to

+ Being in the service of a pagan king involves some risks for a believing Jew. At times these kings act in an overpowering and whimsical way and they want to impose attitudes which are condemned by the Law of God. In such a case, a believer – even if he occupies a high position

– will have to sacrifice his career and even his life, in order to remain faithful to his God.

In 3:7-18 Daniel indicates what should be the believer's attitude: rely on the help of God who can do all things; however, be aware that God is not obligated to work a miraculous salvation.

1. 9, 27; 11, 31; 1 Mac 1, 54

4. Is 66, 18; Rev 5, 9

5. Rev 13, 14

serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have set up."

¹⁹ Nebuchadnezzar's face reddened with fury as he looked at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of his strongest soldiers to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the burning furnace. ²¹ At once they were bound and thrown into the furnace, with their hats, shoes and garments on, ²² for the king's order was very urgent. So fierce was the fire in the furnace that it devoured even the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into it. ²³ The three, bound fast, fell into the midst of the blazing furnace.

²⁴ They walked in the midst of the flames, singing to God and praising the Lord. ²⁵ Azariah stood up in the midst of the fire and prayed aloud:

²⁶ Blessed and worthy of praise are you,
O Lord God of our fathers!
your name is glorious forever!

²⁷ Justice is in all that you do;
your acts are faultless, your ways are
right,
your judgments always true.

■ ²⁸ You have indeed given a just sentence in bringing evil upon us and upon Jerusalem, the Holy City of our fathers. You have acted in accordance with truth and justice, as punishment for our sins.

²⁹ For we have sinned and acted perversely by deserting you. We have sinned gravely in everything and have not listened to your commandments. ³⁰ We have not observed them, and we have not fulfilled everything you commanded us for our good.

³¹ All the evils you have brought upon us, all that you have done to us, you have done according to your just sentence.

³² You have given us into the hands of our enemies, lawless people, the worst of the impious, into the hands of an unjust king, the most perverse in all the world.

³³ And today, we cannot even open our mouths; shame and humiliation have overcome those who serve and worship you.

³⁴ Do not abandon us forever, do not reject your covenant for your Name's sake.

³⁵ Do not withdraw your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham, your friend, of Isaac, your servant, of Israel, your holy one, ³⁶ to whom you promised to multiply their race as the stars of heaven and the sand on the shore of the sea.

³⁷ Lord, see, we have become the least among the nations in all the world, and we are humiliated because of our sins.

³⁸ At this time, we no longer have a king, or a prophet, or a leader. We cannot offer you holocausts, sacrifices, offerings, or incense. We have no place to present to you the first-fruits of our crops, and so obtain your favour.

³⁹ But at least when we present ourselves with a contrite soul and humbled spirit may we then be acceptable to you. ⁴⁰ more than by offerings of rams and calves as holocausts, and of thousands of fat lambs.

May this sacrifice of ours today obtain for us your favour for we know that those who trust in you shall never be disappointed.

⁴¹ And now, we serve you with our whole heart, we fear you and we seek your face. ⁴² Do not leave us in our humiliation, but treat us according to your kindness and your great mercy. ⁴³ Free us in keeping with your wonders, and give us the glory of your Name, Lord.

⁴⁴ Let those who maltreat your servants be confounded, may they be covered with shame and deprived of all their power. Crush their strength, ⁴⁵ and let them know that you alone are God and Lord, glorious over all the earth."

⁴⁶ The king's servants who had thrown

27. Rev 16, 7

31. Lev 26, 14

32. 1 Mac 1, 20

34. Jer 14, 7

37. Jer 42, 2

38. Hos 3, 4

39. Mt 6, 7; Hos 6, 6

40. Ps 22, 6

42. Ps 51, 13

The faults of those who do not know the true God are emphasized: they worship dead things. Gold takes the place of a god (a 30 meter statue would cost a fortune, but it is absolutely lifeless). These gods are speechless and lifeless, and yet, intelligent men kneel before them. Differently from the living God who hears his faithful people and saves them, idols do not know those who worship them and they cannot help them (the flames of the fire kill the Chaldean soldiers).

■ Daniel's prayer teaches the persecuted Jews what they must say to God: "Lord, remember your promises and forget our sins. Have compassion on your humiliated people and come to save us."

Even though God works a miracle in this story, history records that many martyrs did not escape death. According to the Letter to the Hebrews 11:39, those martyrs were not granted to see the fulfilment of God's promises: God



them into the furnace did not stop kindling the fire with oil, tar, tow and vine shoots,⁴⁷ so that the flames rose up to about twenty-five metres above the furnace⁴⁸ and extending out, burnt the Chaldeans who were standing around.

⁴⁹ But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace beside Azariah and his companions; he drove the flames of the fire outside the furnace, and blew upon them,⁵⁰ in the middle of the furnace, a coolness like that of wind and dew, so that the fire did not touch them or cause them pain or trouble them.

⁵¹ Then the three began singing together, glorifying and blessing God within the furnace, and saying:

⁵² "Blessed are you, Lord, God of our fathers, be praised and exalted for ever.

Blessed is your holy and glorious name, sung and exalted for ever.

⁵³ Blessed are you in the temple of your sacred glory, sung and praised for ever.

⁵⁴ Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, sung and glorified for ever.

⁵⁵ Blessed are you who fathom the depths, who are enthroned on the cherubim, praised and exalted for ever.

⁵⁶ Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven, praised and glorified for ever.

⁵⁷ All the works of the Lord, bless him, praise him, exalt him for ever.

⁵⁸ Angels of the Lord, bless him, praise and glorify him for ever.

⁵⁹ Heavens, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁶⁰ All the waters above the heavens, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁶¹ All the powers of the Lord, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁶² Sun and moon, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁶³ Stars of heaven, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁶⁴ Rain and dew, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁶⁵ All winds, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁶⁶ Fire and heat, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁶⁷ Cold and frost, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁶⁸ Dew and frost, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁶⁹ Ice and cold, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁷⁰ Frost and snow, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁷¹ Days and nights, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁷² Light and darkness, praise and exalt him

for ever. ⁷³ Lightnings and clouds, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁷⁴ Earth, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁷⁵ Mountains and hills, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁷⁶ Everything that sprouts on the earth, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁷⁷ Springs of water, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁷⁸ Seas and rivers, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁷⁹ Whales and fishes, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁸⁰ All the birds of heaven, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁸¹ Animals wild and tame, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁸² Sons of men, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁸³ Israel, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁸⁴ Priests of the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever. ⁸⁵ Servants of the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁸⁶ Spirits and souls of the just, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁸⁷ Holy men and humble of heart, praise and exalt him for ever.

⁸⁸ Ananiah, Azariah, Mishael, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him for ever.

For he has taken us out from the nether-world, he has saved us from the hands of death, freed us from the furnace of burning flames and rescued us from the midst of the fire.

⁸⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy is everlasting.

⁹⁰ All who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods, praise and acknowledge him for his mercy is everlasting."

⁹¹ Then King Nebuchadnezzar suddenly rose up in great amazement and asked his counsellors, "Did we not throw three men bound into the fire?" They answered, "Certainly."

⁹² The king said, "But I can see four men walking about freely through the fire without suffering any harm, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

⁹³ Nebuchadnezzar approached the mouth of the blazing furnace and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here." So they came out from the midst of the fire.

⁹⁴ The officials, prefects, governors and counsellors of the king drew near to examine them: the fire had no effect on their bodies, their hair was not singed, their trousers were not burned, and they did not even had the smell of smoke.

preserved them for a better destiny after their death. And so, Daniel is like the model of the believers when, in certain circumstances, they

find themselves alone before a hostile crowd or tyrannical power. Daniel refuses to do what God condemns.



⁹⁶ Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who sent his angel to free his servants who, trusting in him, disobeyed the king's order and preferred to give their bodies to the fire rather than serve and worship any other god but their God.

⁹⁷ I give this command, therefore: From every race, nation and language, anyone who speaks irreverently of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut into pieces and his house shall be destroyed, for there is no other god who can save like this."

⁹⁸ And the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream and insanity

⁹⁹ Nebuchadnezzar, the king, to all peoples, all nations and to all men on the earth whatever be their language: Peace. ¹⁰⁰ It pleases me to make known to you the signs and wonders the Most High God has done in me.

¹⁰¹ How great are his signs,

how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
his dominion lasts for all generations.

4 ¹ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at peace in my house and content in my palace when I had a dream which appalled me. ² The nightmares I had as I lay in bed, and the visions that passed through my mind tormented me. ³ So I summoned all the wise men of Babylon that they might explain to me what the dream meant.

⁴ The wise men, seers and astrologers came, and I recounted the dream to them, but they could not explain it to me. ⁵ So Daniel came in before me – he was renamed Belteshazzar after the name of my god, for in him dwells the spirit of the Holy God. I told him my dream in this way: ⁶ Belteshazzar, chief of the wise men, I know that you have the spirit of the Holy God and that no mystery is ever difficult for you, examine the dream I have had and explain it to me.

⁷ These were my dreams as I lay in bed. There was a tree at the center of the world; it was very tall.

⁸ The tree grew, it became big and reached up to heaven, and its branches could be seen from the ends of the earth.

⁹ Its leaves were beautiful, its fruits abundant, there was food for all in it. Animals of the field found refuge in its shade, the birds of

heaven nested in its branches and all living things fed on it.

¹⁰ I was looking at this interior vision when a watchful one, a holy one, came down from heaven.

¹¹ He cried in a loud voice: Cut the tree down, cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and throw away its fruits. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds as well. ¹² But leave in the earth the stump and the roots bound with iron and bronze bands, in the grass of the field.

Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, let him share the grass of the earth with the animals. ¹³ Let his heart cease from being human, and let a beast's heart be given him and pass over him seven times.

¹⁴ This is the sentence given by the watchful ones, the question settled by the holy ones, so that every living thing may know that the Most High is higher than any human authority. He confers power on whom he pleases and raises the most humble of men.

¹⁵ This was the dream I had, I, King Nebuchadnezzar. You, Belteshazzar, explain it to me, since not one of the wise men in my kingdom has been able to interpret it for me. But you can, for the spirit of the Holy God dwells in you.

¹⁶ Then Daniel, renamed Belteshazzar, was stunned for a while and looked very much upset. The king said, "Belteshazzar, what is in that dream or in its interpretation that upsets you so?" Belteshazzar answered, ¹⁷ "My lord, may this dream be meant for your enemies and its content refer to your foes!"

¹⁸ The tree you saw, which grew big and strong, and reached to heaven and was visible through all the earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, which had food for all, under which animals of the field found refuge and in whose branches the birds of heaven built their nests – ¹⁹ this tree is you, O King, whose power has increased reaching up to heaven, whose empire extends to the ends of the earth.

²⁰ Now, regarding what the king has seen: a watchful one, a holy one, who came down from heaven and said: Cut the tree down, destroy it, but leave the stump and the roots in the ground with bands of iron and bronze, in the grass of the field; let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and share the lot of the animals of the field until they have passed over him seven times. ²¹ Now I shall explain it to you:

This is the decree of the Most High regarding the king, my lord. ²² You shall be driven out from among men and live with the beasts of the



field. You shall eat grass like the oxen, and be drenched by the dew of heaven. Seven times shall pass over you until you acknowledge that the Most High is higher than any human authority, and that he gives the power to whom he pleases.

²³ The order to leave the stump and the roots means that you shall recover your kingdom when you have acknowledged that all power comes from heaven. ²⁴ May it then please the king to accept my advice: wipe out your sins with works of justice, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; then perhaps you may lengthen your prosperity."

²⁵ All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁶ Twelve months later, while walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, ²⁷ the king said, "Is this not the great Babylon I built with the strength of my own power as my royal residence, and for the glory of my majesty?"

²⁸ These words were still in the mouth of the king when a voice came down from heaven:

"King Nebuchadnezzar, I speak to you: your empire is finished.

²⁹ You shall be driven from among men, and live with the animals of the field; you shall eat grass like oxen and seven times shall pass over you until you acknowledge that the Most High disposes of the power among men and gives it whom he pleases."

³⁰ These words were fulfilled at once. Nebuchadnezzar was driven from among men, he fed on grass like oxen, his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

³¹ At the end of this time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven and my reason returned to me; so I blessed the Most High:

Blessed and glorified is he who lives for ever, whose dominion is everlasting and whose kingdom lasts through all generations.

³² All the inhabitants of the earth are before him as if they were nothing. He does as he pleases with the army of heaven and the in-

habitants of the earth. No one can stop his hand or ask him to render an account.

³³ At that moment, I regained my reason, I recovered my throne and again began to govern, for the glory of my kingdom. My counselors and my noblemen acclaimed me, they restored me to my throne and I was given still greater power.

³⁴ So now, I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and glorify the King of Heaven. For all his works are true, and his ways are all just; he knows how to humble those who walk in pride.

The banquet of Belshazzar

5 ¹ King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for his nobles, a thousand of them attended and he drank wine with them. ² Under the influence of wine, he ordered that the gold and silver vessels his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought in so that he and his nobles, his wives and concubines might drink from them. ³ The gold and silver vessels taken from God's temple were brought in, and the king and his nobles, his wives and concubines drank from them. ⁴ While they drank wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze and iron, of wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly a man's fingers appeared opposite the lampstand and wrote on the plastered wall of the king's palace. Watching the hand as it wrote, the king turned pale. ⁶ So terrified was he that his knees knocked and his legs gave way.

⁷ He shouted, calling for his enchanters and Chaldean diviners.

23. 1 Mac 3, 18
Lk 1, 52

28. Mk 1, 11; Jn 12, 28

4. Is 40, 19; Jer 10, 3; Ps 115, 4

32. Is 45, 9; Job 9, 12; Rom 9, 20

34. Ps 111, 7;

◆ This story could be called: the punishment for the sacrileges. These words indicate the destiny of those who make fun of God:

- there comes an end which they cannot postpone;
- the fact that they did not do anything worthwhile during their lives is made clear;
- they disappear and so do their works with them.

The Bible knows that God reveals himself not only in events showing his goodness, but also in other events that are obvious signs that there is a God doing justice. Many times, those who mock God are hit by misfortunes which come as an answer to their insolence.

The author of these chapters is not too concerned with the historical reality of the time during which these people were living. Cyrus is the one who conquered Babylon. Belshazzar died and was followed by Darius.

"Whoever reads this writing and tells me its meaning," said he to the wise men of Babylon, "will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around his neck, and be made the third highest ruler in my kingdom."

⁸ All the king's wise men came, but none could read the writing or tell its meaning. ⁹ King Belshazzar became very frightened and his face grew even more pale. His nobles were likewise terrified and confused.

¹⁰ Hearing the troubled voices of the king and his nobles, the queen entered the banquet hall and said, "Live forever, O king! Do not be alarmed and become pale. ¹¹ In your kingdom is a man who has the spirit of the holy gods. He was found to have discernment and god-like wisdom during your father's lifetime. He was in fact appointed chief of the magicians, enchanters and diviners by your father King Nebuchadnezzar. ¹² This man Daniel, whom the king called Beltheshazzar, knew how to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel and he will tell you what the writing means."

¹³ Daniel was brought in and questioned by the king. "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father brought from Judah?" ¹⁴ I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods that you have insight and extraordinary wisdom. ¹⁵ Wise men and enchanters were brought here, but none of them could read this writing and tell its meaning. ¹⁶ I have heard that you can interpret dreams and solve problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple, wear a gold chain around your neck, and be appointed third in rank in my kingdom."

¹⁷ Daniel replied, "You may keep your gifts or give them to someone else. Just the same I will read and interpret the writing for you. ¹⁸ God the Most High gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and a great kingdom. ¹⁹ Because of the greatness given him by God, he was feared by nations and peoples of every language. He had the power of life and death over everyone. He exalted or humbled whomsoever he wished.

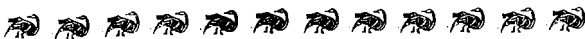
²⁰ But when he became arrogant and insolent, he was deposed and stripped of his glory. ²¹ He became an outcast and as senseless as a beast. He lived with wild asses, ate grass like cattle and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that God the Most High rules over the kingdom of men and appoints whom he pleases to govern it. ²² But you his son Belshazzar, although you knew all this, have not humbled yourself. ²³ You have defied the Lord of heaven. You had the vessels from his temple brought to you, and together with your nobles, your wives and concubines, you drank wine from them. You praised the idols made of silver and gold, of bronze, iron and stones, which neither see nor hear nor understand; but you never glorified God who has power over your life and all your fortunes. ²⁴ So he sent the hand that wrote the inscription ²⁵ which read MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. And these words mean: ²⁶ MENE, God has numbered the days of your reign and put an end to it; ²⁷ TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; ²⁸ PARSIN, your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians."

²⁹ On Belshazzar's order, Daniel was clothed in purple, given a gold chain to wear around his neck, and proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. ³⁰ That very night, however, the Chaldean king Belshazzar was slain.

6 ¹ Darius the Mede, at the age of sixty-two, took over the kingdom.

Daniel is thrown into the lion's den

² Darius appointed one hundred and twenty satraps throughout the whole kingdom.



They were made accountable to three administrators, one of whom was Daniel. This was to ensure that no loss or harm should come to the king. ³ Because of the extraordinary spirit residing in him, Daniel excelled above all the other administrators and satraps, so that the king planned to give him authority over the entire kingdom. ⁴ This provoked envy among the administrators and satraps, who tried to find grounds for filing charges against Daniel as regards his performance of official duties. But he was so trustworthy that neither corruption nor negligence could be found in him. ⁵ Finally the men decided: "We will never find any grounds for charges against this man Daniel except in something that has to do with the law of his God."

⁶ These administrators and satraps, therefore, went as a group to the king and said to him, "Live forever, O King Darius! ⁷ The administrators of the kingdom, the prefects, satraps, counselors and governors are all agreed that the king should issue and enforce a decree that anyone who prays and makes petition to any god or man within the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. ⁸ And now, O king, put the decree in writing and have it signed at once, so that it cannot be altered or annulled, in accordance with Medo-Persian laws. ⁹ King Darius put in writing and signed the prohibition, thus making it a law."

¹⁰ Daniel heard about the new law, but just as usual, he returned home and prayed three times a day, giving thanks to his God, in his room upstairs with the windows opened towards Jerusalem. ¹¹ There the men spying on him found Daniel kneeling in prayer and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and reminded him about the prohibition, "O king, did you not publish a decree that anyone who prays or makes petition to any god or man except to you would be thrown into the lion's den?"

The king answered, "Yes, and the decree stands, in accordance with Medo-Persian laws which cannot be altered or annulled."

¹³ Then they said, "But the Jewish exile Daniel pays no attention to you and to your decree. Three times a day he still prays to some god other than you."

¹⁴ Greatly aggrieved at what he heard, the king decided to help Daniel. He made every effort till sundown to save him.

¹⁵ But the men kept coming to him and insisting, "Remember, O king, that under the Medo-Persian laws every decree or prohibition issued by the king is irrevocable."

¹⁶ The king, therefore, could not help giving the order that Daniel be brought and thrown into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve faithfully, save you."

¹⁷ A stone was placed at the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with that of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might remain unchanged. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent a sleepless night, refusing food and entertainment. ¹⁹ Very early next morning, he rose and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰ As he came near he called in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, did your God whom you serve faithfully save you from the lions?"

²¹ Daniel answered, "Live forever, O king! ²² My God sent his angel who closed the lions' mouths so that they did not hurt me. God did that because I am innocent in his sight. Neither have I wronged you, O king."

²³ The king felt very glad and ordered Daniel released from the lions' den. No wound was found on him for he had trusted in his God. ²⁴ At the king's order, the men who had accused Daniel were thrown into the lions' den, together with their wives and children. No sooner had they reached the floor of the den than the lions lunged at them and tore them to pieces.

²⁵ King Darius wrote to the nations, to peoples of every language, "Peace to you all! ²⁶ I decree that throughout my kingdom people should reverence and fear the god of Daniel."

"For he is the living God,
and forever he endures;
his kingdom will not be crushed,
his dominion will never cease."

²⁷ He rescues and he delivers;
he performs signs and wonders
both in heaven and on earth.
And he came to Daniel's rescue
saving him from the lions' tooth and claw."

²⁸ Daniel greatly prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Vision of the four empires

7 ¹ In the first year of the reign of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions in his mind as he was sleeping. When he woke up, he wrote down the dream. This is how the narrative began:

² Daniel said, "I saw the following in my vision: the four winds of heaven

stirred up the great sea,³ and four great beasts each one different from the other, came out of the sea.

⁴The first was like a lion with eagle's wings. As I looked at it, its wings were torn off. It was lifted up from the ground stood up on its feet like a man, and was given a human heart. ⁵The second was a beast like a bear; it was raised up on one side and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told: Go and devour much flesh. ⁶I went on looking and saw another beast like a leopard with four wings on its back; it had four heads and dominion was given to it.

⁷I continued seeing my visions of the night and saw a terrible fourth beast. It was fearful and extraordinarily strong; it had great iron teeth; it ate, tore into pieces, and crushed underfoot whatever remained. It was different from the previous beasts and had ten horns. ⁸I was looking at the horns, when another small horn sprang among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the root to make way for the new. It had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that uttered insolent words.

The son of man

+ ⁹I looked and saw the following:

Some thrones were set in place and One of Great Age took his seat. His robe was white as snow, his hair white as washed wool. His throne was flames of fire with wheels of blazing fire. ¹⁰A river of fire sprang forth and flowed before him. Thousands upon thousands served him and a countless multitude stood before him.

Those in the tribunal took their seats and opened the book. ¹¹But as I remembered the haughty words of the horn with human eyes and mouth which I had seen before, this animal was killed before my eyes, and its body destroyed and cast into the fire. ¹²Domination was taken from the other animals, though they were allowed to stay alive for a time, until the fixed time.

¹³I continued watching the nocturnal vision:

One like a son of man came on the clouds of heaven. He faced the One of Great Age and was brought into his presence.

¹⁴Domination, honour and kingship were given him, and all the peo-

9. Rev 20, 4; Rev 1, 13; 5, 11; Mt 17, 2; 28, 3; Rev 1, 14; Es 1
11. Rev 19, 19

13. Mt 24, 30; 26, 64; Rev 1, 7; 14, 15

10. Rev 5, 11; Jn 5, 22

14. Rev 5, 13; Lk 1, 33

+The following detailed vision has the same content and the same meaning as the vision of Nebuchadnezzar's statue (chapter 2).

The four empires which dominated the Jewish nation until the time of the great persecution are shown symbolized by beasts. Verses 23-25 specify that the fourth beast is the Syrian empire and the horn that insults God, is king Antiochus Epiphanes. Just as in 2:34 and 44, an intervention by God is announced: it will put an end to the power of the persecutor and establish God's kingdom. Here in 7:11 and 7:26 the judgment on the persecutor is announced. In 2:34 the stone suggested God's power. Here, in 7:13, the son of man represents the people of Israel, he is the servant of God, present in God's plans from the beginning of the world and he receives power over all the nations: 7:27. in due time.

It would be a mistake to look for the events of Jesus' time in this paragraph, as some people did. It is even less applicable to our time as if we

were the center of everything. The author who writes in the worst moment of the persecution of the Maccabees' time, is announcing the end of the persecution of Antiochus (1 Mc 5:55-60) as well as the coming of the Kingdom of God. This way of combining in the same description a close happening – as being a great liberation – and the ultimate liberation which will take place at the end of our history, is something typical of the prophetic books. Jesus did the same thing in speaking about the end of Jerusalem (Mk 13).

On the clouds of heaven: the cloud is the sign of the divine presence.

The One of Great Age: this refers to God, and the white hair is a sign of his majesty. Let us not forget that, in fact, God is ageless and he is in a unique moment, an ever present now.

A son of man, namely, a man (13): at first, this mysterious person referred to the whole people of God (v. 27). But, if God wanted to give his Kingdom to men, he would, in fact, give it to



You will never silence the call to the Desert, far from greed and close to God.



God saves people of any religion. But only to us has he made known, through a rejected Saviour, the mysterious ways of his love.

ples and nations of every language served him. His dominion is eternal and shall never pass away; his kingdom will never be destroyed.

¹⁵ I, Daniel, was deeply troubled, since these visions terrified me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those who were standing there, and asked him to tell me what all this meant. He answered me and gave me the interpretation of these things:

¹⁷ "These four beasts are four kings who will rise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom to possess it eternally, forever and ever."

¹⁹ Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, different from the others, extraordinarily terrifying, with iron teeth and bronze claws, that ate, tore into pieces and crushed underfoot whatever remained. ²⁰ I also wanted to know about the ten horns it had on its head, and about the other horn which had sprung up, and the three first horns that fell, and about this horn with eyes and a mouth that spoke with arrogance, and that looked greater than the other horns.

²¹ As I looked, this horn waged war against the holy ones and was subduing them ²² until the One of Great Age came to do justice for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came for the holy ones to take possession of the kingdom.

²³ Then I was told:

■ "The fourth animal shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, different from all the kingdoms. It will devour the earth, crush it and destroy it.

²⁴ The ten horns are ten kings who shall rise from this kingdom. Another one will rise up after them and destroy three kings.

18. Acts 9, 13 22. Rev 20, 4 24. Rev 17, 12 25. Rev 12, 14 27. Rev 5, 10 2. Est 1, 2; Ne 1, 1

personal way to the one who is the model, the saviour and the head of all men and of all humankind, Jesus is *the Man* (Jn 19:5), or, to follow the Jewish way of speaking, *the son of man*.

The son of man comes from the divine clouds, and so Jesus applied the prophecy to himself to point to his divine origin when his accusers were seeing him in the weakness of the human condition (Mt 26:64).

■ The Jews of the year 170-160 could not be mistaken about this hidden reference to king Antiochus, the king who will destroy three kings, insult the Most High and persecute the holy ones.

A time, two times and half a time means three and a half. In those days, this was a figurative way to indicate times of evil (three and a half is half seven, which is the perfect number).

²⁵ This king shall insult the Most High and persecute the holy ones of the Most High. He shall try to change the feasts and the laws. The holy ones shall be handed over to his power for a time, two times, and half a time.

²⁶ But judgment will come and domination will be taken from him; he shall be destroyed, utterly wiped out. ²⁷ The kingship, domination and leadership of all the kingdoms of the world shall be given to the people of the holy ones of God Most High: his kingdom will be without end. All the kingdoms shall serve him and be subject to him."

²⁸ Here ends the narrative. I, Daniel, was greatly disturbed in my thoughts, I grew pale and I kept these things in my heart.

Another vision about King Antiochus

◆ ¹ In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, I, Daniel, had another vision. ² In the vision, I saw myself in Susa, the fortified city in the province of Elam; I noticed that I was by the river Ulai.

³ I raised my eyes and saw a ram standing before the river. It had two long horns, but one was longer than the other. ⁴ I saw the ram charging westward, northward and southward. No animal could resist it, none could escape its power. It did as it pleased and so became great.

⁵ As I was thinking, a he-goat came from the west, as if flying above the entire earth without touching the ground; it had a great horn between its eyes. ⁶ It approached the ram with the two horns which I had seen by the river, and it ran towards the ram with all the fury of its strength. ⁷ I saw how it reached the ram and directed itself against it; it charged the ram and broke its two horns, and the ram was unable to resist. It cast it down to the ground

The holy ones are those chosen by God to be his people. Ever since Moses, the Jewish people were conscious of being a holy people because they were consecrated to the Holy God.

But from the time of Daniel on, "the holy ones" come to designate the new people of God who will start with the Messiah. The first Christians were conscious of being this new people of God and so, they called themselves "the holy ones" (see Acts 9:32).

◆ The same message is repeated in the following chapters. God will come at the most critical moment of the persecution. We only have more details to assure the Jews that all the events they are witnessing are already known to God ahead of time: while the events are taking place, God has already appointed the time when he will come to save.

and crushed it. No one could free the ram from its power.

⁸ The he-goat became very great, but when it was powerful, the great horn snapped and in its place sprang four great horns facing the four winds of heaven. ⁹ From one of these, the small one, sprang a horn which grew big towards the south and east and towards the Beautiful Land.

¹⁰ It grew up to the army of heaven and flung part of the stars to the ground and crushed them underfoot. ¹¹ It even came to the Commander of the army, deprived him of the perpetual sacrifice and made useless his temple ¹² and the army. It put Abomination in place of the sacrifice and flung Truth to the ground. And whatever it undertook succeeded.

¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking and another who asked him in return. "When shall the vision be fulfilled? What about the perpetual offering, the Abomination of the devastator, the sanctuary handed over and the army trampled underfoot?" ¹⁴ He answered, "Until two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings have gone by, then the Temple shall be restored."

¹⁵ As I, Daniel, looked at this vision and tried to understand it, I suddenly saw before me someone like a man, ¹⁶ and I heard a human voice over the river Ulai, that cried out to him: "Gabriel, explain the vision to this man."

¹⁷ He approached the place where I was. When he came, I was terrified and fell on my face. He said to me, "Son of man, understand: this vision refers to the end-time." ¹⁸ As he spoke, I lost consciousness and fell face down on the ground. He touched me and raised me to my feet. ¹⁹ Then he said, "See, I will reveal to you what is going to happen when the wrath comes to an end, for the end is set."

²⁰ The ram you have seen, with its two horns, stands for the two kings of the Medes and the Persians. ²¹ The hairy he-goat is the king of Greece; the great horn between its eyes

is the first of its kings; this horn snapped, ²² and the four horns that sprang up in its place are the four kingdoms that will rise from his nation, but will not overpower him.

²³ At the end of their reign, when the sinners have reached their full number, a king will arise, insolent and wise in cunning. ²⁴ His strength will increase, so that he shall plot things unheard of before.

Whatever he undertakes shall prosper; he shall destroy the powerful and the very people of the holy ones. ²⁵ He shall carry out his deceptions, will be believed in by many and, in the fullness of peace, shall destroy many. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes, but he shall be destroyed without the intervention of any human hand.

²⁶ What I said of the vision of the mornings and evenings is true, but keep the vision secret, for it will be fulfilled only in the remote future."

²⁷ I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for several days. Then I got up to attend to the king's affairs. I remained frightened because of the visions and did not understand it.

The prayer of Daniel

9 ¹ In the first year of the reign of Darius, son of Ahasuerus, of the Median race, who was king of Chaldea, the following happened:

² I, Daniel, thought about the number of years, according to the scriptures before Jerusalem should be left in ruins. Yahweh spoke of seventy years to the prophet Jeremiah. ³ I turned to the Lord and begged him. I pleaded with prayers and fasting. I did penance, I put on sackcloth and sat on ashes.

9. Eek 20, 6	10. Rev 12, 4	16. Lk 1, 19	17. Rev 1, 17	19. Mr 3, 7; Hab 2, 3	24. 1 Mac 1, 11
25. 1 Mac 1, 25; Rev 17, 14; 19, 16		2. Jer 25, 11; 29, 10		3. Is 44, 26	

o Daniel is reflecting about Jeremiah's prophecy (25:1) about the seventy years of exile of the Jews in Babylon. The angel Gabriel gives him another message referring to seventy weeks. This message is one of the most famous prophecies in the book of Daniel.

+ Gabriel begins by saying enigmatic things (v.24) and then, he explains.

To put an end to transgression, to put sin under lock, to wipe out the offence, and to bring everlasting justice. So, the coming of the kingdom of God is clearly announced. A most Holy One will be anointed: this refers to the most holy place, namely, the Temple. After being

prolained by the pagan conquerors, it will be renewed to become the definitive dwelling place of God in the midst of his people.

Now Gabriel himself provides an explanation: all of this will happen soon. The seventy weeks are a symbolic number of weeks of years, and cannot be taken literally except for the first seven weeks; these refer to the time between the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and the decree of liberation by Cyrus – called the Anointed of God in Is 45 – in 538.

Then comes an indefinite period represented by sixty-two weeks (of years) bringing us to the beginning of Antiochus' persecution in 171. That year the high priest, Onias, was murdered:

⁴ I prayed to Yahweh, my God, and made this confession: "Lord God, great and to be feared, you keep your Covenant and love for those who love and you observe your commandments. ⁵ We have sinned, we have not been just, we have been rebels, and have turned away from your commandments and laws. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, leaders, fathers and to all the people of the land.

⁷ Lord, justice is yours, but ours is a face full of shame, as it is to this day – we, the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the whole of Israel, near and far away, in all the lands where you have dispersed us because of the infidelity we have committed against you. ⁸ Ours is the shame, O Lord for we, our kings, princes, fathers, have sinned against you. ⁹ We hope for pardon and mercy from the Lord, because we have rebelled against him. ¹⁰ We have not listened to the voice of Yahweh, our God, or followed the laws which he has given us through his servants, the prophets.

¹¹ All Israel has broken your law and has turned away from it rather than listen to your voice. Therefore, the curse and the threats written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have come upon us because we have sinned against him. ¹² He has carried out the threats he pronounced against us and against those who governed us: he brought a terrible calamity upon us. No, never could there be anything worse than what has come upon Jerusalem.

¹³ All these disasters have struck us with dread as it was written in the Law of Moses, but we have not tried to calm the anger of Yahweh,

our God. We have not turned away from our sins and learned to listen to your truth. ¹⁴ Yahweh made true his threat and brought this calamity upon us, for Yahweh, our God, is just in all his works, while we have not obeyed his voice.

¹⁵ And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt by your powerful hand and gained renown to this day, we have sinned, we have been unfaithful. ¹⁶ Lord, in keeping with your kindness, turn away your anger and wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy mountain, for because of our sins and the wickedness of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people are the laughing stock of all around us.

¹⁷ So now, our God, listen to the prayer and pleading of your servant and, for your own sake, let your face shine upon your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸ My God, incline your ear and listen. Open your eyes and see how the city lies in ruins, the city upon which your Name has been pronounced. We do not rely on our good works, but we pour out our plea before you, trusting in your great mercy.

¹⁹ Listen, Lord! Lord, forgive! Pay attention to us, Lord! Act, my God, and do not delay for your own sake, since your city and your people are called by your name."

The prophecy of the seventy weeks

+ ²⁰ At the hour of the evening sacrifice, I was still speaking, confessing my sins and those of Israel, my people, begging Yahweh on behalf of his Holy Mountain.

4. 3, 25-35; Est 4.1; Est 9, 6
20. Num 28, 4; 1 K 18, 36

7. 2 K 17, 6

16. Ezk 25, 3

17. Ps 74, 3

19. Ezk 36, 22

an anointed one will be cut off. After that, the persecutor put an end to worship in the Jerusalem Temple and he even built an altar dedicated to Baal Shamem on the altar of holocausts: this is the *Abominable Idol of the devastator*. This is the first week of persecution during which the prophecy was written: a victorious intervention of God is announced for the end of the week.

The divine intervention revealed itself in the unexpected peace which the Jews obtained at that time (1 Mc 6:55). However, this was not the coming of God's kingdom, but only a sign of it. What was announced about *everlasting justice* will only be fulfilled in Christ.

In any case the numbers presented by the author refer to the era of the Maccabees. If the end of history did not take place then, it is useless to manipulate the numbers to figure out when that would be: God did not wish to reveal it (Mk 13:32).

At the end of the last century the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses built up his whole interpretation of the Bible on this prophecy of Daniel. His extravagant figuring was meant to prove that, after the kingdom of God in Israel, with David and Solomon, concluded in Daniel's days, the new kingdom of God began and it would end in 1914 with the end of the world. When that did not happen, they corrected their figures.

This is not the place to argue about these theories. It is enough to note that for them the two key dates of salvation were the destruction of Jerusalem in the 6th century before Christ and the year 1914. For them the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection, were not important for the coming of the kingdom of God. This shows the error of those who rely on difficult biblical texts to question the surest truths, instead of starting with the most solid

²¹ At that moment, Gabriel whom I had seen at the beginning of the vision, came to me, flying, ²² and he said to me, "Daniel, I have come now to make you understand. ²³ As you were praying, a word was uttered and I have come to teach it to you because God loves you. Pay attention to this word and understand the vision:

²⁴ Seventy weeks are set for your people and your holy city, to put an end to transgression, to put sin under lock, to wipe out the offence, and to bring everlasting justice, so that the visions and the prophecies will be fulfilled and the Holy of Holies be anointed.

²⁵ Understand this, then:

From the time the order to rebuild Jerusalem was given until an anointed leader comes, there shall be seventy weeks.

Then in sixty-two weeks squares and walls will be rebuilt, but in a difficult time.

²⁶ After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one will be cut off; the city and the temple shall be destroyed by the people of a king who will come. They will be carried along as by a flood. Until the end, there will be wars and disasters which God has decreed.

²⁷ He will impose his law on a great part of the people for a week. By mid-week, he will put a stop to the sacrifices and offerings. The devastator shall place the abominable idol in the Temple until the ruin decreed by God comes upon the devastator.

History of the time of the Maccabees:
a symbolic narrative

10 ¹ In the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, God gave a message to Daniel, renamed Belteshazzar. This message spoke of fidelity and great anguish. Daniel paid attention to these words and to the following vision:

² At that time, I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. ³ I ate no rich food, took no meat or wine, and did not perfume myself for three weeks.

⁴ On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I stood on the bank of the river Tigris, ⁵ I raised my eyes and saw this: a man clothed in linen with a belt of pure gold round his waist. ⁶ His body was like chrysolite, his face had the brilliance of lightning, his eyes were like blazing torches, and the sound of his words was like the noise of a crowd.

⁷ I, Daniel, alone saw this vision; the men who were with me did not see it, but they were seized with great fear and they fled to hide. ⁸ So I was left alone gazing on this vision. I was powerless. The appearance of my face changed fearfully, and I retained absolutely no strength. ⁹ I heard the sound of his words, and when I heard it, I fainted face down to the ground. ¹⁰ Then a hand touched me, and set me trembling on my hands and knees.

¹¹ He said to me, "Daniel, man loved by God, pay attention to the words I shall say to you and stand up, for I have been sent to you now." When I heard these words I stood up trembling.

¹² Then he said to me, "Daniel, do not be afraid, for from that first day when you resolved to acquire understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your supplications were heard, and it is precisely because of this that I have come.

¹³ The prince of the Persian kingdom has resisted me for twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the leading angels, has come to my assistance. I left him there with the kings of Persia, ¹⁴ and I have come to tell you what will happen to your people in the days to come. For this new vision too refers to those days.

21. 8, 16; Lk 1, 19

Ezr 4, 4

5. Ezk 9, 2

24. Is 30, 2; Mal 3, 20; Lk 24, 44; Acts 10, 38

26. 2 Mac 4, 34

7. Acts 9, 7

27. 1 Mac 1, 45; 1 Mac 1, 54; Mk 13, 14

10. Ezk 2, 1

13. Jud 9; Rev 12, 7

25. Ezr 1, 13; Zac 4, 14;

3. Ne 1, 4

foundations of faith to attempt to clarify confusing texts.

■ All the events mentioned in chapters 10-11 were past events for the author: the same events which are related in the second book of Maccabees. Here, however, they are related as if a certain Daniel had announced them four centu-

ries ahead of time. This is nothing more than a stylistic device. In fact, all that matters to the author is the conclusion of the story which we explain in 12:3. The author wants to teach his persecuted contemporaries who have just gone through these events that their hardships were leading to the coming of the kingdom of God soon and to the day of resurrection.

conspiracies have been plotted against him.²⁶ Those who ate from his table will ruin him, his army will be disbanded and many will fall dead by the sword.

²⁷ The two kings will not think of anything but to do harm and to deceive each other while sitting at the same table. But they will not accomplish anything, since there is still time before the appointed moment.

²⁸ The king of the North will return to his land with great riches and will devise plans against the Holy Covenant. He will act against it, then he will return to his land.²⁹ In due time he will return again to the South, but in this second time, things will not be as before.

³⁰ The ships of Kittim will come against him and he will have to abandon his plan, but he will vent his anger against the Holy Covenant, and will again favour those who have turned away from the Holy Covenant.³¹ He will send some of his forces to profane the citadel sanctuary, to suppress the perpetual sacrifice and there to set up the Abominable Idol of the devastator.³² He will corrupt with flatteries those who violate the Covenant, but the people who know their God will stand firm.

³³ The most intelligent among the people will teach many, but they will fall by the sword or be burned or exiled or plundered of their goods for some time.³⁴ And when they fall, they will receive little help; but many will join them in deceit.³⁵ Some among the learned will stumble, but this will be so as to prove them, to purify and cleanse them until the end which is to come at its appointed time.

³⁶ The king will act according to his whims, becoming conceited and exalting himself above all the gods, and he will speak outrageous blasphemies against the God of gods. He will prosper until the Wrath is filled to overflowing, for what has been decreed will be fulfilled.³⁷ He will pay no heed to his fathers'

gods, will not mind the favourite god of the women, or any other god, but will exalt only himself as greater than them all.³⁸ In their place, he will worship the god of fortresses, a god unknown to his fathers, and will honour him with gold, silver and precious stones and jewels.³⁹ Trusting in a foreign god, he will attack the fortresses. Those who adore him will be given great honour, they will have authority to divide the land as a reward.

⁴⁰ When the end-time comes, the king of the South will confront him. The king of the North will attack him with chariot cavalry and many ships. He will enter his lands, invade them and pass through them.

⁴¹ He will come to the Beautiful Land where many will fall; only the people of Edom, Moab and the best of the Ammonites will escape.⁴² He will stretch out his hand to many countries including Egypt.⁴³ He will seize the treasures of gold and silver and all precious objects of Egypt. Libyans and Ethiopians will join him.

⁴⁴ But reports coming from the East and the North will worry him, and he will set out in a rage, determined to utterly wipe out and destroy many.

⁴⁵ He will set up the tent of his military camp between the sea and the Holy Mountain of the Beautiful Land. Then he will come to his end and no one will come to his aid.

Those who sleep will awake to everlasting life

◆¹² At that time, Michael will rise, the Great Commander who defends the sons of your people. It shall be a time of anguish as never before since the nations first existed until this very day.

Then all those whose names are

27. 1 Mac 1, 20; 1, 63	30. 9, 27; 8, 11	31. 1 Mac 1, 45	32. 1 Mac 6, 2; Mt 24, 15
33. 1 Mac 1, 60	36. 2 Thes 2, 4	45. 1 Mac 6; 2 Mac 9	1. Mt 24, 21; Ps 69, 28; Rev 3, 5

◆ This is a very important text: this is the first mention of the resurrection.

The Jews believed that, after death, they would only have reduced life under the earth. They held no hope of a resurrection or a reward for the individual, but only for their nation. If they did not right, God would bless or uplift their nation (See Ez 37).

The persecutions during the days of the Maccabees and their reflection on the destiny of the martyrs led them to the conviction that those who had died would have their share of happiness in the kingdom of God: they had to be raised up. We find the same hope in the second book of Maccabees (chapter 7:9 and 12:43). We

read about it also in chapters 2-5 of the book of Wisdom. These texts, fruits of the faith and the trials the Jewish people endured in the last two centuries before Jesus, prepared for what he was going to teach about the resurrection (Mark 12:18).

Michael, your angel (of the Jewish people: 10:13 and 10:21. The book of Daniel is filled with many visions, some of them quite complex; this is typical of the *apocalyptic* books which were written among the Jews between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D.

These apocalyptic books (or *revelations*), were written by sages of the day to remind the people that God has dominion over history. Jus-

written in the Book will be saved. ² Many of those who sleep in the Region of the Dust will awake, some to everlasting life but others to eternal horror and shame. ³ Those who acquired knowledge will shine like the brilliance of the firmament; those who taught people to be just will shine like the stars for all eternity.

⁴ And you, Daniel, keep these words secret and have the Book sealed until the appointed time of the end. Many will wander looking here and there. Wickedness will go on increasing."

⁵ I, Daniel, looked and saw two others standing, one on either side of the river. ⁶ One said to the man clothed in linen who was upstream, "When will these wonderful things take place?"

⁷ And I heard the answer of the man in linen who was upstream. He raised his hands to heaven and swore by the One who lives eternally: "Everything will be fulfilled within a time, two times and a half a time. When the holy people is completely crushed and without any strength, then these things will be fulfilled."

⁸ I heard but did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of

these things?" ⁹ He said, "Go, Daniel, for these words are secret and sealed until the appointed time of the end. ¹⁰ Many will be purified, cleansed and proved. The impious will go on doing evil, none of them will understand anything, only the learned will understand."

¹¹ From the time the perpetual sacrifice is suppressed and the Abominable Idol of the devastator is installed, there shall be a thousand two hundred ninety days. ¹² Fortunate is the one who waits and reaches a thousand three hundred thirty-five days. ¹³ And you, go your way until your end. You shall rest and then rise to receive your reward at the end of time."

The story of Susanna

o13 ¹ There lived in Babylon a man named Joakim, ² who was married to a very beautiful God-fearing woman, Susanna, Hilkiah's daughter, ³ whose pious parents had trained her in the law of Moses. ⁴ A very rich man and greatly respected by his countrymen, Joakim was frequently visited by the Jews in his house adjoining a garden.

⁵ That year, two elders of the people were appointed judges, in whom this word of the Lord became

2. Mt 25, 46

3. Wis 11, 33; 3, 7

6. Rev 10, 5

8. Mt 24, 3

5. Jer 29, 21

as in Daniel, they all used complicated visions, symbolic numbers, messages from angels. It was nothing more than a way to hold their hearers. In 9:1, the angel Gabriel explains the vision. Here, we have another angel, Michael. History is described as if the events were predetermined and written in God's book. In heaven there are occasional struggles between angels representing one nation or another. And so, Michael fights for the Jewish people. In 10:3 we have another angel called "prince of the Persian kingdom."

At the end of chapter 12 we have another series of symbolic numbers. They do not express anything more than the previous ones: the persecution which continues from the time worship was interrupted, must stop, and soon after, the end will come.

WHY DID THEY ANNOUNCE THE RULE OF GOD AS IMMINENT WHEN IT CAME MUCH LATER?

The various oracles of the book of Daniel predict both the end of the persecution by Antiochus and the definitive coming of God with his universal rule. Christ came more than a hundred years later. We can apply here what

was said concerning the prophets' announcements (see Isaiah 9).

When a man starts on a long walk with his son and the son begins to get tired, the father does not tell him how much longer he still has to walk. He simply points to the next goal: let us go as far as this tree we see in the distance. Then, he tells him: let us go to this house, to the top of this hill... and so, he nourishes the son's hope through a series of stages. Thus, in sacred history, every time God invites his people to take a step, he presents the happy future which he has in store for humanity with bright colors, as if it were within their reach. There is always something gained, but the best is still ahead, and men will live by hope until their last days.

God does not speak to satisfy our curiosity, but to call us to action. When, in 165 B.C., a teacher of the Law was writing this book to encourage his persecuted compatriots and to announce the liberation which he thought would be the final one, God did not reveal the date of the end of the world to him. For the Jews of his time, the unexpected end of the persecution by Antiochus and the peace achieved must have been quite a clear sign of God's rule over history.



true, "Wickedness has come forth from Babylon, through the elders appointed judges, who were supposed to govern the people." ⁶ These men frequented Joakim's house, and all who had legal disputes used to come to them.

⁷ After the people had left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden for a walk. ⁸ The two old men began to lust for her as they watched her enter the garden every day. ⁹ Forgetting the demands of justice and virtue, their lust grew all the more as they made no effort to turn their eyes to heaven. ¹⁰ Although both were possessed of the same passion for her, they concealed that from each other, ¹¹ for they were ashamed to reveal their lustful desire. ¹² But they continued watching her day after day.

¹³ One day before lunch, they parted, saying to each other, "Let us go home for it is meal time. So off they went in different directions. ¹⁴ but both turned back, and coming face to face again, each was obliged to explain his action and admit his lust. They agreed to wait for an opportunity to meet her alone.

¹⁵ One day, as they were waiting for an opportune time, Susanna entered the garden as usual with only two maids. She decided to bathe, for it was a hot day. ¹⁶ Nobody else was there except the two elders watching her from where they had hidden themselves.

¹⁷ She said to the maids, "Bring me oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors while I bathe." ¹⁸ Unaware of

the elders hidden inside the garden, the two maids did as ordered, shutting the doors and leaving by the side entrance to the house to fetch what she had asked for.

¹⁹ When the maids had left, the two elders hurried to her and said, ²⁰ "Look, the garden doors are shut and no one sees us. We desire to possess you. ²¹ If you refuse to give in, we will testify that you sent your maids away for there was a young man here with you."

²² Susanna moaned, "Whatever I do, I am trapped. If I give in to your desire, it will be death for me; if I refuse, I won't escape your persecution. ²³ I would rather be persecuted than sin in the eyes of the Lord."

²⁴ Susanna shrieked, but the old men shouted, putting the blame on her. ²⁵ One of them ran and opened the garden doors. ²⁶ Hearing the noise in the garden, the household servants rushed in by the side entrance to see what was happening. ²⁷ They were taken aback when they heard the elders' accusation, for never had anything like this been said of Susanna.

²⁸ The next day a meeting was held at Joakim's house. The two elders arrived, vindictively determined to have Susanna sentenced to death. ²⁹ They ordered before all the people. "Send for Susanna, Hilkiah's daughter and Joakim's wife." ³⁰ They sent for her, and she came with her parents, children and all her relatives.

³¹ Susanna was a very refined and beautiful woman. ³² She had her veil on, but the wicked elders ordered her

9. 1 Mac 3, 18

o Three more stories in the book of Daniel:

The first, to show how God defends the helpless innocent: the corruption of the judges is severely denounced. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 5:28: "The one who looks at a woman with evil desires has already committed adultery in his heart."

22. Jn 8, 4

These stories are not found in the original book of Daniel, written part in Hebrew, part in Aramean, but only in the Greek translation of the Bible.

We should not look down on these stories saying that they are for children. Just like the parables of Jesus, they contain many lessons and they invite us to reflect on our behaviour.



to uncover her face for them to feast on her beauty. ³³ Her family and friends and all who saw her wept.

³⁴ The two elders stood up and laid their hands upon her head. ³⁵ Completely trusting in the Lord, she raised her tearful eyes to heaven.

³⁶ The elders started making their accusation. "We were taking a walk in the garden when this woman came in with two maids. She ordered them to shut the garden doors and dismissed them. ³⁷ Then a young man came out of hiding and lay with her. ³⁸ We were in a corner of the garden, and we saw this crime from there. We ran to them, ³⁹ and caught them in the act of embracing. We were unable to take hold of the man. He was too strong for us. He made a dash for the door, opened it and ran off. ⁴⁰ But we were able to seize this woman. We asked her who the young man was, ⁴¹ but she refused to tell us. This is our statement, and we testify to its truth."

The assembly took their word, since they were elders and judges of the people. Susanna was condemned to death. ⁴² She cried aloud, "Eternal God, nothing is hidden from you; you know all things before they come to be. ⁴³ You know that these men have testified falsely against me. Would you let me die, though I am not guilty of all their malicious charges?"

⁴⁴ The Lord heard her, ⁴⁵ and as she was being led to her execution, God aroused the holy spirit residing in a young lad named Daniel. ⁴⁶ He shouted, "I will have no part in the death of this woman!"

⁴⁷ Those present turned to him, "What did you say?" they all asked.

⁴⁸ Standing in their midst, he said to them, "Have you become fools, you Israelites, to condemn a daughter of Israel without due process and in

the absence of clear evidence? ⁴⁹ Return to court, for those men have testified falsely against her."

⁵⁰ Hurriedly they returned, and the elders said to Daniel, "Come and sit with us, for you also possess the gifts bestowed by God upon the elders."

⁵¹ Daniel said to the people, "Separate these two from one another and I will examine each of them."

⁵² When the two elders were separated from each other, Daniel called one of them and said, "How wicked you have grown with age. Your sins of earlier days have piled up against you, and now is the time of reckoning.

⁵³ Remember how you have passed unjust sentences, condemned the innocent and freed the guilty, although the Lord has said 'The innocent and the just should not be put to death.' ⁵⁴ Now, if you really witnessed the crime, under what tree did you see them do it?"

⁵⁵ The elder answered, "Under a mastic tree."

"Daniel said, "Your lie will cost you your head. You will be cut in two, as soon as the Lord's angel receives your sentence from God."

⁵⁶ Putting the first one aside, Daniel called the other elder and said to him, "You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, you have long allowed yourself to be perverted by lust.

⁵⁷ This is how you have dealt with the daughters of Israel, who out of fear have yielded to you. But here is a daughter of Judah who would not tolerate your wickedness. ⁵⁸ Tell me then, under what tree did you catch them committing the crime?"

⁵⁹ The answer came. "Under an oak."

⁶⁰ "Your lie has also cost you your head," Daniel said. "God's angel waits to cut you both in two."



⁶⁰ The whole assembly shouted and blessed God for helping those who hope in him. ⁶¹ They turned against the two elders who, through Daniel's efforts, had been convicted by their own mouths. In accordance with Moses' law, the penalty the two elders had intended to impose upon their neighbour was inflicted upon them. ⁶² They were sentenced to death. Thus was the life of an innocent woman spared that day.

⁶³ Hilkiah and his wife praised God for the justice given Susanna, and so did Joakim her husband and all her relatives, for she was not found guilty of any shameful deed. ⁶⁴ Daniel was greatly esteemed by the people from that day onward.

Daniel and the priests of Bel

14 ¹ When King Astyages died, Cyrus the Persian ascended the throne. ² Daniel was very close to the king, who regarded him in higher esteem than any of his other friends.

³ The Babylonians had an idol called Bel, to which twelve bushels of fine flour, forty sheep, and six measures of wine were offered daily. ⁴ The king took part in this cult and worshipped the idol every day. Daniel, on the other hand, worshipped only his own God. ⁵ And the king asked him, "Why don't you worship Bel?"

Daniel answered, "I worship no man-made idols, but only the living God who made heaven and earth and rules over all mankind." ⁶ The king asked, "Don't you think Bel is a living god? Don't you see how much he eats and drinks everyday?"

⁷ Daniel laughed. "Do not be deceived, O king. This is only clay inside and bronze outside. It never ate or drank anything."

⁸ Enraged, the king called his

priests and said to them, "If you will not tell me who consumes all these offerings, you will all die." ⁹ But if you can show that Bel consumes them, it is Daniel who will die for blaspheming." Daniel said to the king, "Let it be as you say."

¹⁰ There were seventy priests of Bel, besides their wives and children. Together with Daniel, the king went to Bel's temple. ¹¹ The priests said to the king, "See, we are going outside. We will leave you here inside, O king, to set out the food and prepare the wine. Then you can leave them, shut the door and seal it with your ring. ¹² You will return in the morning, and if you find that Bel has not eaten the food and drunk the wine, we are ready to be executed. But if the reverse happens, Daniel must die for telling lies and slandering us."

¹³ They were confident for they had made a secret entrance under the table, through which they used to come in to consume the food and wine offerings. ¹⁴ When the priests had left, the king set the food before Bel, while Daniel ordered his servants to scatter ashes all over the temple floor. Then they left after shutting the door and sealing it with the king's ring. ¹⁵ That night the priests and their wives and children came and, as usual, ate and drank the offerings.

¹⁶ Early the next morning, the king returned to the temple with Daniel. "Are the seals unbroken, Daniel?" the king asked. Daniel answered, "They are unbroken, O king." ¹⁸ Opening the door, the king looked at the table, then exclaimed, "You are indeed great, O Bel. There is no deception in you."

¹⁹ Daniel laughed, and restraining the king from entering, he said, "But look at the floor and see whose footprints these are." ²⁰ The king said, "I



see footprints of men, women and children."

²¹ Enraged, the king ordered the priests and their wives and children to be seized. They were compelled to show him the secret door through which they used to enter to consume the offerings on the table. ²² They were put to death on orders of the king. And Bel was handed over to Daniel, who destroyed the idol and its temple.

Daniel and the dragon

²³ In Babylon there was a big dragon which was also worshipped. ²⁴ "Look," said the king to Daniel, "this is alive, not made of bronze. Would you deny that this is a living god? Worship it."

²⁵ Daniel replied, "I will worship no one but the Lord my God, for he alone is the living God. ²⁶ With your permission, O king, I will slay this dragon without sword or club." The king answered, "You have my permission."

²⁶ Then Daniel took some pitch, fat and hair, and boiled them together. He made them into cakes which he fed to the dragon. And the dragon burst after eating them. ²⁷ Daniel said to the king, "Now look at what happened to the thing you worship."

²⁸ The Babylonians became angry upon hearing of this. "Our king has become a Jew," they said. "He destroyed Bel, killed the dragon

and put the priests to death." ²⁹ They went to the king and said, "Hand Daniel over to us or we will kill you and your family!" ³⁰ The king was forced to hand Daniel over to the people.

³¹ Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, where he stayed for six days. ³² In the den were seven lions which were fed daily with two human bodies and two sheep. This food was withheld from them, to make sure that they would devour Daniel.

³³ Now in Judea was a prophet named Habakkuk. He had put some bread and stew in a basket, and was about to take them to the reapers in the field ³⁴ when an angel of the Lord appeared and said to him, "Take that lunch to Daniel in the lion's den at Babylon."

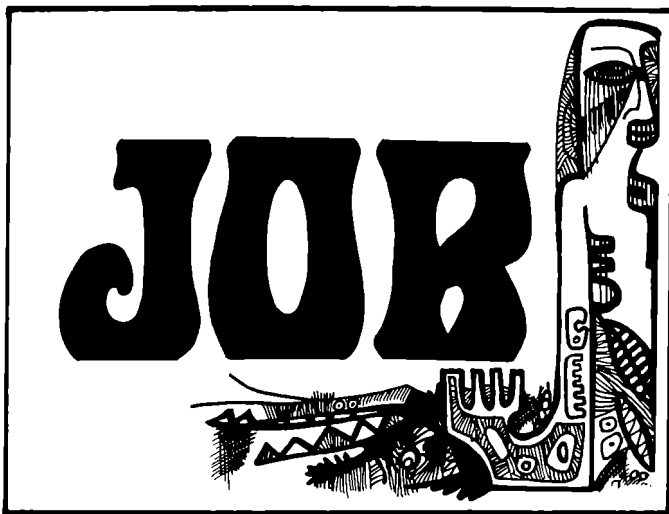
³⁵ Habakkuk said, "Sir, 'I have never been to Babylon nor have I seen the lions' den.'"

³⁶ The angel then took him by the crown of his head, carried him by his hair, and soon they were alighting above the lions' den in Babylon. ³⁷ "Daniel, Daniel," cried Habakkuk, "take this lunch God has sent you."

³⁸ Daniel gave thanks to God, saying, "You have remembered me, O God, and have not forsaken those who love you. ³⁹ Daniel ate, and the Lord's angel returned Habakkuk to his own place.

⁴⁰ On the seventh day, the king came to the lions' den to mourn for Daniel. He looked inside and saw Daniel sitting there. ⁴¹ The king cried aloud, 'How great you are, O Lord God of Daniel! Surely there is no other God but you!'

⁴² He took Daniel out and threw into the den those who had tried to destroy him. They were at once devoured before his eyes.



THE TRADITIONAL FIGURE OF JOB

1 Job, a faultless and upright man who feared God and avoided evil, once lived in the land of Uz. ²He had seven sons and three daughters. ³Owner of seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five

hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys and a large number of servants, he was considered the greatest man among the people of the East.

⁴His sons used to take turns holding banquets in their homes and

INTRODUCTION

The story of Job heads the Wisdom Books of the Bible: it is here that the great questions of the human condition are touched upon in the most profound way. Job's misfortunes – after having been blessed in his life, he is reduced to the most extreme misery – are only a pretext to make us reflect on the fact that human life on earth is not satisfactory. Suffering and death are manifestations of a more profound evil, which is a being ill-at-ease, and the bad conscience of human beings aware of their destiny.

It is no accident that Job is introduced as a man from the land of Uz, which does not belong to God's people and has not entered into the hope of the prophets. It is enough for Job to contemplate nature to believe in God and in his Providence, but he has not seen him, and God has never addressed his word to him. Yet, Job feels himself to be the work of God. He realizes that only a dialogue with his Creator will enable him to situate himself in his place, but even though he looks for an opening, he does not find it.

Job's accusations are a way of crying out to God with all the strength of his unsatisfied hope and, in the end, God will have to intervene.

THE BOOK OF JOB

The starting point of this book is a popular tale found in the first and last pages (1:1-2:13 and 42:10-17), the story of the holy man Job. Yahweh had tested him by taking everything away from him, and in spite of this, Job had remained steadfast, trusting God who always rewards the just. At the end, God gave everything back to him.

This morality is obviously a little simplistic. Then, an author unknown to us, developed this example of Job in the dialogues of chapters 3-41. There, Job shouts his indignation before the human condition and his three friends confront him with the answers of the wise men of that time.

would invite their three sisters to dine and drink with them. ⁵After each series of banquets, Job would send for his sons and daughters and have them purified. He would rise early in the morning, offer a holocaust for each of his children, thinking, "Perhaps they have sinned and blasphemed God in their hearts." This had been quite a routine for Job.

⁶One day the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh, and Satan came with them. ⁷Yahweh asked Satan, "Where have you been?"

Satan answered, "Going up and down the earth, roaming about."

⁸Yahweh asked again, "Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as faultless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil."

⁹But Satan returned the question, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

¹⁰Have you not built a protective wall around him and his family and all his possessions? You have blessed and prospered him. ¹¹But stretch out your hand to destroy everything he has, and I bet he will curse you to your face."

¹²Yahweh said to Satan, "Very well, all that he has is in your power. But do not lay a finger upon the man himself." So Satan left from the presence of Yahweh.

¹³One day, while his sons and daughters were feasting in the house of the eldest brother, ¹⁴a messenger came to Job and said, "Your oxen were at the plow, and your donkeys were grazing nearby. ¹⁵Then the Sabaeans came and carried them off. They killed the herdsmen. I alone escaped to tell you."

¹⁶While he was yet speaking, another messenger came, "God's fire fell from the sky and burned all your sheep and the shepherds as well. I alone escaped to tell you."

¹⁷He had hardly finished speaking when another messenger arrived, "Three raiding teams of Chaldeans killed your servants and carried off your camels. I alone escaped to tell you."

¹⁸He was still speaking when a third messenger came and said to Job, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking in the house of their eldest brother ¹⁹when suddenly a great wind blew across the desert and struck the house. It collapsed on them and they all died. I alone escaped to tell you."

²⁰In grief Job tore his clothes and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground and worshipped, ²¹saying,

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,

6. Is 38, 12

9. Wis 2, 1; James 4, 14

10. Eccl 1, 2

4. Dt 32, 4

o Job lives in a foreign pagan land (Uz would be in the southern part of Palestine) in ancient times. His position is enviable: he is a leader of nomads, somewhat like Abraham, and he lacks nothing. Yet, he is only a pawn in world politics, or better, in heavenly politics. God holds a council with the *sons of God*, namely, the angels, and he must look at things which escape Job. In this case, God is challenged by Satan, the enemy, the spirit who promotes evil, and in spite of himself, God has to test Job in order to defend his own honor.

And so, from the very start, man is put in his place. He is neither the center of the world, nor can he demand that God stop the course of history for his sake.

Job does not say *anything* foolish against God. Even though he does not know the cause of his misfortune, he sees that his personal interest does not necessarily coincide with God's. Job takes the attitude which will save him in the end and which for the moment, gives glory to God: before the spirit of evil, always accusing believers of looking after their own interests and expecting rewards, Job proves that God can arouse a totally disinterested love in his faithful people.

Note the intervention of Job's wife: *Curse God and die*. Those who blame God for the existing evil do not solve problems and they close the path of hope.

naked shall I return.

Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken away.

Blessed be his name!"

²²In spite of this calamity, Job did not sin by accusing God of doing him wrong.

2 ¹Once more the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh, and again Satan was with them. ²Yahweh asked Satan, "Where have you been?"

Satan answered, "Going up and down the earth, roaming about."

³Yahweh asked again, "Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as faultless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil. He still maintains his integrity even if you provoked me to ruin him for no reason."

⁴Satan replied, "Skin for skin! For his own life, a man will give everything he owns. ⁵But lay your hand against his own flesh and bones and he will curse you to your face."

⁶Yahweh said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power. But spare his life."

⁷So Satan left the presence of Yahweh and afflicted Job with pestering sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. ⁸Job took a potsherd to scrape himself and sat among the ashes.

⁹His wife said to him, "Do you still hold on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

¹⁰Job replied, "You talk foolishly. If we receive good things from God, why can't we accept evil from him?" In spite of this calamity, Job did not utter a sinful word.

HERE BEGIN THE POEMS OF JOB

+ ¹¹Three of Job's friends – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite – heard of the misfortune that came upon him. They set out from their own homes and journeyed together to offer their sympathy and consolation to Job. ¹²Failing to

recognize him from the distance, they wept aloud, tore their garments and poured dust upon their heads. ¹³For seven days and seven nights they sat on the ground beside him. They did not say a word to Job, for they saw how terribly he suffered.

21. Ps 49, 18; Eccl 5, 14; 1 Tim 6, 7

6. Lk 22, 31

8. Lev 13, 46

+ As we remarked in the introduction, this is the beginning of the dialogue on suffering, leaving aside Job, this popular figure who accepted God's will without arguing in chapter 2.

Cursed be the day I was born. These first verses repeat what Jeremiah said in a moment of despair (see Jer 20, 14). And so, we must not be surprised when, at times, the friends of God make similar statements, nor judge those who attempt to commit suicide when driven by despair.

Why is life given to the miserable, for whom the path is hidden? Why are children born crippled and blind, or destined for an atrocious death? But we would be mistaken to think only about them or even to focus on the millions of people who are marginalized and without hope today. Because in the very countries where nothing is lacking, human beings, asphyxiated by a materialistic civilization, are despairing in the

midst of their abundance: it is there that young couples do not want to have children. Job's question deals with the value of life: Is life worth it? Would it not be better not to have existed?

In past centuries people's lives were driven by the uncontainable energy of life. They were living and making sacrifices for the survival of their people. Our parents worked and procreated without asking themselves why. But when people reach maturity in their critical thinking, they need an answer to this question: Why live if, in the end, life leads nowhere?

In the story of Adam, God curses the earth because of man, or rather, he shows that sin disfigures life and that death without the hope of rising is bitter. This appears again in Rv 9, 6 where some look for death which does not come, to refer to sinners who suffer without repenting.

May that day perish when I was born

3

¹ At length it was Job who spoke, cursing the day of his birth. ² This is what he said:

³ May that day perish when I was born,
and also the night of my conception.

⁴ May that day be dark
and ignored by God.

May no light shine upon it.

⁵ May the shadow of death claim it as its own.

May a cloud settle over it;
may blackness obstruct its light.

⁶ That day – oh, may it be obscure;
among the days of the year, may it not occur;
may it be unaccounted for.

⁷ That night – oh, let it be barren,
unreached by shouts of joy.

⁸ Let it be cursed by the lovers of darkness,
sorcerers who call on the Devil.

⁹ Let its morning stars be in mourning;
let it wait for light in vain
and never see the first rays of dawn,

¹⁰ since it did not close the womb
to keep my eyes from seeing doom.

¹¹ Why did I not die at birth,
or come from the womb without breath?

¹² Why the knees that received me,
why the breasts that suckled me?

¹³ For then I should have lain down
asleep and at rest

¹⁴ with kings and rulers of the earth
who built for themselves lonely tombs

¹⁵ or with princes who have gold to spare
and sepulchers stuffed with silver.

¹⁶ Why did I not come out stillborn,
like others who did not see the light of morn?

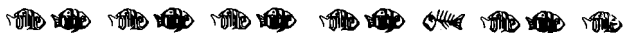
¹⁷ There the trouble of the wicked cease,
there the weary find repose.

¹⁸ There the prisoners are at ease;
they hear no longer the taskmaster's voice.

¹⁹ Great and small fare equally there,
where the slave is free from his master.

²⁰ Why is light given to the miserable,
and life to the bitter in soul?

²¹ Death is what they long for
more than hidden treasure.



- ²²They rejoice upon reaching the grave.
²³Why give light to a man whose path is hidden
 and whose way God blocks at every side?
²⁴Instead of bread I feed on sighs
 like water poured out are my groans.
²⁵For what I fear has come upon me,
 what I dread has befallen me.
²⁶I find no rest, I find no ease;
 only turmoil, nothing of peace!

No man is just before God

■4 ¹Eliphaz the Temanite spoke next:

- ²If one attempts a word, will you condone it?
 For who can just keep silent?
³Remember how you have taught many others,
 how you have strengthened their feeble hands.
⁴Your words have supported those who wavered,
 have steadied the knees that faltered.
⁵But now that trouble has come, you are discouraged;
 now that it has struck, you are dismayed.
⁶Should not your confidence be in your piety,
 and your hope in your integrity?
⁷Have you seen a guiltless man perish,
 or an upright man done away with?
⁸As I see it, those who plow evil
 or those who sow trouble reap its like.
⁹By the breath of God they are swept away;
 by the blast of his wrath they are destroyed.
¹⁰The lion may roar and growl,
 yet like its cubs' teeth it will fail.
¹¹The lion will die for lack of prey,
 and the whelps of its mate will stray.
¹²I had a secret revelation;
 a whisper of it came to my ear.
¹³Amid thoughts from night visions,

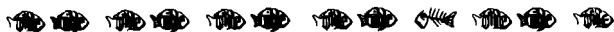
■ Eliphaz is a believer. Faced with Job's grief, he repeats what was commonly said in those days:

- God is just in this life: he rewards the just with health and prosperity.
- If you are sick and abandoned, it is because you have sinned.

Eliphaz is not wrong in recalling that the wicked are afflicted with misfortune and that God's providence favours his friends. The Bible does state that, as anyone can easily verify. The prophets did not hesitate to repeat to Israel that its difficulties were the consequence of its sins. Deuteronomy also declares this (Dt 30:15-20) and the book of Judges claims to prove it through historical events (Jgs 2:11-19).

Eliphaz claims he is speaking as a result of a revelation from God such as many prophets had in their dreams. He is surely telling the truth: *can a mortal be just in the eyes of God*. Can any man be pure before him? People complain that life is meaningless, but maybe sin prevents them from seeing its meaning?

Have you seen a guiltless one cut down? (v 7). People of faith understand that God "brings the powerful down and he exalts the humble," but daily experience often seems to show the opposite. According to the Gospel, wealth can be a negative sign. Eliphaz speaks with such assurance because he has not suffered in his own flesh, nor does he pay enough attention to those who suffer.



when men are heavily wrapped in slumber,

¹⁴I was seized with fear and trembling
that shook me to my very bones.

¹⁵A spirit passed over my face,
and the hair of my body stood on end.

¹⁶It stopped and stood before my eyes,
but I could not make out what it was.

Silence... and then – a voice was heard:

¹⁷"Can a mortal be just in the eyes of God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?

¹⁸If God can put no trust in his servants,
if he can charge his angels with error,

¹⁹how much more those who live in houses of clay
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed as easily as moths!

²⁰Between dawn and dusk they perish,
and unheeded, forever vanish;

²¹and they die for lack of wisdom.

5 ¹Resentment kills the fool,
and anger slays the simple.

5 ¹I have seen a fool taking root
when suddenly his household col-
lapsed.

⁴His sons went about without security,
crushed in court without a defender.

⁵The hungry consumed his harvest
and carried it to a hiding place;
his surplus was taken away,
the thirsty hankered after his wealth.

⁶For affliction comes not from the earth,
nor does sorrow sprout from the ground;
⁷but it is man who carries about trouble,
as eagle in the heights, brings down light-
ning flash.

¹Call then, but who will answer you?
Who of the Saints will you turn to?

⁸If I were you, I would appeal to God
and lay before him my case.

⁹His wonders are past all reckoning,
his miracles beyond all counting.

¹⁰He pours rain down to the earth
and sends water upon the fields.

¹¹He sets the lowly on high,
raises the grieving to a state of joy.

¹²He wrecks the plans of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.

¹³He traps the clever in their own devices
and puts an end to the schemes of the wily.

¹⁴Darkness comes upon them in the day-
time:
they grope at noon as in the night.

¹⁵He rescues the despoiled from the de-
spoil,

the weak from the hands of those in power.
¹⁶Thus hope comes to the unfortunate,
and injustice shuts its mouth.

¹⁷Blessed is the man whom God corrects;
reject not, therefore, his lessons.

¹⁸He inflicts wounds, but he binds them
up;
he strikes but he also heals.

¹⁹From six troubles he will rescue you;
at the seventh no harm will touch you.

²⁰In famine he will ransom you from death;
in war, from the threat of the sword.

²¹You will be protected from the lash of the
tongue,
and need not be afraid of approaching ruin.

²²You will laugh at destruction and want;
you need not fear the beasts of the earth.

²³You will be in league with stones of the
field
and at peace with wild animals.

²⁴You will find your tent secure,
your household untouched when you
come home.

²⁵You will have children without number
and descendants like the grass of the hills.

²⁶You will come to the grave in full vigour,
like a sheaf of grain gathered in season.

²⁷This we have examined and found true.
This we have heard, and you should know.

What is man that you keep him in mind

6 ¹Job replied:
²If only my anguish could be measured
and my misery put on the balance,
³they would outweigh the sands of the
seashore!

It is for this that I speak impetuously.
⁴Pierced by the arrows of the Almighty,
my spirit absorbs their poison;
my heart fails before the terrors of God.
⁵Does a wild ass bray when it has fodder?
Does an ox bellow when it has grass?
⁶What taste would food have without salt?
What flavour is there in the white of an
egg?

⁷So everything is tasteless for me,
the bread I eat makes me sick.

⁸Oh, that I might have my request,
that God would grant what I wanted –

⁹that he would decide to crush me,
let loose his hand and strike me down!

¹⁰Then this at least would comfort me,
my only joy in unrelenting dread
that I had not cursed the will of the Holy
one.

¹¹What strength have I to go on hoping,
what expectation to keep on waiting?

¹²Have I the strength of stone,
have I the flesh of bronze?

¹³Have I the power to help myself,
now that success has departed?

¹⁴Friends must treat a hopeless man
kindly,

even if he forgets to fear the Almighty.

¹⁵But fickle have been my brothers,
like the flowing of seasonal waters.

¹⁶Once a year such a stream is seen with ice
and swells with melting snow.

¹⁷But summer comes and the river dries
and no water is left to flow.

¹⁸Caravans turn aside from their routes,

go up to the wasteland and perish.

¹⁹The merchants of Tema search,
the travellers of Sheba hope.

²⁰They are confident to find water,
but are frustrated when they arrive there.

²¹Now you too have become of no help;
you see a dreadful thing and draw back in
fear.

²²Have I asked you to give me anything?
Did I say, "Pay a ransom for me,

²³deliver me from the enemy
or rescue me from suffering?"

²⁴Teach me and I will keep silent;
show me where I have been wrong.

²⁵Honest words I must not resent,
but what have your arguments shown?

²⁶Do you mean to correct what I said,
or treat a despairing man's words as wind?

²⁷You would even cast lots for the orphan
and bargain over your friend!

²⁸But now, give me your attention;
surely I will not lie to your face.

²⁹Relent, and grant me justice;
reconsider, my case is not yet tried.

³⁰Is there insincerity on my tongue?
Can my mouth not discern falsehood?

7 ¹Man's life on earth is a military service,
his days are those of a mercenary.

²Like a slave he longs for the shade of
evening,

like a hireling he waits for his wages.

³Thus I am allotted months of futility
and nights of grief and misery.

⁴In bed I say, "When shall the day break?"
On rising, I think, "When shall evening
come?"

and I toss restless till dawn.

⁵My body is full of worms and scabs;
my skin festers with its boils and cracks.

9. Is 38, 12

15. Jer 15, 18

4. Dt 28, 67

◆ Job is bitter against all these friends who
make speeches but do not bring him peace.
Now, he begs God to make him die before he
rebels against him under the pressure of evil
(6:8-10).

In 6:15-30, Job emphasizes the abyss which
separates those who suffer from those who
come to console. Do we not often verify this at
a patient's bedside? Consoling words are often a
disguise: those consoling the afflicted want to
hide their own confusion before others' pain and
their own inability to really lighten their suffer-
ing. However, the sick person is not fooled and
feels more isolated in realizing he is not told the
truth.

In chapter 7, Job addresses an absent God.

Let us not forget that, according to the book, Job
comes from a pagan people and he does not
know God-Father. He thinks that God may be
jealous and that he watches over people in order
to punish them on the spot: it would be better to
escape from such an observer.

Yet, Job's complaint against God reminds us
of the frictions between people who love each
other, and precisely because they love each
other, they are more demanding.

*What is man that you make so much of
him?* Job is dreaming of a God who is tender
toward his creatures. And also, if God is watch-
ing over his favorite creatures at all times, could
it not be because he cannot live without them?



*My days pass swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
heading without hope to their end.

⁷My life is like wind; you well know it.
O God, never will I see happiness again.

*The eye that saw me will see me no longer;

when you look for me, I shall have gone.

⁹As a cloud dissolves and vanishes,
so he who goes to the grave never returns.

¹⁰Never will he come back to his house;
or be seen by his household.

¹¹I will not restrain my words,
in the agony of my spirit I will speak out:
and complain with embittered soul,

¹²"Am I the sea or a monster of the deep,
that you have to keep me under watch?"

¹³When I think my bed will comfort me
and my couch will soothe my pain,

¹⁴then you frighten me with dreams
and terrify me with visions,

¹⁵so that I prefer death by strangling
rather than this body and suffering.

¹⁶See I am dying. I will not live forever.
Leave me alone; my days are meaningless.

¹⁷What is man that you make so much of him,

that you give him so much attention,

¹⁸that every morning you examine him
and each moment try him with affliction?

¹⁹Will you never take your eyes off me
and give me respite to swallow my spittle?

²⁰Suppose I sinned, what has it done you,
O keeper of mankind?

Why choose me as your target?
Have I become a burden to you?

²¹Why not pardon my sin

and take away my guilt?

For in the dust I will soon lie down;

when you search for me, I shall have gone.

Does God pervert judgment?

8 ¹Bildad the Shuhite spoke:

²How long will you say such things?

Your words are long-winded blusters.

³Does God pervert judgment?

Does the Almighty distort justice?

⁴If your children did him wrong,
he has made them pay for their sins.

⁵But if you will have recourse to God
and plead with the Almighty,

⁶if you are faultless and righteous,

even now he will care for you
and restore you to your rightful place.

⁷And such will your prosperity be
as to make you forget the former times.

⁸Inquire of the past generations
and learn from their fathers' experience;

⁹for born but yesterday, we know nothing
and our days on earth are but a twinkling.

¹⁰But looking back to ancestral tradition
will bring forth words of wisdom.

¹¹Can papyrus thrive without mire?

Can reeds flourish without water?

¹²Even if still growing and uncut,
they wither quicker than any plant.

¹³Such is the end of him who forgets God;
the godless man's hope perishes.

¹⁴His trust has a fragile foundation;
a spider's web is what he relies on.

¹⁵He leans on his house, but it does not stand;

he clings to it, but it does not last.

¹⁶He is like a plant tended in the garden,
spreading its shoots under the sun.

¹⁷entwining its roots about a pile of rocks,
holding fast to each stone.

¹⁸But if uprooted from where it has grown,
the place rejects it as its own;

¹⁹and there it lies rotting by the road,
while other plants grow in its place.

²⁰Indeed God does not reject the righteous,
nor lend his hand to the evildoer.

²¹He will again fill your mouth with laughter

and your lips with joyful shouts.

²²Your enemies will be wrapped in dishonour,

and the tent of the wicked will come apart.

6. 1 K 22, 19; Dn 7, 10; Hch 12, 22; Rev 5, 11

o Job is upset before an inaccessible God. The Creator's greatness, as manifested in his works, does not console him when he suffers without being heard. The misfortune of a single just one distorts creation.

But, again, Job does not only question evil, but the very situation created by human existence with its freedom. The God who made us free persons must also be a Person, and as long as he does not speak to us, his silence may be interpreted as a refusal to dialogue and a proof of aggressiveness toward us.

But, am I innocent, after all? I do not know.

Job reminds us of those notorious trials where militants, unjustly accused by their own party, come to admit their guilt "spontaneously." Similarly, many times a single mishap will be enough to make us feel sinful.

Can a mortal be just before God? The same question is found in 4:17 and 22:2. This guilt feeling and the opposite feeling of aggressiveness against God are the two sides of the same truth: the human condition is unacceptable as long as God makes a person who cannot find him.

You granted me life in your grace. Job can-

I cannot argue with you, nevertheless...

9

¹Then Job answered:

²Very well I know that it is so.
But how can a mortal be just before God?

³If one were to contend with him,
not once in a thousand would he answer.

⁴His power is vast, his wisdom profound.
Who has resisted him and come out unharmed?

⁵He moves mountains without their knowledge;
he overturns them in his rage.

⁶He makes the earth tremble;
he shakes its pillars.

⁷He commands the sun, and it does not shine;
he seals off the light of the stars.

⁸He alone stretches out the skies
and treads on the waves of the seas.

⁹He made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and every constellation.

¹⁰His wonders are past all reckoning,
his miracles beyond all counting.

¹¹He passes by me, but I do not see him;
he moves on, but I do not perceive him.

¹²He snatches away, and who can stop him?
Who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

¹³God does not turn back when angered;
before him Rahab's cohorts cowered.

¹⁴How then can I answer him?
How can I find words to argue with him

¹⁵if I get no answer, being innocent,
and only plead with my judge for mercy?

¹⁶Even if I appealed and he answered,
I do not believe that he would have heard.

¹⁷He who crushes me for a trifle
and multiplies my hurt for no reason.

¹⁸He does not let me regain my breath.
but fills me with grief without respite.

¹⁹If it were a contest of strength, he is mighty.
If a matter of justice, who will summon him?

²⁰If I were innocent, my own mouth would condemn me;
if blameless, it would pronounce me guilty.

6. Is 13, 13; Ps 114, 7

10. Is 40, 22; 44, 24

14. Rom 9, 20

not deny that God is concerned about his creatures, and he remembers the wonders God achieves in the pregnant mother. But these attentions only open the way for his demands: gifts coming to us from people above arouse our aggressiveness more than our gratitude: *I know*

what was in your mind.

After being unconcerned for years, people discover the burden of their responsibility and it is then that the willed absence of their Creator provokes their restlessness and prepares them for rebellion.



²¹But am I innocent, after all?
I do not know, and so I find my life hateful.

²²It is all the same! And this I dare say:
both blameless and wicked – he destroys.

²³When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks the despair of the innocent.

²⁴When a land falls into a tyrant's hand,
it is he who makes the judges blind.

But if it is not he – who else then?

²⁵Swifter than a runner are my days;
without a glimpse of joy they fly away.

²⁶They skim along like reed canoes,
or like eagles swooping on their prey.

²⁷If I resolve to forget my affliction,
to smile and change my expression,
²⁸fear comes at the thought of your punish-

ments

for I know I shall be held accountable.

²⁹If anyway I am to be condemned
why should I bother in vain?

³⁰If I wash my body with snow

and cleanse my hands with bleach,

³¹then you plunge me into the dung pit
even my clothes would abhor me.

³²He is not a man like me that I might
answer,

and in court we might confront each other.

³³If only there were an arbiter between us,
who could lay his hand upon both of us,

³⁴who could remove the rod of God from
me, so that his terror would not frighten me.

³⁵But it is not so. Then I will speak
to myself, without fear.

You hunt me like a lion

10

¹I loathe my life.

I shall then utter my complaint;
I shall speak of my soul's torment.

²I shall say to God: Condemn me not.
But what are your charges against me?

³Or does it please you just to oppress me,
to spurn the work of your hands
and favour the evildoers' designs?

⁴Have you eyes of flesh?
Do you see as man sees?

⁵Are your days as the days of man,
or your years as a mortal's lifetime?

⁶Why do you seek the guilt in me
and search after my faults?

⁷You know I have not sinned,
but who can rescue me from your hand?

⁸You have formed and made me.
Will you then turn and destroy me?

⁹Remember that you moulded me from clay.
Will you turn me to dust again?

¹⁰Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?

¹¹You wrapped me up in skin and flesh,
knit me together in bones and sinews.



¹²You granted me life in your grace
and kept my spirit in your care.

¹³Yet this is what you hid in your heart,
I know what was in your mind:

¹⁴You wanted to see if I sinned,
and not let my fault be forgiven.

¹⁵If I am guilty – alas for me!
If innocent – I dare not lift my head.
When I am filled with consternation,
humbled and shamed in my affliction.

¹⁶you hunt me like a lion,
showing your awesome power against me.

¹⁷You renew your attack upon me;
you intensify your rage,
your forces assail me wave upon wave.

¹⁸Why did you bring me out of the womb?

I wish I had died unseen,

¹⁹a being that had not been –
carried from the deep direct to the tomb.

²⁰Are not my few days almost over?

Turn away; leave me a while to recover

²¹before I go to the place of no return,

²²to the land of gloom and shadow,
to the land of chaos and deepest night,
where darkness is the only light.

⁹Its measure is wider than the earth,
broader than the sea.

¹⁰Who can stop him when he passes,
when he imprisons and calls to judgment?

¹¹He sees evil; he recognizes deceit.
Will he not then take note of it?

¹²So the stupid men learn to be wise
as wild donkeys become tame.

¹³If you set your heart aright
and stretch out your hands to him.

¹⁴if you wash your hand of sin
and allow no evil in your tent.

¹⁵you will then raise your face in honour:
having no fear, you will feel secure.

¹⁶You will forget your suffering
and recall it only as waters gone by.

¹⁷Your life will be brighter than noonday
and its darkness like the morning.

¹⁸You will be comforted, for there is hope:
you will be protected and feel safe.

¹⁹You will lie down with no one to fear;
many will come to court your favour.

²⁰But the eyes of the wicked will fail;
they will lose all way of escape.
their one hope – that death will come.

The discourse of Zophar

11 ¹Zophar the Naamithite spoke:
²Must these words go unanswered?

Must you be right for talking so much?

³Will your prattle keep men silent?

Will no one answer your mocking?

⁴You say to God that your way is right,
that you are clean in his sight.

⁵How I wish that God would speak
and open his lips against you,

⁶to show you the secrets of wisdom
which put intelligence to shame,
that you may know it is for your sin
that God calls you to account.

⁷Can you fathom the mysteries of God,
probe the extent of his perfection?

⁸It is higher than heaven –
what can you do?

Deeper than the world of death –
what can you know?

Will you defend God with lies?

+12 ¹Then Job answered:
²No doubt you are the people's voice:
when you die, wisdom dies with you!
³But I have a mind as well as you,
so I know all these things you said.

6. Rom 11, 33; 1 Cor 2, 9

8. Eph 3, 18; Bar 3, 29

17. Is 58, 8

+ Zophar kept on repeating the arguments of the wise men: if you are suffering, you are guilty; mend your way and you will be healed.

Then, Job continues to accuse God. He lists some of the injustices which we see daily. Then,

in 12: 14-25, he emphasizes that God's power manifests itself especially in his destructive action. He upsets the fortune of the powerful, distorts the wisdom of the sages, prevents man from being successful, and does not allow his



⁴To my friends I am a laughingstock:
"The man who calls and whom God an-
swers,

the just and perfect man" —
that is how I am rebuked.

⁵Men at ease think of my misfortune
as the outcome of a moral downfall.

⁶Yet the robbers' tents are undisturbed,
those who provoke God are in peace,
those who make a god of their strength.

⁷But ask the beasts to teach you,
the birds of the air to tell you,

"the plants of the earth to instruct you,
the fish of the sea to inform you.

¹¹Does not the ear test words
as the tongue tastes food?

¹²So wisdom is found in the old
understanding in great age.

¹³Who among them do not understand
that behind all this is God's hand?

¹⁴He holds the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind.

¹⁵To God belong wisdom and power;
his are counsel and understanding.

¹⁴What he tears down, none can rebuild;
the man he imprisons, none can release.

¹⁵If he withholds water, there is drought;
if he lets it loose, there is flood.

¹⁶In him are strength and perception;
deceived and deceiver are in his power.

¹⁷He leads counsellors away stripped
and makes fools of judges.

¹⁸He loosens the belt of kings
and ties a loincloth about their waist.

¹⁹He leads priests away, barefoot,
and overthrows those in power.

²⁰He compels advisers to keep silent,
and strips elders of their discernment.

²¹He puts princes to shame;
he unties the girdle of the strong.

²²(He uncovers the gloomy recesses
and brings the deep darkness to light.)

²³He makes a nation rise and fall,
a people to grow and to dwindle.

²⁴He deprives leaders of their judgment,
leaving them to roam in a trackless waste.

²⁵Without light, they grope in the dark
and stagger like drunkards.

■ 13

¹My eyes have seen all this,
my ears have heard and understood.

²What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.

³But I am speaking to the Almighty,
I plead my case with God.

⁴You are glossing over the problem
and offering false remedies.

⁵If only you would keep silent,
that would at least be wisdom.

⁶Hear now my argument;
listen to my defense.

⁷Will you speak falsely for God?

ventures to last. Job even says that, in the midst of a perfect universe, human history has no meaning.

■ Before the injustices in life, human wisdom does not have an adequate answer. And so Job accuses these wise men pretending to justify God while forgetting reality (13:1-6). *Will you defend God with false arguments?* It is better to keep quiet and admit our own ignorance.

This boldness will be my triumph. Job prefers to accuse God and demand judgment. Even though he is aware that such an attitude is blasphemy, he is so convinced that God is just that he wants to force him to come out of his silence. Since discussion does not clear up anything, Job tries another way: to provoke God.

Perhaps God will make him die because of his boldness, but, at least, Job will have had an answer and he will know why he dies (13:13-20).

Actually Job knows that God will not condemn him for having appeared before him: for no godless man dares draw near to him.

Job's bold attitude corrects the widespread image of a believer accepting with resignation without trying to understand. Job does not fall down before God like a slave, but rather, being a free creature, conscious of his dignity in the eyes of his Maker, Job does not resign himself to death and he asks for an explanation. The rest of the Bible will tell us that God wants to give people precisely what Job is demanding.



Will you defend him with false arguments?

⁸Will you side with him
and advocate on his behalf?

⁹Would it be well if he examine you?
Could he be deceived as men are?

¹⁰He will rebuke you for sure
if in secret you show partiality.

¹¹You will be terrified by his majesty,
and you will be in dread of him.

¹²Heaps of ashes are your maxims;
mounds of clay are your defenses.

¹³So keep silent and let me speak;
this will be at my own risk.

¹⁴I am putting myself in jeopardy
and gambling for my life.

¹⁵Though he may slay me,
I will still argue before him;

¹⁶and this might even save me
for no godless man dares draw near to him.

¹⁷Carefully listen to my words,
give my case a hearing.

¹⁸I will proceed in due form
believing that I am guiltless.

¹⁹If anyone makes good his charges,
I am ready to be silenced and die.

²⁰Only grant me these two things, O God,
and from you I will not hide:

²¹Withdraw your hand far from me,
and frighten me not with your terrors.

²²Summon me and I will respond;
or let me speak and you reply.

²³What are my faults, what are my sins?
Make known to me all of them.

²⁴Why hide your face from me
and consider me your enemy?

²⁵Why torment a wind-blown leaf
or pursue a withered straw?

²⁶But you are searching for accusations
and you recall the sins of my youth.

²⁷You shackle my feet,
keep watch on all my paths
and mark out my footsteps.

◆ Through his personal case, Job presents the human condition, and he does it in a way very similar to Ecclesiastes. He emphasizes the following about man's fate:

- his life is short;
- his sufferings are countless;

- the grace of his youth is followed by the bitterness of adult life;
- there is a degree of impurity in him, namely, something mysterious which ruins everything he undertakes;
- when looking at life, he would like to live



Man born of woman has a short life

14

¹Man born of woman

has a short life full of sorrow.

²Like a flower he blossoms and withers;
transient and fleeting as a shadow.

³Is this he on whom you turn your eyes
and bring before you for judgment?

⁴Who can bring the clean from the unclean?
No one!

⁵Measured are the days of man;
you have set the number of his months,
assigned him bounds he cannot pass.

⁶Then leave him alone; turn away from him
till he complete his day like a hireling.

⁷There is hope for a tree:
if cut down it will sprout again,
its new shoots will keep on coming.

⁸Though its roots grow old in the ground
and its stump withers in the soil,

⁹at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth shoots like a young plant.

¹⁰But when man is cut down, he becomes lifeless;
he breathes his last and ceases to exist.

¹¹As waters of a lake may disappear
or that of a river may drain away,

¹²so man lies down and does not rise again;
the heavens will vanish before he wakes,
before he rises from his sleep.

o ¹³If only you would hide me in the grave
and shelter me till your wrath is past!
If only you would set a time for me
and then remember me!

¹⁴Will a man live again if he dies?

All the days of my service

I would wait for my release.

¹⁵You would call and I would answer;
you would long for the work of your hands again.

¹⁶Now you watch my every step,
but then you would stop counting my sins.

¹⁷My offenses would be sealed in a bag,
and you would do away with my guilt.

5. Eccl 6, 12.

forever, which is not granted to him. But meanwhile Ecclesiastes accepts the universal law. Job dreams of a God who would talk with him and forget, for a time, his superiority (v. 15-17).

Here we see one of the results of the teaching

9. Eccl 3, 21.

that God gave his people for centuries. Thanks to the prophetic words, the Israelites acquired a sense of their responsibility, and then, they discovered their personhood. While their ancestors, like Jacob or Moses, were resigned to their mortal destiny, they were desperately looking for the Good News.

¹⁸But as mountains erode and crumble,
as rock is moved from its place,

¹⁹as waters wear away stones
and floods wash away the soil,
so you destroy the hope of man.

²⁰You crush him once for all, and he is gone;

you change his appearance and send him away.

²¹If his sons are honoured, he does not know it;

if brought low, he does not see it.

²²Only the pain of his own body does he feel; only for himself does he mourn.

Another discourse of Eliphaz

15 ¹Eliphaz the Temanite spoke:

²Should a wise man answer with airy notions,

puff himself up with senseless opinions?

³Should he argue in empty talk,
in words that are meaningless.

⁴You are doing away with piety
and lessening devotion to God.

⁵Your iniquity instructs your mouth,
and you talk like the crafty.

⁶You are condemned by your own mouth,
by your own lips, not mine.

⁷Are you mankind's first-born?

Were you brought forth before the hills?

⁸Are you privy to God's counsels?

Do you alone possess wisdom?

⁹What knowledge have you that we do not have?

What do you understand that is obscure to us?

¹⁰The gray-haired and the aged are among us,
men older than your father.

¹¹Are God's consolations too small for you,

and the words spoken gently to you?

¹²Why does your heart carry you away,
why do your eyes flash

¹³when you turn your wrath against God
and utter such words as these?

¹⁴What is man to claim innocence,
the child of woman to be cleared of guilt?

¹⁵If God puts no trust in his holy ones,
and the heavens are unclean in his eyes,

¹⁶how much less man who is vile and corrupt,

who drinks evil as he drinks water!

¹⁷Listen and I will explain;
I will tell you of my experience

¹⁸and of the sages' teachings
passed on to them by their fathers,
¹⁹to whom alone the land was given
when no foreigner moved among them.

²⁰The wicked are in unceasing torment.
Numbered are the years of the tyrant.

²¹In his ears are sounds of terrors,
in prosperity the threat of marauders.

²²He despairs of escaping the darkness
and is always on the lookout for the sword.

²³As wanderer and prey for vultures,
he knows his destruction is at hand.

²⁴The hour of darkness fills him with dread,

as distress and anguish close in on him.

²⁵And this happens because he defied God,
he raised his hand against the Almighty,

²⁶charging stubbornly against him
behind a thick, sturdy shield.

²⁷His face has grown full and fat,
his thighs bulge with flesh,

²⁸yet he will dwell in ruined cities,
in deserted and crumbling houses.

²⁹No longer will he be rich
nor take root in the earth.

³⁰He will not escape from darkness;
a flame will wither his shoots;

the wind will carry off his blossom.

³¹Let him not trust in greatness

for he will get nothing in return.

³²He will be paid in full before his time,
and his branches will never again be green.

³³Like a vine he will be stripped of unripe grapes;
like the olive, he will shed his blossoms.

27. Ps 73,4

● In 14:13-17 Job mentions the place of the dead, or Sheol, or netherworld, where the Jews thought that, after death, they would have some semblance of life, but more like prisoners far from Yahweh than like human beings who are alive and praise God (see Is 38:18-19). When a man has been awakened by God to understand his own worth as a free person, he no longer accepts to disappear forever. And if God were to grant him to survive in a place not close to God, he would always long to reach God: *I would wait for the end of my service, then you could call me and I would answer you.* Once again here,

we find the image of God mysteriously bending over people.

In chapters 15-18 everyone proceeds with out listening to the other: Job expresses his despair and his friends repeat their conviction that misfortunes are for the wicked.

◆ Notice the passage 16:8-17,7 recalling Isaiah 53 and also the psalms evoking the Passion of Christ. When human beings are suffering, they share in the Passion of Christ, whether they know it or not, the confrontation of sin with the justice of God continues in them. God seems

¹⁴For the breed of the godless will be barren,
and fire will consume the tents of extortioners.

¹⁵They conceive mischief and bring forth evil,
for in their womb deceit is formed.

Where then can my hope be?

16 ¹Then Job answered:
²I have heard many such things.

What miserable comforters you are!

³When will your airy words end?

What ails you and keeps you arguing?

⁴I too could talk as you do,

if you were in my place;

I could declaim over you

and shake my head at you.

⁵I would give you strength,
and comfort you with words.

⁶Yet if I talk, my suffering is not eased,

if I refrain, my pain is not lessened.

⁷O God, you have worn me out!

You have destroyed my household.

⁸You have filled me with wrinkles,

which testify against me;

even my growing leanness

bears witness to my face.

⁹God assails me in his anger;

he gnashes his teeth at me,

while my enemies lord it over me.

¹⁰With open mouths they jeer at me;

the strike my cheek, and together

they mass themselves against me.

¹¹God has given me over to evil men

and cast me into the clutches of the wicked.

¹²All was well until he shattered me,

but he seized me and dashed me to pieces.

Having set me up for a target,

¹³he had his arrows pointed at me,

striking from every direction,

piercing my sides without pity,

spilling my gall on the ground.

¹⁴Like a warrior he bears down on me,

thrusting me incessantly.

¹⁵I have fastened sackcloth over my skin

and buried my brow in the dust.

¹⁶My face is red with weeping,

deep shadows ring my eyes;

¹⁷yet my hands are free of violence,

and my prayer sincere.

¹⁸O earth, cover not my blood;

let not my cry come to rest!

¹⁹Even now my witness is in heaven
and my defender is on high.

²⁰Now my prayer has gone up to God
as I poured out my tears before him.

²¹Would that man could discuss with God
as he does with his fellows.

²²For my years are numbered, and soon
I will take the road of no return.

17 ¹My spirit is broken,
my days are cut short

and the grave awaits me.

²Mockers surround me;
my eyes grow dim with nights of bitterness.

³Keep beside you, O God, my guarantee

since no one cares to be my sponsor;

since my friends have been unhelpful.

⁴You have closed their minds to reason,

so they will not help me.

⁵Who will help a friend when his sons are
in need?

They describe as evil my fate,

⁶and I have been made everybody's by-word,

a man in whose face people spit.

⁷My eyes have grown dim with grief,

my frame shrunken to a shadow.

⁸At this upright men are appalled,

and the guiltless rail against the wicked.

⁹The righteous feel at ease

and those with clean hands are strengthened.

¹⁰But come on again, all of you;

I will not find a single sage among you.

¹¹My days are ended, my plans shattered,

and so my heart's desires

harass me by day and night.

¹²These men talk of day when it is night,

light has become like darkness.

¹³Where is my hope? The grave is my home,

in the darkness I spread out my bed,

¹⁴I must call corruption "my father,"

and the worm "my mother" or "my sister,"

¹⁵where then can my hope be

and who will see any hope for me?

¹⁶Will it go down to the bars of death,

shall we descend together into the dust?

18 ¹Bildad the Shuhite replied:

²When will your empty words end?

Be sensible, and then we can talk.

18. Gen 4, 10

8. Is 52, 15

merciless in pursuing his creatures, in completely humiliating them, but, in fact, he is removing the roots of our pride.

Verses 17: 8-10 must be seen as Job's ironic

answer to his friends: You say that in seeing the wicked's misfortune, the just praise God's justice, well then, in seeing me so humiliated, rejoice and say: well done!



³Why do you regard us like beasts?
Are we stupid in your sight?
⁴You who tear yourself in your wrath,
must the earth be forsaken on your ac-
count?

Or must the rock be moved out of its place?

⁵Surely the evil man's light is snuffed;
his fire stops burning.

⁶The light is darkened in his tent;
the lamp shining on him goes out.

⁷His vigorous steps weaken;
his own schemes make him stumble.

⁸His feet carry him into a net
or lead him into a pitfall.

⁹A trap seizes him by the heel;
a snare lays hold of him.

¹⁰Hidden in the ground is a noose for him;
pitfalls await him along the way.

¹¹Terrors assail him on every side;
they harry him at every step.

¹²Hungering among his goods,
doom awaits him if he falls.

¹³Sickness eats his skin;
death's firstborn devours his limbs.

¹⁴Torn from the security of his tent,
he is marched off to the king of terrors,
now anyone may live in his tent;

¹⁵after brimstone is scattered over it.

¹⁶Dried up below are his roots;
withered above are his branches.

¹⁷His memory perishes in the land,
his name is forgotten on the earth.

¹⁸From light he is driven into darkness;

from the world he is banished.

¹⁹He has no descendants among his
people,

no survivor where once he lived.

²⁰Men of the west are appalled at his fate;
men of the east are seized with fright.

²¹Such is the lot of the wicked;
such is the place of one who knows not
God.

19 ¹This is what Job said:

²How long will you vex me,
crush me with your words?

³Ten times now you have reviled me,
you have attacked me shamelessly.

⁴If indeed I am at fault,
I alone am concerned with it.

⁵If you vaunt yourselves against me
and use my humiliation as argument,

⁶know then that God has treated me un-
fairly
and compassed me round with torment.

⁷Though I cry injustice I am not heard;
though I call for help I receive no aid.

⁸He has barred my way so I cannot pass;
he has shrouded my path and made it dark.

⁹He has stripped me of honour,
and removed the crown from my head.

¹⁰On every side he tears me down
and uproots my hope till it is gone.

¹¹He directs his anger against me
and counts me as his enemy.

¹²Against me his troops build a siege ramp,
and around my tent they encamp.

In my flesh I shall see God

+ ¹³From me he has alienated my brothers,
completely estranged my friends.

¹⁴My kinsfolk and companions have gone away;
my guests have forsaken me,

¹⁵my maidservants count me as an alien.

¹⁶I summon my servant, but he does not answer,
although I plead with him.

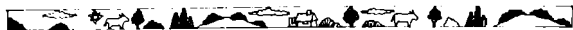
¹⁷To my wife my breath is offensive;
to my own brothers I am loathsome.

¹⁸Even little children ridicule me:
Come! let us make fun of him!

¹⁹All my intimate friends detest me;
those I love have turned against me.

²⁰I have become skin and bones
and have escaped with only my gums.

²¹My friends, have pity,
for God's hand has struck me.



²²Why do you hound me as God does?
Will you never have enough of my flesh?

²³Oh, that my words were on a scroll,
²⁴or recorded on lead with an iron tool,
or engraved forever on rock!

²⁵For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and he, as the last, will take his stand on the earth

²⁶I will be there behind my skin,
and in my flesh I shall see God.

²⁷With my own eyes I will see him –
I and not another. How my heart yearns!

²⁸If you say, "We will pursue him!
let us find a charge against him";

²⁹be afraid of the sword yourselves;
when wrath has brought punishment,
you will know there is judgment.

Zophar: Evil will come to an end

20 ¹Zophar of Naamath spoke next:
²My troubled thoughts move me to
reply

for I have been feeling impatient.

³I hear a rebuke which puts me to shame,
and I am inspired to give an answer.

⁴You know how it has been from of old,
since man was placed on earth,

⁵that the triumph of the wicked is short
and the joy of the godless is but a moment.

⁶Though his pride reach to the heavens
and his head touch the clouds,

⁷he vanishes like a phantom;
those who have seen him ask where he is.

⁸Like a dream he takes flight,
like a vision of the night.

⁹The eye that met him sees him no more;
neither shall his dwelling shelter him
again.

¹¹The vigour that fills his youthful frame,
shall at last lie with him in the dust.

¹²Though evil is sweet in his mouth,
and he hides it under his tongue,

¹³though he cannot suffer to let it go
and keeps it still within his mouth,

¹⁴yet his food turns sour
and becomes venom in his stomach.

¹⁵He vomits the rich food he swallowed;
God will compel his belly to belch it out.

¹⁶Because he sucked the poison of a viper,
he will be killed by the fangs of an adder.

¹⁷He will see no streams of oil,
no rivers of honey and milk.

¹⁸He will give back and not enjoy
the fruit of his toil;

¹⁹For he has oppressed the poor
and seized houses instead of building
them.

¹⁰His children must make amends to his
victims;

his own hands must pay back his riches.

²⁰For his greed had no respite,
and no one could escape from his appetite;

22. Ps 27, 2

24. Lev 25, 25; Rut 4, 4

+ Job is between God and men, abandoned by all. This poem, in 19: 13-22, deals with the destiny of the elderly and the sick who feel useless, the condition of a fallen man or woman, rejected by society and an object of repulsion for the relatives who can do nothing to help.

But, suddenly, we come upon a decisive word in this chapter, right in the center of the book. Job turns to God in an act of faith. In contrast with his words of discouragement, he says categorically: *I know that my redeemer lives and I shall see God with my own eyes.*

The very justice of God demands that he speak after all the speakers. Often, God waits

until his servants have died to justify them, but in the end, the Redeemer rises: then, they too will see him and listen to him.

But in fact, Job himself is not an oppressed waiting for his liberation... What matters for him is not the sentence of God or the destruction of his adversaries, or to see his rights defended, – but only to see God (v. 27).

It is hard for Christians to read these statements without seeing in them the longing of all those who believed in justice. Above all, what is expressed here is the hope of Christ when he meets death alone and entrusts his life into the Father's hands.

²¹ he devoured them and no one was left.
This is why his property will not endure.
²² In the midst of plenty, distress seizes him,
the full force of misery coming upon him.
²³ When his belly is filled
God unloads his wrath upon him
and makes his arrows rain upon him.

²⁴ While he flees from an iron weapon,
the bronze bow strikes him down.
²⁵ A dart sticks out of his back,
from his liver an arrow.

He is in the grip of a terrible fear;
²⁶ total darkness has been stored for him,
a fire which he did not kindle devours him
and consumes whoever was left in his tent.
²⁷ The heavens will expose his guilt;

the earth will rise up against him.
²⁸ Flood will sweep away his house
on the day of the wrath of God.
²⁹ Such is the fate of the wicked –
their heritage which God assigned.

21 ¹ Job replied:
² Listen at least to my words,
and finish with your consolation.
³ Bear with me while I speak;
and then you can mock.
⁴ Is it to man that I direct my complaint?
Why then should I not be impatient?
⁵ Look at me and be appalled;
cover your mouths momentarily.
⁶ When I think about this I am troubled
and trembling seizes my body.

Job: It's well for the wicked!

- ⁷ Why do the wicked survive,
increase in age and in power?
- ⁸ Their posterity flourish in their sight,
their kinsfolk and their offspring.
- ⁹ Their homes are safe, free from fear;
they do not feel the scourge of God.
- ¹⁰ Their bulls breed without fail;
their cows calve and do not miscarry.
- ¹¹ Their children run and play like lambs,
their little ones dance like deer.
- ¹² They sing to the rhythm of timbrel and harp;
they make merry to the sound of the flute.
- ¹³ They live out their days in happiness
and go down to Sheol in peace.
- ¹⁴ Yet they were those who said to God, "Go away!
We have no desire to learn your way.
- ¹⁵ Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?
What will it profit us if we pray to him?"
- ¹⁶ Although the thoughts of the wicked are far from God
prosperity is in their hands.
- ¹⁷ How often is their lamp put out?
How often does calamity come upon them?
How often does God's anger wipe them out?

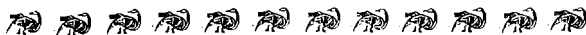
7. Jer 12, 1; Mal 3, 15 12. Is 5, 12; Am 6, 5 17. Jer 25, 10

■ Here too, we recognize Jeremiah's complaint 12:1 and the questions raised in psalm 73. In the Old Testament the just are scandalized by the prosperity of the wicked because this seems to deny God's justice. Is it true, as we sometimes hear, that death is the ultimate justice?

◆ Eliphaz' speeches are repetitive: if Job suffers, it is because he has sinned. He must have oppressed his neighbour in spite of his reputa-

tion of integrity. Yet, note the list of sins that Job might have committed: it is always a matter of oppressing the weak or failing to assist them. Jesus will say nothing new when, in Matthew 25:40, he condemns to eternal punishment those who failed to provide bread and water to those in need.

The commentary on 29-30 can be found in Is 2: 6-22.



¹⁸How often are they like straw before the wind,
like chaff which the storm sweeps away?

¹⁹You say, "His children will pay for his sin."

Let the man himself pay for his iniquity;

²⁰let his own eyes see the calamity;

let him drink the wrath of the Almighty!

²¹What does he care about his family left behind,
when his allotted months have come to an end?

²²Can anyone teach God knowledge,
since he judges even the highest?

²³One man dies in full vigor,

at ease and completely secure;

²⁴full and nourished is his figure,
rich in marrow are his bones.

²⁵Another dies in bitterness,
never having enjoyed happiness.

²⁶But in the dust they lie down
side by side, covered with worms.

²⁷I know your thoughts fully
and your schemes about me.

²⁸For you say, "Where is the house of the
great prince?

Where is the tent of the wicked?"

²⁹Have you never asked the travellers,
or have you misunderstood what they

say –

³⁰that the evil man is spared from calamity,
delivered from the day of God's fury?

³¹Who will denounce his conduct to his
face

or pay him back for what he has done?

³²When people have carried him to the
grave

his image watches from his tomb.

³³The soft earth is sweet to him;
behind him you see all men follow

and before him a countless procession.

³⁴How then can you console me with your
nonsense?

After all you have said, falsehood alone
remains.

Eliphaz: Can man be of any use to God?

22

¹Eliphaz the Temanite replied:

²Can man be of any use to God?

Only himself a wise man benefits.

³What advantage would God have if you
were upright?

◆ What profit if you were faultless?

⁴Is it for your piety that he reproves
and brings you to judgment?

⁵It is for your great wickedness,
for there is no end to your sins.

⁶Without any need you kept your kins-
men's goods

and stripped them naked of their clothing.

⁷You denied drink to the thirsty
and withheld bread from the hungry.

⁸The powerful are in control of the land
and allot it to their cronies alone.

⁹You have sent widows away empty-
handed

and crushed the arms of orphans.

¹⁰No wonder snares are round about you
and sudden terror makes you dismayed.

¹¹You are blinded by darkness
and covered by a flood of waters.

¹²Is not God above the heavens?

See how lofty are the highest stars.

¹³Yet you say, "What does God know?

Can he judge through such deep darkness?

¹⁴He cannot see for thick clouds veil him
as he walks upon the vault of the heavens."

¹⁵Will you keep to the old path
that wicked men have trod?

¹⁶Before their time they were carried off
and their foundation washed away.

¹⁷They said to God, "Away from us!
What can the Almighty do to us?"

¹⁸He had filled their houses with good
things,

but the thoughts of the wicked were far
from him.

¹⁹The righteous see their ruin and are glad,
while the innocent laugh at them and say,

²⁰"What is left of their wealth?

Fire has devoured their heritage."

²¹Come to terms with God and make
peace;

in this way you will prosper.

²²Receive instruction from him
and keep his words in your heart.

²³You will be restored if you put iniquity
away and return to the Almighty.

²⁴Then you will consider nuggets like dust,
gold of Ophir like stones.

²⁵For the Almighty will be your gold
and your sparkling silver.

18. Ps 1, 4	19. Ex 20, 5; Dt 24, 16	20. Eek 18, 4	30. Ps 73, 5	32. Lk 16, 22	6. Dt 24, 10;
Eek 18, 12	7. Mt 25, 42	8. Is 58, 7	12. Ecl 5, 1	24. Mt 6, 19	

²⁶ For then you will delight in the Almighty and lift up your face to God.

²⁷ You will pray to him and he will hear, and you will fulfil your vows.

²⁸ You will succeed in your decision, and light will shine upon your way.

²⁹ For God brings down the proud and saves the downcast.

³⁰ He delivers the innocent man, and rescues you if your hands are clean.

23 ¹ Again Job answered and said:
² Bitter and rebellious is my complaint,

how can I restrain my lament?

³ If only I knew where to find him,

if only I could go to his dwelling,

⁴ I would bring my case before him and lay out in full my arguments.

⁵ I would find out his answer and understand what he would say.

⁶ He would contend but see my point, and I would receive a fair hearing.

⁷ There the just might reason with him,

and surely I should win my case.

⁸ But if I go eastward, he is not there;

if I go westward, I still cannot see him.

⁹ Seeking him in the north, I do not find him;

looking for him in the south, he is not there.

¹⁰ But he knows my every step,

so I will come out as gold in his test.

¹¹ I have always walked along his path;

I have kept his ways and not turned aside.

¹² I have not departed from his commands

but have treasured his words in my heart.

¹³ But who can oppose once he has decided?

He does what he desires.

¹⁴ He will carry out his decree and other plans he has in store for me.

¹⁵ That is why I am terrified

when I think of all this.

¹⁶ God has made me lose courage;

the Almighty has made me afraid

¹⁷ because I am not silenced by darkness, by the thick gloom that covers my face.

Why does God not ask?

+ 24 ¹ Why does not God inquire about what happens?
Why do his faithful never see his justice?

² The wicked remove landmarks and pasture stolen flocks.

³ They drive away the orphan's ass and for a pledge take the widow's ox.

⁴ They force the needy off the road and drive the poor into hiding.

⁵ Like wild asses in the wasteland, they go seeking prey;

the poor toil until night,

there is no food for their children!

⁶ They gather fodder in the fields, glean the vineyards of the wicked.

29. Is 57, 11

2. Dt 19, 14

3. Dt 24, 17

o Job comes back to what he already said: there is something tormenting religious people: to know that God is always looking at us and being unable to ever find him. This was commented in chapter 7: Job personifies those who do not know Christ and have not felt "how good the Lord is with those who serve him with love." The same rebellion is found in many atheists today: they refuse the idea of a God who watches them only to punish their faults.

+ A terrible accusation against God who keeps silent when the oppressed are before him. Few prophets had expressed the horror of human evil more forcefully.

It is true, as Job says, that 'the poor hide. There is not much awareness of war victims or work tragedies. All countries hide their poor and the rich live so apart (different neighbourhoods, different recreation, etc....) that they never meet the poor and thus, ignore them. But, that would be nothing if God did not seem to forget the poor.

■ This paragraph seems to be out of place here. The God of light allows the presence of dark areas on earth, where the children of darkness are at work.

Paragraph 24:18-23 would be better located after 27:23.



God is in you and others receive him from you – as long as you are not an important person.



What are you building, and will it benefit your brothers?

⁷Living in destitution, they lie down naked,
shivering in the cold of the night.

⁸Drenched with mountain rains,
they hug the rocks for lack of shelter.

⁹The fatherless child is snatched from the breast,
the infant of the poor is seized for a debt.

¹⁰Lacking clothes, they go about naked,
starving as they carry the sheaves.

¹¹Between the millstones they crush olives;
they tread the winepress but suffer thirst.

¹²In the city the dying groan,
and the wounded cry out for help
but God pays no attention.

¹³Many rebel against the light,
they do not know its way or stay in its path.

■ ¹⁴When daylight is gone, the murderer
rises

to kill the poor and the helpless.

¹⁵The adulterer waits for dusk,
thinking that no eye watches him.

In the night the thief roams about
and puts a mask over his face.

¹⁶ready to break into houses while dark-
ness lasts.

Shutting themselves up by day,
these people do not know the light.

¹⁷Morning is their darkest hour
because then they have to fear.

¹⁸The wicked are foam on the face of the
waters:

their portion of the land is cursed,
and no one goes to their vineyards.

¹⁹As drought and heat snap up the thawed
snow,

so Sheol swallows up the sinner,

²⁰and the womb which formed him, for-
gets him.

Evil men are no longer remembered,
like a fallen tree they are broken.

²¹They preyed on the barren, childless
woman,

and showed no kindness to the widow.

²²But the Powerful stands against them
and drags away the mighty.

²³He may let them feel secure,
but his eyes are upon their ways.

²⁴They are momentarily exalted, and then
gone:

they wither and fade like a weed.

They are cut off like heads of grain.

²⁵If this is not so, who can prove me wrong
and reduce my words to nothing.

◆ **25** ¹Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:
²Dominion and awe belong to God,

who establishes peace in the heavenly.

³Can his armies be numbered?

Upon whom does his light not rise?

⁴How can man be righteous before God?

How can one born of woman be pure?

⁵Even the moon is not bright

nor are the stars pure in his sight –

⁶how much less man, – this insect,
the son of man who is but a worm?

+ **26** ⁵The shades of the deep writhe in
terror,

the waters and their inhabitants.

⁶Sheol is naked before God;

Destruction lies uncovered.

⁷Over the void he spreads out the northern
skies;

over nothing he suspends the earth.

⁸He wraps up the waters in his clouds,

yet the clouds do not burst under their
weight.

9. Am 2, 6

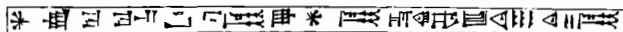
6. Dt 24, 12

◆ Bildad offers a new presentation of the splendour of the world. The people of the time still had very primitive ideas about the origin of the world. They accepted the legends of the neighbouring people, the Canaanites and the Chaldeans, presenting the universe as organized by the gods after they had destroyed the monsters of chaos. For some time, the Jews said similar things: they were satisfied to take out of the

legends the references to pagan gods and they were speaking of a first victory of Yahweh at the beginning of the world. See also Is 51:9.

The first chapter of Genesis was written after these poems. There the notion of God Creator is purified: God created everything from the beginning and he did so by his word alone.

+ Paragraph 26:1-4 comes at the end of chapter 26.



⁹He covers the face of the moon
and spreads his clouds over it.

¹⁰On the face of the waters he draws the
horizon

as boundary between light and darkness.

¹¹The pillars of the heavens quake,
stunned at his thunderous rebuke.

¹²By his power he stilled the sea;
by his wisdom he smote Rahab.

¹³By his wind the skies became clear;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

¹⁴These are but hints of his power;
a whisper is all that we hear of him.

But who can understand the thunder of his
might?

o ¹Job answered then:

²What help have you given to the power-
less,

what strength to the enfeebled arm?

³What advice have you offered to the
foolish,

and what great insight have you shown?

⁴Who has inspired in you these words?

Whose spirit spoke from your mouth?

27

¹Job continued his discourse:
²As God lives, who denies my right,
the Almighty, who has made me bitter,

³as long as I have life within me
and God's breath in my nostrils,

⁴my lips will not speak falsehood
nor my tongue utter deceit.

⁵Never will I admit you are right,
nor deny my integrity till I die.

⁶Never will I let go of my righteousness;
my conscience is not ashamed of me.

⁷Let my enemy be as the wicked
and my adversary as the unrighteous.

⁸For what hope has the godless
when God cuts him off,
when God takes away his life?

⁹Will God listen to his call
when he is beset by trouble?

¹⁰Will he delight in the Almighty
and call upon him constantly?

¹¹I will teach you about the power of God;
I will not conceal the ways of the Al-
mighty.

¹²You have witnessed this yourselves.
Why then these empty words?

¹³This is a wicked man's portion from God,
the heritage of an oppressor
which he receives from the Almighty.

¹⁴Though his children be many,
the sword is their destiny.

His offspring will go hungry.

¹⁵The plague will bury those who survive
him,

and their widows will not mourn for them.

¹⁶He may heap up silver like dust
and pile up clothes like clay,

¹⁷but what he stores, the just will wear,
and the innocent will divide his silver.

¹⁸He builds his house like a cobweb,
or like the hut a watchman makes.

¹⁹Once more he lies down rich
and opens his eyes to see his wealth gone.

²⁰Terrors rush upon him by day:
at night a whirlwind carries him away.

²¹The east wind lifts him up, and he disap-
pears

as it sweeps him out of his place.

²²People strike at him without mercy
as he flees headlong from their hands.

²³They clap their hands in mockery
and hiss him from where he is.

The miners praise the wisdom of God

+ 28

¹There is a mine for silver
and a place where gold is refined.

²Iron is taken from earth
and copper is smelted from ore.

³Man tries to conquer darkness,
piercing to the uttermost depths
in darkness far the gloomy stone.

⁴Strange people cut a shaft
in places remote and long forgotten,
and there they labour, dangling and swaying.

⁵The earth, out of which food comes,
underneath is turned upside as by fire.

⁶Sapphires come from its rocks,

- gold nuggets from its dust.
⁷No bird of prey knows the hidden path,
 no falcon's eye has seen it yet.
⁸No proud beast has trodden it,
 no prowling lion has passed over it.
⁹Man attacks the flinty rocks,
 upturns mountains by their roots.
¹⁰Tunneling through earth's layers,
 he sees all its treasures.
¹¹He searches the sources of rivers,
 and brings to light the hidden things.
¹²But where is wisdom found?
 Where does understanding dwell?
¹³Man has known no way to wisdom;
 it is not found in the land of the living.
¹⁴The deep says, "It is not in me";
 the sea says, "It is not with me."
¹⁵It cannot be purchased with the finest gold,
 nor can its price be weighed in silver.
¹⁶It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir,
 not with precious onyx or sapphire.
¹⁷It is beyond compare with gold or crystal;
 its worth is unmatched by any golden vessel.
¹⁸Not worth mentioning are coral and jasper;
 the price of wisdom is above the biggest pearl.
¹⁹The topaz of Cush cannot equal it;
 it cannot be valued in pure gold.
²⁰Whence then comes wisdom?
 Where does understanding dwell?
²¹It is hidden from the eyes of all the living,
 concealed from the birds in the sky.
²²Destruction and Death can only say,
 "We have heard of it."
²³God alone knows the way to wisdom,
 his eye enters its dwelling place.
²⁴When he looked to the ends of the earth,
 and watched everything under the heavens,
²⁵when he gave the wind its force
 and measured out the waters,
²⁶when he set a bound for the rain
 and a way for the thunder and lightning,
²⁷then he looked at wisdom and appraised it;
 he established it, knowing it in depth.

12. Job 28:23; Bar 3:15. 26. 1:40, 12. 27. Bar 3:32

o Job remarks ironically: What does all of this have to do with the point of the discussion?
 + This poem marks an interval and a break after Job's discussion with his friends.

Miners know how to look for hidden treasures inside hills: gold, silver and precious stones. But, who will look for God's wisdom? We find something similar in Baruch 3:15-30.

²⁸ And to man he said:
The fear of the Lord is wisdom;
avoiding evil is understanding.

Whoever heard spoke well of me

■ 29 ¹Job continued his discourse:

²Oh, that I were in months gone by,
in the days when God watched over me,
³when his light shone upon my head
and I walked by it through darkness.

⁴Oh, that I were in my prime,
when God's friendship blessed my home,
⁵when the Almighty was yet with me
and my children were around me,
⁶when milk bathed my footsteps
and olive oil flowed from the rock.

⁷When I went to the city gate
and took up my seat in the square
⁸the young men stepped aside
and the old men rose to their feet;
⁹the chief men dared not speak
but laid their hands on their mouths;
¹⁰the princes were silenced,
their tongues stuck to the palate.
²¹For me they listened and waited;
for my counsel they were silent.

²²Once I spoke they said no more,
but their interest grew all the more.
²³They waited for me as for showers;
they drank in my words as spring waters.
²⁴I smiled at them, they did not dare to believe it
not a glance of mine was lost.
²⁵I chose out their way, acting as chief,
and took a king's place among the troops.
Wherever I led them, they went.

8. Lev 19, 32

24. Dt 32, 2

■ In chapters 29-31 Job presents his defense and he assumes the role of the just one who is envied and slandered. As long as people are lucky they are esteemed, but if they run into misfortune, suddenly everyone looks at them differently. It is because a secret instinct drives people to find a scapegoat in any critical situation and, similarly, it drives them to denounce the faults of the one who has fallen from a good situation.

Paradoxically, it is Job's defense that shows the flaws in his integrity. *I was wearing my honesty like a garment.* Job was delighted to do good. He was a "just" man, aware of being just

and he was giving thanks to God who had made him good.

But all of this was nothing more than the justice of the Pharisee. Very respectful of a distant God, Job had built up his life, his virtues and his good self-image alone. In the end, his perfection did not exist in God's eyes because, without saying so, he was God's rival.

◆ The book of Job teaches us how much we need the coming of the Son of God. On one hand, as long as God does not present himself openly, man cannot avoid doubting and resenting him. On the other hand, as long as man feels

²⁷ My heart in turmoil is never at peace,
for days of distress have come upon me...
²⁸ I go about in gloom, without the sun;
if I rise in council, it is to voice my grief.
²⁹ I have become a brother of jackals,

a companion of owls.
³⁰ My skin blackens and peels;
my body burns with fever.
³¹ My harp is turned to mourning,
and my flute to sound of weeping.

Have I eaten my food alone?

o31

¹ I have made a covenant with my eyes
not even to gaze at a virgin.
² For what is man's lot from God on high,
his heritage from the Almighty above?
³ Is it not ruin for the wicked,
disaster for the wrongdoer?
⁴ Does he not see my ways
and number all my steps?
⁵ Have I walked in falsehood?
Have my feet hastened to deceit?
⁶ Let me be weighed in honest scales,
that God may know I am guiltless.
⁷ If my steps have turned from the way
and my heart's desire has gone astray,
if my hands have been stained,
⁸ then may others eat what I have sown,
or may my crops be stricken down.
⁹ If I have been enticed by a woman,
if I have lurked at my neighbour's door,
¹⁰ then may my wife grind for another,
and may other men sleep with her.
¹¹ (For that is enough to make one ashamed,
a crime that should be utterly condemned.)
¹² For it is a fire that burns to destruction;
it would have consumed all my possessions.
¹³ If I have denied justice to my servants
when they had grievance against me,
¹⁴ what would I do when confronted by God?
What would I answer when called to account?
¹⁵ No less than I, they too were formed in the womb
by the same God who made us all within our mothers.
¹⁶ Have I denied anything to the poor,
or allowed the widow's eyes to languish?
¹⁷ Have I eaten my food alone,
not sharing it with the fatherless?

on concern for one's neighbour. In a world with a very modest standard of living, those lucky enough not to lack anything had the obligation of sharing with their less fortunate brothers. The most serious sin was the lack of social solidarity.

In Job's examination of conscience the sin of

idolatry appears (verses 26-28): the temptation to adore the heavenly bodies as gods. This, however, played a minor role compared with another rebellion against God, that of a man wanting to enjoy "his" gods and forgetting the tragedy in the world when he was to build a fraternal world.

1. Sir 9, 5

9. Pro 6, 25

13. Ex 21, 2

¹⁸No! since youth I have fostered him,
and from my mother's womb, I guided the widow.

¹⁹Have I seen a man cold and shivering,
destitute, in need of clothing,

²⁰who did not bless me from his heart
for giving him the warmth of my fleece?

²¹If I have raised my hand against the orphan,
trusting in my power and influence,

²²then let my shoulder fall from its socket,
let my arm be broken at the joint.

²³For I feared God-sent calamity,
and would do no such thing against his majesty.

²⁴If I have put my trust in gold
or have sought my security from it,

²⁵if I have gloated over my wealth,
my fortune and accomplishments,

²⁶if I have regarded the sun in its radiance
or the moon in its splendor,

²⁷and having been enticed offered them
a kiss of my hand in homage,

²⁸then these also would be sins to judge
for I would have been unfaithful to God.

²⁹Have I rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune
or gloated over the trouble that befell him?

³⁰I have not even allowed my mouth to sin
by invoking a curse against him.

³¹Those of my household were used to say,
"Who has not been fed with Job's meat?"

³²No sojourner ever spent the night in the street,
for my door was always open to wayfares.

³⁸If my land has cried against me
and its furrows wept

³⁹because I had eaten its fruits unjustly
after getting rid of its owners,

⁴⁰let thorns grow instead of wheat
and striking plants in the place of barley.

⁴¹Have I, out of human weakness,
hidden my sins and concealed the guilt in
my heart,

⁴²keeping silent by myself

because I feared the crowd and their contempt.

⁴³Oh, that I had someone to hear me!

Let the Almighty answer! This is my plea.

Let my accuser write his indictment

⁴⁶and I will surely wear it on my shoulder,

or bind it round my head like a turban.

⁴⁷I would give him an account of my every
step,

and go as boldly as a prince to meet him.

This is the end of the words of Job.

29. Pro 24, 17

31. Is 58, 10

32. Gen 19, 2

38. Hab 2, 11

40. Gen 3, 18

■ Elihu's intervention starts the second part of the book, shorter than the first. Everything has been said and Elihu's speeches will not change the conclusion. Yet, he has his own viewpoint and he insists on the teaching aspect of the divine work; many situations which seem unjust

to us **stop** being unjust if we go beyond our first impressions:

You ask where your faults are, but perhaps, God had warned you in a thousand ways and you did not take it into account: 33:13-18.

SECOND PART: ELIHU INTERVENES

32 ¹ Seeing Job unswayed in his belief that he was guiltless, the three men said nothing more to him. ² But Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry with Job for justifying himself before God. ³ He was also angry with the three friends for their failure to refute Job, because they had allowed God to be condemned. ⁴ Because they were older than he, Elihu had bided his time; ⁵ but when the three gave up the argument his anger burst out. ⁶ Thus Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, spoke:

I am young and you are quite old;
therefore I was timid and afraid
and dared not tell you of what I know.
⁷ "Age should speak." I thought:
"advanced years should teach wisdom."
⁸ But it is the spirit in man,
the breath of the Almighty,
that makes him understand.
⁹ It is not the old alone who are wise,
nor the aged who understand what is right.

¹⁰ Therefore I say, listen;
let me also show my knowledge.
¹¹ I waited listening as you spoke,
as you tried hard to reason,
¹² I gave you my full attention.
But none of you has proved Job wrong,
none has refuted his arguments.
¹³ Stop saying, "We have met wisdom;
God has instructed us, not man."
¹⁴ I will not resume your argument
or answer Job with your reasoning.

¹⁵ They keep quiet for they are dismayed
and have nothing more to say.
¹⁶ Must I wait, now that they are silent,
now that they stand saying nothing?
¹⁷ I too will show my knowledge.
¹⁸ For I am full of words
and prodded on by the spirit.
¹⁹ I am as bottled-up wine,
or wineskin bursting with wine.
²⁰ I have to speak to find relief,
open my lips and make reply.
²¹ I will be partial to no one
and will not flatter any man.
²² For if I were skilled in flattery,
my Maker would soon do away with me.

Have you heard God's warning?

+ 33 ¹ So now, O Job, hear my discourse,
listen to everything I say.

² My words are on the tip of my tongue,
³ words from an upright heart,
words full of knowledge and sincerity.
⁴ The Spirit of God has made me;
the breath of the Almighty keeps me alive.
⁵ Answer me if you can;
draw up your arguments and take your
stand.

⁶ Like yourself, I too have been taken
by God from the same clay.
⁷ Thus, no fear of me need alarm you,
nor should my presence lie heavy on you.

⁸ But I heard what you said,
none of your words escaped my hearing:

⁹ "I am clean and without sin;
I am innocent, guiltless."
¹⁰ Yet God has found fault with me
and considers me his enemy;
¹¹ he shackles my feet,
keeps watch of all my paths."

¹² I tell you, you are wrong in this,
for greater than man is God.
¹³ Why then do you complain
that he will answer none of your words?

¹⁴ See God gives a warning
but does not repeat it a second time.

¹⁵ In a dream, in a night vision,
when deep sleep falls on men,
while they slumber in their beds,
¹⁶ it is then he opens the ears of men
and gives warning by terrifying them.
¹⁷ So he turns man from wrongdoing
and keeps him away from pride,
¹⁸ God preserves his soul from the pit,
his life from perishing by the sword.

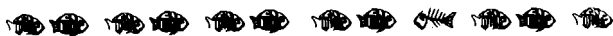
¹⁹ Man is also chastened on his bed by pain
and constant distress upon his frame,
²⁰ so that he finds food repulsive,
even the choicest meal loathsome.
²¹ His flesh wastes away to naught;
his bones, once unseen, now stick out.
²² His soul draws near to the pit,
and his life to the place of death.
²³ Yet if there is an angel by his side –

27. Ps 103, 10; Rom 6, 23 11. Ps 62, 13 12. Pro 24, 12 13. Wis 12, 16 17. Gen 18, 25

You despair in your illness, but perhaps
God wants to teach you: you did not invoke
him when all was going well: 35: 8-13.
Elihu senses that there is something false in
Job's righteousness, but he does not know what

it is. He looks for secret sins that Job might have
committed. The fact is that what Job lacks is
evangelical justice which is the humble love of
God.

+ Elihu says to Job: you think you are inno-



a mediator, one in a thousand –
to show him what is right for man,
to give him justice once again,
²⁴ God will have mercy on him and say,
“Deliver him from going down to the pit;
I have found for him a ransom.”

²⁵ Then his flesh will be renewed as a
child’s,

restored as in the days of his youth.
²⁶ He will pray and find favour with God;
he will see God’s face and rejoice.

²⁷ He will witness to men and say,
“I sinned and perverted what was right,
but I was not punished as I deserved.”

²⁸ He rescued my soul from going down the
pit, and gave me life to enjoy the light.”

²⁹ God does all this to man –
twice, even thrice –

³⁰ to turn him back from the pit,
to lead him with the light of life.

³¹ Pay attention, Job, listen to me;
be silent, and I will continue to speak.

³² But if you have anything to say, say it
then.

speak up, for I wish to see you justified.

³³ If not, then do listen;

be silent as I teach you wisdom.

34 ¹ Elihu continued speaking:
² Hear my words, you wise men;

listen to me, you who know.

³ The ear tests the word,
as the palate tastes the food.

⁴ Let us discern what is right,
learn between us what is good.

⁵ Job has said, “I am innocent,
but God denies me justice
⁶ and disregards my right
though guiltless, my wound is hopeless.”

⁷ What man is like Job,
who drinks in blasphemies like water?

⁸ He keeps company with evildoers
and goes in the path of wicked men.

⁹ For has he not said, “It does not profit a
man
if he tries to please God?”

¹⁰ So hear me, you men of understanding,
Far be it from God to do evil,
far from the Almighty to do wrong!

¹¹ Rather, he repays man for what he has
done;

he gives him what his conduct deserves.

¹² How unthinkable that God would do
wrong,

that the Almighty would pervert justice!

¹³ Who gave him charge over the earth?

Who else laid out the whole world?

¹⁴ If he were to take back his spirit,

to withdraw to himself his breath,

¹⁵ all flesh would perish together
and man would return to dust.

¹⁶ Do you hear this, O Job?

Do you understand what I say?

¹⁷ Can an enemy of justice govern?

Or do you condemn him who is mighty and
just,

¹⁸ who says to kings, “You are worthless,”

and to nobles, “You are wicked,”

¹⁹ who is impartial to princes
and favours not the rich over the poor,
for they are all his handiwork?

²⁰ They die in a moment, even at midnight;
people are shaken and pass away.

Without effort he removes a tyrant.

²¹ His eyes are upon the ways of men,
and he sees their every step.

²² For him there is no dense darkness
where evildoers can hide.

²³ He forewarns no man of his time
to come before God in judgment.

²⁴ He shatters the mighty without inquiry,
and sets in his place another strongman.

²⁵ Because he knows their evil deeds,
he turns at night and crushes them.

²⁶ He punishes them for their wickedness
in a judgment that men witness.

²⁷ For they had turned away from him,
heeded none of his ways,

²⁸ and oppressed the poor so much,
that their cries of suffering reached him.

²⁹ If he remains silent, who stirs him up?
If he hides his face, who can see him?

Yet he watches man and nation alike,
³⁰ and restrains those who mislead the
people.

³¹ If a wicked man says to God,
“I was misguided but will offend no more,”

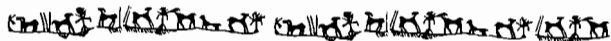
³² Teach me what I do not see;

cent, but surely you have not paid attention to God’s warnings. In spite of the fact that God cannot be reached by humans, he communicates through dreams, inspirations, encounters. God also corrects by way of the advice of other people who are his messengers, called here ‘angels,’ ‘mediators.’ We know that angel

means messenger. The very man who complains about God fails to see, to listen and to accept the messages God sends through the reprimands and advice given us by others correcting us in a fraternal way.

Elihu shows how trials are a lesson in humility for all (36:1-21).

8. Is 11, 2; Dn 13, 45 9. Wis 4, 8 19. Mr 9, 17 4. Ps 104, 30



if I have done wrong, I will do so no more"

³³ In such a case, do you think God will punish?

Speak, you who reject his decisions
and think you know more than I do;
tell us what you know.

³⁴ Men of understanding will say to me,
wise men who hear my views:

³⁵ "Job speaks without knowledge;
his words are without insight.

³⁶ Let Job be tried to the utmost
for answering as wicked men do!

³⁷ To his sin he adds rebellion
by scornfully brushing off our arguments
and multiplying his words against God."

It is because they did not call on God

35 ¹ Elihu continued and said:

² Do you presume you are right
and innocent before God,

³ when you say, "What is it to you,
am I doing you harm with my sins?"

⁴ I will answer you and your friends as
well.

⁵ Look up to the sky and see,
gaze at the clouds above.

⁶ Does your sin injure God?

Do your many offenses hurt him?

⁷ What does your righteousness give him?

What does he receive from your hand?

⁸ You are right: it is man that his wicked-
ness affects;
man himself like you benefits from his
righteousness.

⁹ Men cry out when greatly oppressed;
they plead for relief under the tyrant's
reign.

¹⁰ But no one says, "Where is God, my
Maker,
whose songs of jubilation are heard in the
night,

¹¹ who teaches us through the beasts of the
earth,

who makes us wise through the birds of the
air?"

¹² This is why he does not answer when
they cry out

because of man's arrogance.

¹³ In vain! God does not listen,
the Almighty takes no heed of it.

¹⁴ How much less then will he listen

when you say you do not see him, and wait,
for your case is before him!

¹⁵ and you say that though he is angry

he does not know how to punish

for he has taken no notice of wickedness:

¹⁶ So Job opens his mouth in empty talk,
without knowledge he multiplies words.

God tests man to correct him

36 ¹ Elihu proceeded further:

² Bear with me a little and I will ex-
plain,

for I have more to say on God's behalf.

³ I will spread my knowledge afar
to do justice to my Maker.

⁴ Be assured that my words are not false,
for you have before you an enlightened
man.

⁵ God is mighty indeed

but he does not despise the pure of heart

⁶ He cuts off the power of the sinner
and restores the right of the oppressed,

⁷ he does not forsake their claim.

He sets kings on their thrones
and makes them firm forever.

But if they raise themselves in pride

⁸ he has them bound with fetters
and held fast by bonds of affliction,

⁹ Then he tells them what they have done
all their sins and arrogance.

¹⁰ He opens their ears to correction
and exhorts them to repentance.

¹¹ If they obey and serve him,
they spend their days in prosperity
and their years in contentment.

¹² But if they do not listen, they go to the
grave:

knowledge would have saved them.

¹³ These rebels harbour resentment:
they do not pray for help in their bonds,

¹⁴ therefore they die in their youth
and perish among the reprobate.

¹⁵ God saves the wretched through their
suffering,
God instructs the unfortunate.

¹⁶ In like manner, he rescues you from dis-
tress

to a free and broad space,
to a table filled with rich food.

¹⁷ Then you will judge the wicked;

justice and judgment will be yours.

¹⁸ Be not overcome by wrath, and oppres-
sion one;

do not yield to arrogance, bribery and
corruption.

¹⁹ Your wealth and all your mighty efforts
will not bail you out of distress.



²⁰ Do not long for the coming of night
to drag people away from their homes.
²¹ Beware of turning to iniquity,
which you seem to have chosen rather than
affliction.

A hymn to God's greatness

◆ ²² God is exalted in his power.
What teacher is there like him?
²³ Who has prescribed his ways for him,
or said to him that he has done wrong?
²⁴ Remember to extol his work,
of which many men have sung.
²⁵ All mankind has seen it;
men gaze on it from afar.
²⁶ God is great beyond our understanding;
the number of his years is past reckoning.
²⁷ He holds in check the waterdrops
which distil from the mist as rain,
²⁸ then the clouds will pour them down
back to earth as showers again.
²⁹ This is the way he nourishes the land
that provides food in abundance.
³⁰ Who can understand how he spreads the
clouds,
how he thunders from his pavilion?
³¹ He unfurls his mists
and covers the expanse of the sea.
³² With both hands he lifts up lightning
and commands it to strike the target.
³³ His thunder warns the shepherd
and the flock senses the tempest.

37 ¹ This is why my heart pounds
and leaps from its place.
² Listen to the thunder of his voice
as it comes rumbling from his mouth.
³ Under the heavens, he hurls his lightning,
sending it to the ends of the earth.
⁴ After it comes God's roaring voice—
the majestic peal of his thunder.
He does not check his thunderbolts
until his voice has fully resounded.
⁵ God thunders and his voice works mar-
vels,
he does great things we cannot perceive.

Yahweh answers Job

o 38

¹ Then Yahweh answered Job out of the storm:

² Who is this that obscures divine plans
with words of ignorance?

³ Gird up your loins like a man;
I will question you and you must answer.

⁴ He says to the snow, "Fall on the earth";
and to the rainshower, "Be a strong down-
pour."

⁵ So he has people kept under cover
to let them acknowledge his work.

⁶ Wild beasts go back into their lairs
and remain quietly in their dens.

⁷ The storm comes out from its chamber,
and the cold from the driving winds.

⁸ By the breath of God ice is given,
and the broad waters become frozen.

⁹ With thunderbolt he loads the clouds,
and through them scatters his lightnings.

¹⁰ At his direction they do their rounds,
upon the face of the habitable world.

¹¹ He commands nature to punish men,
to water his land or to show his love.

¹² Listen to this, O Job:
pause and consider God's marvels.

¹³ Do you know how he controls the
clouds,

how he makes his lightning flash?

¹⁴ Do you know how the clouds hang
poised,

all these wonders wrought in his perfect
knowledge?

¹⁵ You who swelter in your clothes
when the earth lies still under the south
wind,

¹⁶ can you, like him, spread out the skies,
hard as a mirror of molten bronze?

¹⁷ Teach us then what we shall say to him;
we cannot draw up our case because of
darkness.

¹⁸ Does it take an angel
to bring this to God's attention

¹⁹ A while ago we could not see the light
and the clouds darkened the sky,
but the storm has just cast them out.

²⁰ A blaze come from the north,
a dreadful glory around God.

²¹ The Almighty, is beyond our reach;
exalted in power, great in judgment;
the Master of justice oppresses no one.

²² Therefore, people revere him:
wise men are nothing in his sight.



⁴Where were you when I founded the earth?
Answer, and show me your knowledge.

⁵Do you know who determined its size,
who stretched out its measuring line?

⁶On what were its footings set?
Who laid its cornerstone,

⁷while the morning stars sang together
and the sons of God shouted for joy?

⁸Who shut the sea behind closed doors
when it burst forth from the womb,

⁹when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling clothes,

¹⁰when I set its limits
and its doors and bars in place,

¹¹when I said, "You will not go beyond this bound;
here is where your proud waves must halt?"

¹²Have you ever commanded the morning,
or shown the dawn its place,

¹³that it might grasp the earth by its edges
and shake the wicked out of it?

¹⁴Then it takes a clay colour
and changes its tint like a garment.

¹⁵The wicked are denied their own light,
and their proud arm is shattered.

¹⁶Have you journeyed to where the sea begins
or walked in its deepest recesses?

¹⁷Have the gates of death been shown to you?
Have you seen the gates of Shadow?

¹⁸Have you minded the breadth of the earth?
Tell me, if you know all this.

¹⁹Where is the way to light's abode,
and where does darkness abide?

²⁰Can you take them to their boundaries,
and set them on their homeward paths?

²¹You know, for you were born before them,
and great is the number of your years!

²²Have you entered the storehouse of the
snow

or seen the storehouse of the hail,

²³which I reserve for times of woe,

for days of war and of battle?

²⁴What is the way to the place
where lightning is dispersed,
or the place whence the east wind

o Yahweh answers Job from within the storm clouds, just like on Mount Sinai. He does not explain nor justify, but he is doing the questioning. He does not show off his own wisdom, but he forces man to admit that he does not know anything. In seeing and admiring the wonders of

creation, man discovers that God's way of doing things is disconcerting. Why does God send rain upon uninhabited lands? Why does the ostrich leave carelessly her eggs on the ground? Why does the horse show so much boldness in a war useless to it?



begins spreading over the earth?

²⁵ Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,

and path for the thunderstorm,

²⁶ to bring rain to no man's land

and to the unpeopled wilderness,

²⁷ to enrich the waste and desolate ground,

to make the desert bloom with green?

²⁸ Does the rain have a father?

Who fathers the drops of dew?

²⁹ From whose womb comes the ice,

and who gives birth to the frost from the skies,

³⁰ when the waters lie as hard as stone,

when the surface of the deep is frozen?

³¹ Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loosen the bonds of Orion?

³² Can you guide the morning star in its season,
or lead the Bear with its train?

³³ Do you know the laws of the heavens,
and can you establish their rule on earth?

³⁴ Can you raise your voice to the clouds
and order their waters to pour down?

³⁵ Will lightnings flash at your command
and report to you, "Here we are"?

³⁶ Who has given the ibis foresight
or endowed the cock with foreknowledge?

³⁷ Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?
Who tilts the water jars of heaven

³⁸ so that the dust cakes into a mass
and clods of earth stick together?

³⁹ Can you hunt the woods to appease

the hunger of the lioness and her whelps,

⁴⁰ as they crouch in their dens

or lie in wait in the thicket?

⁴¹ Who provides prey for the raven
when its young cry out to God

and roam about desperate for food?

39

¹ Do you know how mountain goats breed?

Have you observed the hinds in labour,

² numbered the months they must fulfil,

and fixed the time they must give birth?

³ Have you watched them end their labour

as they crouch and drop their young,

⁴ how they wait for them to grow,

until they leave never to return?

⁵ Who has given the wild ass his freedom,

and loosed the bonds of the brayer?

⁶ I have given him the desert for a home,
the salt plains for a shelter.

⁷ For he scorns the city's tumult,
knows not the driver's shout and insult;

⁸ he prefers the hills for his pasture,

ranging for food in the rich verdure.

⁹ Is the wild ox willing to serve you,

to pass the night by your manger?

¹⁰ Can you make him work with a plow or harrow

if you provide him with the proper gear?

¹¹ Can you rely on his great strength

and leave him to do your heavy work?

¹² Can you depend on him to come home alone,

carrying your grain to your threshing floor?

23. Is 28, 17

31. Am 5, 8

41. Ps 147, 9

We, like old Job, have become accustomed to seeing this without marveling. though, on some occasions, we awaken. A mouse's strange look, or cubs at play, or the shape of a flower are enough to show forth the mystery of creation.

The world of the senses, the object of science, is not all of reality. It is only the expression, a sort of reflection of divine Wisdom, in which all beauty, goodness and truth have their roots: there we have the ultimate reality.



- ¹³ Can the wing of the ostrich be compared
with the plumage of the stork or falcon?
¹⁴ She lays her eggs on the ground
and lets them warm in the sand,
¹⁵ not knowing that a foot may step on them
or some wild beast may crush them.
¹⁶ Cruel to her chicks as if they were not hers,
she cares not that her labour be in vain,
¹⁷ for God has given her no wisdom
nor a share of little good sense.
¹⁸ Yet in the swiftness of her foot,
she makes sport of horse and rider.
¹⁹ Is it you who give the horse strength
and clothe his neck with splendour,
²⁰ who makes him leap like a grasshopper
and his proud snorting strike terror?
²¹ Rejoicing in his strength, he fiercely paws
and charges into the fray,
²² afraid of nothing, laughing at fear,
not shying away from the sword.
²³ Against his side rattles the quiver,
along with the lance and flashing spear.
²⁴ In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground;
there is no holding him when the trumpets sound.
²⁵ He cries "Hurrah!" at each trumpet blast.
He catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.
²⁶ Is it by your wisdom that the hawk takes flight
and spreads his wings toward the south?
²⁷ Is it at your command that eagles fly
and build their nests on high?
²⁸ On cliffs they dwell and spend the night;
their stronghold is the rocky crag.
²⁹ From there they look out for food,
which they detect even from afar.
³⁰ They and their young feast on blood,
and where the slain lie, there they are.

+ 40 ¹ Yahweh said to Job:
² Must a faultfinder contend with the
A "mighty?
Let him who would correct God answer.
³ Job said:
⁴ How can I reply, unworth as I am!
All I can do is put my hand over my mouth.
⁵ I have spoken once, now I will not an-
swer;
oh, yes, twice, but I will do no further.

Yahweh's discourse continues

⁶ Then Yahweh addressed Job out of the
storm:
⁷ Gird up your loins like a man;
I will question you, and you must answer.
⁸ Would you refuse to acknowledge me,
right?
Would you condemn me that you may be
justified?
⁹ Have you an arm like that of God,



and can you thunder with a voice like his?

¹⁰Then adorn yourself with glory and splendour.

array yourself with grandeur and majesty.
¹¹Unleash the fury of your wrath;

¹²look for every proud man and abase him;
 crush the wicked where they stand.

¹³Bury them all in the dust.
 shut them silent-faced in the grave.

¹⁴If you can do this, I myself will admit
 that your right hand can save yourself.

¹⁵See, besides you I made Behemoth,
 who feeds on grass like ox.

¹⁶What strength he has in his loins,
 what power in the muscles of his belly!

¹⁷Like a cedar his tail sways,
 like cables are the sinews of his thighs.

¹⁸Like tubes of bronze are his bones,
 like iron rods are his limbs.

¹⁹He is first among the works of God,
 created to dominate its companions.

²⁰The mountains give him their produce,
 and he makes sport of all wild beasts.

²¹Under the lotus trees he lies,
 hidden among the reeds of the marsh.

²²The lotus trees cover him with their shade;
 the poplar trees on the bank surround him.

²³He is not alarmed though the river rages
 and torrents surge against his mouth.

²⁴Who can capture him by the eyes,
 or trap him and pierce his nose?

²⁵Can you pull in Leviathan with a hook,
 or curb his tongue with a bit?

²⁶Can you put a cord through his nose
 or pierce his jaw with a hook?

²⁷Will he keep begging you for mercy,
 or speak to you with tender words?

²⁸Can you make him your slave forever?

²⁹Can you make a pet of him like a bird,
 or put him on a leash for your maidens?

³⁰Will traders bargain for him?

Will merchants divide him up?

³¹Can you fill his hide with harpoons
 or his head with fish spears?

³²Try and lay a hand on him –
 you will not forget the struggle,
 and you will never do it again!

41 ¹Any hope of subduing him is vain,
 for the mere sight of him is overpowering.

²He grows so ferocious when aroused
 that no one dares stand before him.

³Who has attacked him and come off un-
 harmed?

No one under the sky.

⁴I need hardly mention his limbs,
 describe his matchless strength.

⁵Who can strip off his outer garment
 and penetrate his double breastplate?

⁶Who can dare open the gates of his mouth
 to confront the terrors of his rows of teeth?

⁷Rows of scales are on his back –
 rows of shields that are tightly sealed.

⁸So closely fitted they are
 that no space intervenes;

⁹so joined one to another
 that they hold fast and cannot be parted.

¹⁰Light flashes forth when he sneezes;
 like those of dawn are his eyes.

¹¹Out of his mouth go flaming torches
 with sparks of fire leaping about.

¹²Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,
 like hot steam from a boiling pot.

¹³His mere breath sets coals afire,
 with the flame pouring from his mouth.

¹⁴Strength abides in his neck,
 and terror dances before him.

¹⁵Tightly joined are the folds of his flesh,
 firmly cast and immovable,

¹⁶like his heart hard as stone.

¹⁷When he rises up, the mighty are terri-
 fied,

the waves of the sea fall back.

¹⁸Should the sword reach him, it will not
 avail,
 nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.

¹⁹Iron is to him no more than straw;
 and bronze, no more than rotten wood.

²⁰Arrows will not put him to flight;
 slingstones will be as wisps of hay.

²¹Clubs are as splinters to him;
 he laughs at the whirling javelin.

²²His belly is as sharp as pottery sherds;
 he moves across the mire like a threshing
 sledge.

23. Ecl 12, 5

+ In questioning Job, Yahweh gets and gives us a few seconds of rest, before beginning his second discourse in chapters 40-41.

In chapter 40, Behemoth or the hippopotamus appears, enormous, terrible and ugly, that eats only plants. Leviathan, the crocodile, whose skin resists arrows just like an armor.

Though it is true that these chapters do not have any religious teachings, let us allow the Bible to show the greatness of creation in a poetic form. For centuries prophets and priests had to protect Israel from the seduction of nature. Everywhere around them, the wonders of creation gave rise to the pagan worship of natural forces.

²³ He churns the depths into a seething cauldron;

he makes the sea fume like a burner.

²⁴ Behind him he leaves a white gleaming wake,

making the deep appear a hoary head of age.

²⁵ There is none like him upon the earth: such a horrible creature he was made!

²⁶ He makes all, however lofty, afraid;

he is king over all the sons of pride.

42 ¹This was the answer Job gave to Yahweh:

²I know that you are all powerful; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

^{3a}I spoke of things I did not understand,

too wonderful for me to know.

⁵My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you.

⁶Therefore I retract all I have said, and in dust and ashes I repent.

The end of Job's Poem

◆ ⁷After Yahweh had spoken to Job, he turned to Eliphaz the Temanite. "I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken of me rightly, as has my servant Job. ⁸Now, take seven bulls and seven rams, go to my servant Job, offer a holocaust

for yourselves and let him pray for you. I will accept his prayer and excuse your folly in no speaking of me properly as my servant Job has done."

⁹Then Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as Yahweh had ordered. Yahweh accepted Job's intercession.

Here ends the traditional story of Job

¹⁰After Job had prayed for his friends, Yahweh restored his fortunes, giving him twice as much as he had before. ¹¹All his brothers and sisters and his former friends came to his house and dined with him. They showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that Yahweh had brought to him. Each of them gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

¹²Yahweh blessed Job's latter days much more than his earlier ones. He came to own fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-donkeys. ¹³He was also blessed with seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴The first daughter he named Dove, the second Cinnamon, and the third Bottle of Perfume. ¹⁵Nowhere in the land was there found another woman who could compare in beauty with Job's daughters. Their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

¹⁶Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. ¹⁷He died old and full of years.

23. Ezk 32, 2

said: Listen and I will speak and question you, and you must answer."

8. Ezk 14, 20

3a & 4. were probably added: "You asked: Who obscures divine plans with ignorance. You

12. Dt 8, 16; James 5, 11

16. Gen 25, 8

But when the Jews had become stronger against these errors, they could freely sing the beauty of all that had come from the hand of God.

■ Here we have the conclusion of the long dialogues of this book.

Now my eyes have seen you. Job's questions about suffering and death have not been answered, but now we realize that it was not essential. God has responded. God has revealed himself and Job has begun to live as someone who has been miraculously freed from his loneliness. The words addressed to him by God seemed like reproaches, but the mere fact of speaking to him showed the love of God, just like Job's complaints were hiding his search for the living God.

What Job needed was not a revelation, since God had given him intelligence to investigate these human questions. What he lacked was to see God, and this is the great yearning of the

entire Bible: "Show us your face and we will be saved" (Psalm 80:8).

◆ In the last paragraph (42:10-17) we have the conclusion of the popular story of the holy man Job, begun in 1:1-2:13 (see introduction). Since he preserved his trust, it was rewarded in the end by the just God.

On the contrary, in 7-9, we have a difficult merging between this submissive holy man Job and the other character who occupied most of the book, namely, the Job who argues with God. Here, God favours Job who points to the problems of this world, over his friends who thought they were more religious because they were hiding these flaws.

A childish faith does not want to see the seeming contradictions of life. Job is the example of the Christian who courageously looks for an answer to today's problems: *my servant Job has spoken properly of me.*



PROVERBS

o1

¹These are proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

²for you to obtain wisdom and instruction,

to penetrate words of significance,

³to acquire well-ordered knowledge,

and become just with discernment and integrity.

⁴Simple people will become clever

and the young will acquire understanding and foresight.

⁵let the wise man listen: he will add to his learning,

and the man of sound judgment will acquire skill,

⁶to understand the proverbs and sayings,

the words of the wise and their riddles.

⁷The beginning of knowledge is the fear of Yahweh,
only fools have contempt for wisdom and discipline.

7. Ps 111, 10; Job 28, 28

INTRODUCTION

The word of God came to the people of Israel in different ways. We have already said how the *prophetic books* and the *historical books* originated: they arose from the prophets' preaching and from the reflection on the history of Israel in religious circles.

But there were also men, of a very different disposition, who were more interested in reflecting on human behaviour, the ups and downs of life, the role of wealth, the different destiny of those who are irresponsible and those who dominate their desires. Their main concern was to know if there is justice in this world.

The popular wisdom of all peoples of any time was developed around these themes. So too, with the Israelites. When they were settled in their land, they began to have writers in Solomon's time, and they had their first books of proverbs and sayings. This marked the beginning of *wisdom literature* in the Bible.

This literature is no less word of God than the prophetic books: it is a different type of word throwing a different light on life. It does not deal with the destiny of God's people but with the possible ways for human beings to excel, in every sense of the word.



Avoid the company of evildoers

⁸Listen, my son, to the teaching of your father, do not ignore your mother's instruction: ⁹for they will be your graceful crown, a precious chain around your neck.

¹⁰My son, if sinners try to tempt you, do not give in.

¹¹They will invite you, "Come with us, let us spill blood, let us ambush the innocent without a second thought. ¹²We will engulf them as does the netherworld and snatch them suddenly as does death. ¹³We will help ourselves to many riches and fill our houses with booty. ¹⁴Join forces with us: one purse will be shared between us!"

¹⁵My son, do not go with them, do not set foot along their way. ¹⁶See, how they speed on to evil! How they hasten to spill blood!

¹⁷What bird would fall into a trap if you set it up in its sight? ¹⁸But these men stalk themselves and set a trap for their own lives.

¹⁹Such is the lot of all who lie by plunder: plunder will rob them of their own lives.

Listen to me today

+ ²⁰Wisdom shouts aloud in the streets, she raises her voice in the marketplace; ²¹at street corners she cries; she delivers her speeches at the city gates:

²²"You ignorant people, how long will you continue to cling to your foolishness? How long will mockers revel in their mockery, and fools have contempt for knowledge?"

²³Listen to my warning. Here I will pour my spirit upon you and make you know my words.

²⁴Indeed if I cry out and you refuse to listen, if I offer my hand and no one cares, ²⁵if you ignore my advice and reject my warning, ²⁶I, in turn, will laugh at your disaster, I will sneer when terror grips you; ²⁷when terror comes down on you like a hurricane, and distress and anxiety befall you.

²⁸Then people will cry to me but I will not respond. They will seek me but will not find me, ²⁹because they despised knowledge and did not choose the fear of Yahweh; ³⁰they would not listen to any advice and they rejected all my warnings.

³¹They will harvest the fruits of their evil ways and have their fill of their own designs. ³²For the error of the ignorant will lead to death, the idleness of fools brings about their ruin.

³³But whoever listens to me will feel secure and at ease, without fear of evil."

It is good to acquire wisdom

2 ¹My son, if you heed my words and value my commands, ²with your ear attentive to wisdom and your heart obedient to

8. Sir 6, 24

13. Num 16, 31
25. Jer 7, 13

21. 8. 1-10; 9, 3; Jn 7, 37
28. Jer 11, 11; Jn 7, 34

24. Is 65, 12; 66, 4

o From the beginning, men are divided into two groups. On one hand, the wise including intelligent, clever and responsible men: on the other hand, the foolish, including also stupid, lying and evil men.

The beginning of knowledge is the fear of Yahweh. This word "fear" does not have for us the meaning it had in the Bible. It is not, in fact, a matter of being afraid of God, but rather of a love full of respect. *To fear Yahweh* means to look to him before anyone else in making decisions. The person who *fears Yahweh* always takes him into account and takes God's word as the basis of his actions.

+ An invitation to convert today. Tomorrow will be too late. Jesus will say the same: Mt 7:21 and 25:1.

Wisdom shouts aloud in the streets. Who will be able to say that no one awakened him and showed him the way? Infrahuman conditions of life make a people irresponsible, but irresponsible men also make an infrahuman world. However, all were invited to come out of their passivity.

They did not choose the fear of Yahweh. This is the sin of the negligent. It is easy to excuse oneself: "There is no malice on my part: it is a question of negligence." Wisdom rejects

The greater part of the book of *Proverbs* is very old (chapters 10-31). The first section (chapters 1-9), however, is much more recent, around the second century before Christ. There we find a meditation about the *Wisdom of God*, from which all human wisdom proceeds. The height of this contemplation of divine Wisdom is found in the famous 8th chapter.



understanding: ³if you call for perception and raise your voice for insight; ⁴if you seek it as silver and search for it more than any treasure ⁵then you will understand the fear of Yahweh, and you will find the knowledge of God.

⁶For Yahweh gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and insight. ⁷He reserves his help for the upright and is a shield for those who walk in integrity; ⁸he guards the ways of the just and protects the steps of his faithful.

⁹Then you will understand justice, discernment and integrity – all that leads you to happiness.

¹⁰Wisdom will abide in your heart and knowledge will comfort your inner self.

¹¹Foresight will guide you and understanding will protect you. ¹²It will guard you from evil, from those who have perverse purposes; ¹³from those who have abandoned the ways of goodness to walk the roads of darkness; ¹⁴they rejoice in evil-doing, they revel in perversion; ¹⁵their paths are crooked and their ways devious.

¹⁶Wisdom keeps you from the alien woman, from the stranger with her smooth words, ¹⁷who deserts the partner of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.

¹⁸For her house inclines towards death, her paths towards the grave. ¹⁹Those who go to her never return, they do not regain the paths of life.

²⁰So you will walk along the way of the good, and keep to the paths of the virtuous.

²¹For the honest will inherit the land; the people of integrity will live on it.

²²The evil-doers instead will be cut off from the land. The wicked will be rooted out of it.

3 ¹My son, do not forget my instruction, my commands; keep them in your heart. ²For they will bring you length of days, years of life and peace.

³Let loyalty and truthfulness never leave you; tie them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, ⁴that you may find favour and good name in the eyes of God and man.

Put wisdom into practice

◆ ⁵Trust in Yahweh with all your heart; do not rely on your own insight. ⁶Let his presence pervade all your ways and he will make smooth your paths.

⁷Do not consider yourself wise, fear God, and turn away from evil. ⁸This will be a medicine to your body and a relief to your bones.

⁹Honour Yahweh, giving him from what you have, the first fruits of all your produce. ¹⁰Then your barns will be filled to overflowing, your vats will brim over with wine.

¹¹My son, do not scorn the discipline of Yahweh; do not ignore his correction. ¹²For Yahweh corrects those he loves, as a father does with his beloved son.

¹³Happy the man who finds wisdom and gains insight. ¹⁴For she is of more value than silver and more useful than gold. ¹⁵She is more precious than pearls; nothing you could wish for would compare with it. ¹⁶With her right hand she offers you length of days, with her left, riches and glory. ¹⁷She leads you through delightful ways; all her roads are peace.

¹⁸She is a tree of life for those who clasp her; those who possess her are happy.

¹⁹It is by his wisdom that Yahweh founded the earth; by his understanding that he made firm the heavens. ²⁰By his knowledge the depths were scooped out, and the clouds rained down dew.

²¹My son, hold on to sound judgment and discretion and do not let them out of your sight. ²²They will give life to your inner self, and adorn your face.

²³Then, you can go your way

5. Mt 13, 44; Job 28	18. Is 14, 9	21. Ps 37	22. Mt 5, 4	3. Dt 5, 22
12. Dt 3, 5; Heb 12, 5	18. Gen 2-3; Jn 6	19. 8, 22-31		

these excuses. Negligence is a form of contempt of God.

■ The wisdom of God protects those who love it against evil influences. They are no longer like straw carried off by the wind, like the foolish ones; they resist the call of drunkards, of frivolous women and of unscrupulous companions.

◆ The first paragraph deals with the attitudes leading to wisdom: humility, being willing to sacrifice what God wants, not becoming discour-

aged when the Lord corrects us, that is to say, when we are tested (see Heb 12:5 and Rev 3:19).

The proverbs insist on the value of advice, discipline, correction: to live as one pleases, according to one's fantasies causes all sorts of misfortune: this is a saying of Proverbs (see 5:12).

This will mean health for your body. The teachings of wisdom assure you of life and well-being. It is even healthy for the body (3:8; 4:22).



safely and your foot will not stumble.
²⁴ You will have no fear when you lie down and your sleep will be peaceful.
²⁵ You will not fear sudden terror or the attack of evildoers.
²⁶ For Yahweh is at your side and he guards your foot from harm.

²⁷ Do not hold back from those who ask your help when it is within your power to do so.
²⁸ Do not say to your neighbour, "Go away! Come another time; tomorrow I will give it to you!" when you can help him now.

²⁹ Do not plot evil against your neighbour who lives trustingly beside you,
³⁰ nor fight a man without cause since he has done you no wrong.
³¹ Do not envy the man of violence or follow his example.

³² For Yahweh hates the wicked but guides the honest.
³³ He curses the house of the evildoer but blesses the home of the upright.
³⁴ If there are mockers, he mocks them in turn but he shows his favour to the humble. The wise will possess his glory while the foolish will inherit disgrace.

Keep your path

4 ¹ Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction and pay attention so that you may gain insight.
² For I have given you good principles; do not discard my teaching!

³ For when I, too, was a young boy, and my mother fondly looked on me as special,
⁴ my father taught me and said to me: Treasure my words in your heart; listen to my directions and you will live.

⁵ Acquire wisdom and insight and do not forget or reject the words of my mouth.
⁶ Do not abandon wisdom for she will protect you. Love her and she will be your salvation.

⁷ The beginning of wisdom is to work to acquire it. At the cost of all you possess, strive to gain insight.
⁸ Hold her close, for she will exalt you and bring you honour if you embrace

her.
⁹ She will crown you with grace and put a diadem of splendour on your head.

¹⁰ Listen, my son, and take my words to heart; then the years of your life will be multiplied.

¹¹ Because I have taught you the way of wisdom and have guided you along honest ways,
¹² you will walk with ease and run without falling.
¹³ Hold firm to discipline; never let her go. Guard her well for she is your salvation.

¹⁴ Do not follow the way of the wicked nor walk with evildoers.
¹⁵ Avoid them, turn your back on them and pass on.
¹⁶ For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; they cannot rest unless they have caused someone's downfall.
¹⁷ Wickedness is their bread and violence their wine.

¹⁸ The way of the upright is like the dawn whose light increases until the fullness of day.
¹⁹ The way of the wicked is total darkness and they do not notice what will make them fall.

²⁰ My son, be attentive and listen carefully to my words.
²¹ Never let them out of your sight but guard them in the bottom of your heart.
²² For they are life to those who cling to them and healing for the inner spirit.

o ²³ Above all else, guard your heart for therein is the source of life.
²⁴ Keep your mouth from lies and let no deceit come from your lips.

²⁵ Keep your sight on what is ahead and your eyes directed straight in front of you.
²⁶ Test the ground under your feet and all your ways will be secure.
²⁷ Turn neither to left nor to right and keep your path from evil.

Beware of the adulteress

5 ¹ My son, pay heed to my wisdom and listen to what I know by my insight;
² remember my counsel and let your lips not depart from this knowledge.

³ Know that the lips of the adulteress are sweet as honey and her words smoother than oil,
⁴ but the outcome is bitter as herbs. It is as sharp as a double-edged sword.

⁵ Her feet go down to the grave and her steps lead to death.
⁶ She pays no attention to the path of life and strays without knowing it.

⁷ Now then, my son, listen to me and do not forget my words:
⁸ Stay away from her and

29. Jer 12, 6

34. James 4, 6; 1 Pet 5, 5

o Above all guard your heart for therein is the source of life. This verse resembles Christ's word in Mark 7:21 and Matthew 12:34. Good as well as evil comes from the heart, that is, from what is innermost.

+ Drink from the water of your own cistern. Let man be responsible first in his married life. This chapter develops the consequences of licentiousness. It also invites man to value the intimacy of his married life and to be able after



never approach the door of her house,⁹ lest you surrender your honour to strangers and your best years to cruel men,¹⁰ lest others benefit from your goods and your earnings go to an alien house.

¹¹ You will complain at the end when your body and flesh are already devoured and ¹² you will say, "Why did I reject instruction and turn my back on sound advice?" ¹³ Why did I not listen to the voice of my teachers and follow their counsel? ¹⁴ For I have come to the depths of disgrace in the midst of the whole community."

+ ¹⁵ Drink, then, from the water of your own cistern, from that which flows in your own well. ¹⁶ Do not let your fountains be wasted elsewhere nor in the public streets. ¹⁷ They are for you alone and not for strangers.

¹⁸ May your fountainhead be blessed and may you find joy in the wife of your youth. ¹⁹ your beautiful hind and graceful gazelle! May her breasts be your delight at all times; be always in love with her.

²⁰ My son, why be infatuated with an adulteress and embrace a strange woman? ²¹ For Yahweh watches the ways of men and he observes all his paths.

²² The wicked will be caught in his own evil and remain entangled in the nets of his own sin. ²³ He will die for want of discipline and will drown in the rising tide of his own evil.

6 ¹ My son, if you have stood bail for your neighbour or guaranteed the word of a stranger: ² if you have committed yourself with your own lips, know that you have trapped yourself with your own words. ³ Then do this, my son: release yourself. If you have fallen into the hands of your neighbour, go speedily, kneel down and plead with him;

⁴ do not give sleep to your eyes or rest to your eyelids. ⁵ Break free like a gazelle from the trap or a bird from the hand.

The idlers and the fools

⁶ You idler, go to the ant, watch her ways and be wise. ⁷ She has no master, no steward or overseer. ⁸ She secures food in summer and stores up provisions during harvest time.

⁹ How long, you idler, are you going to lie around? When do you intend to rise from sleep? ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little drowsiness and your laziness creeps up on you and then, like a tramp, ¹¹ poverty comes, bringing misery like a vagabond.

¹² The villain, the unjust man goes about with a sneer on his lips, ¹³ winking his eye, shuffling his feet and beckoning with his finger. ¹⁴ His heart is deceitful; he is forever plotting evil and causing arguments. ¹⁵ Therefore, disaster will suddenly and irrevocably overtake him.

¹⁶ There are six things Yahweh hates; seven his inner being detests: ¹⁷ the proud look, the lying tongue, hands which spill innocent blood, ¹⁸ the depraved heart, feet which speed towards evil, ¹⁹ a false and lying witness and the man who sows discord among people.

²⁰ My son, respect your father's instruction and do not reject your mother's teaching. ²¹ Hold them forever in your heart and hang them around your neck. ²² These will guard your footsteps, protect you when you sleep and speak to you on waking.

²³ For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light; correction teaches you the way of life.

²⁴ It will protect you from the evil woman, the smooth talking of the stranger. ²⁵ Do not covet her beauty in your heart or let her captivate you with her looks. ²⁶ For the prostitute deserves a piece of bread but the adulteress hunts after your worthy life.

²⁷ Can you hold fire in your pocket without setting fire to your clothes or ²⁸ walk on hot coals without burning your feet? ²⁹ So it is for the man who approaches his neighbour's wife: all who touch her will be punished.

18. Ecl 9, 9

1. Sir 8, 13

11. Ecl 4, 5

many years to continue being as the "bridegroom" of his wife: *be always in love with her*. It would be easy to verify that many are tempted by vices, especially drunkenness, because they did not know how to understand each other and to dialogue in their marriage. Since they were not able to have an authentic married life, they found refuge in a group of friends to live as irresponsible bachelors with them.

■ Here we have all kinds of advice.

6:1-5 A man who is responsible, however generous and obliging he may be, always thinks before committing himself.

6:9-11 He who is lazy to get up will benefit from these verses and also from 26:14.

Following this passage, there is a long discourse on the consequences of adultery which is accompanied by a life of lies and slavery.



³⁰ One does not condemn the hungry thief who steals to fill his stomach; nevertheless, ³¹ if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold and give the contents of his house. ³² How senseless is the adulterer! Whoever does so destroys himself. ³³ He will reap blows and contempt and his disgrace will not be erased.

³⁴ Jealousy inflames the husband's heart and when he can take revenge he will have no mercy. ³⁵ He will accept nothing, neither reparation nor lavish gifts.

7 ¹ My son, keep my words and remain faithful to my commands. ² Hold fast to my instruction and you will have life; treasure my teachings as the apple of your eye. ³ Bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablets of your heart. ⁴ Let wisdom be your sister and knowledge your friend, ⁵ so that you will be saved from the adulterous woman, from the stranger with her enticing words.

⁶ From my window I looked out through the lattice and ⁷ saw among the young men, an inexperienced youth ⁸ who walked along the road near her corner, towards the path to her house. ⁹ It was dusk, daylight was fading – the time of darkness and shadow. ¹⁰ And look! Out comes this woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute, covered with a veil.

¹¹ She is brazen and shameless, unable to remain in the house. ¹² Now at the corner, now in the square, ¹³ she is on the lookout.

¹⁴ She throws herself at him, kisses him and confidently says, ¹⁵ "I have to offer sacrifices and terminate my vows; because of this ¹⁶ I came out to meet you. I sought and found you. ¹⁷ I have decorated my bed with quilts and fine Egyptian sheets and ¹⁸ sprinkled it with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. ¹⁹ Come, let us abandon ourselves to pleasure and drink our fill of love all night, ²⁰ for my husband is not at home but away on a long journey. ²¹ He has taken his moneybags and will not return before the full moon."

²² She led him astray with such smooth and seductive words.

²³ At once he followed her, as an ox led to slaughter or a deer caught in a snare ²⁴ until its liver is pierced by an arrow; as a bird springs at the snare unaware that its life is at stake.

²⁵ Now then, my sons, listen and pay attention to my words. ²⁶ Do not be led astray or lose yourself on her paths. ²⁷ For she has brought many to their death and the strongest were all her victims. ²⁸ Her house leads to hell and death.

Wisdom calls

8

¹ Who calls? Is it not Wisdom?
Who lifts up her voice?

² Is it not Knowledge?

She shouts from the hilltops
and waits by the crossroads;

³ in the vicinity of the city gates she speaks.

⁴ "It is you, men, I address
for my message is directed to all mankind
⁵ so that the ignorant may learn
and the thoughtless come to their senses.

⁶ Listen to me for I speak of vital things
and everything I say is true.

⁷ Truthful words come from my mouth
and my lips do not lend themselves to evil.

⁸ All my words are right,
none are twisted or deceitful.

⁹ The intelligent will verify their truth,
the wise perceive their sincerity.

23. Ecl 7, 26

3. 1, 30

◆ Wisdom speaks again in this poem. We understand that this Wisdom is the wisdom found in the books of the Bible. The biblical

words are alive, as they contain something of God, something which is life-giving to us (Jesus will also say that the word of God is a seed).



- ¹⁰ Prefer my teaching to silver
and seek wisdom rather than gold,
¹¹ because wisdom has more value than any jewel
and no human desire can equal it.
¹² I, Wisdom, dwell with discretion
and count pensiveness among my friends.
¹³ Fear of Yahweh is rejection of evil.
I hate all pride, arrogance, wicked ways and lies,
¹⁴ but love counsel, discretion, prudence and strength.
¹⁵ Kings reign by my power,
their ministers issue just laws
¹⁶ by me princes govern,
and the great and noble of the earth as well.
¹⁷ I love those who love me
and go to meet those who seek me.
¹⁸ Riches and honour are with me,
true well-being and upright living.
¹⁹ More precious than silver and gold
are my fruit and my yield.
²⁰ I proceed on the path of righteousness
and make use of the ways of justice,
²¹ giving riches to those who love me,
and filling their cellars.

Yahweh formed me at the beginning

- o ²² Yahweh created me first,
at the beginning of his works.
²³ He formed me from of old,
from eternity, even before the earth.
²⁴ The abyss did not exist when I was born,
the springs of the sea had not gushed forth,
²⁵ the mountains were still not set in their place,

14. Is 11, 2 16. Wis 9, 10 22. Sir 24; Bar 3, 38 23. Gen 1, 1; Jn 1, 1

All the benefits that will be reaped by the frequent reading of the Bible are listed: to begin with, the fear of God, that is to say, appreciating God above all things. Then, culture enabling us to be leaders and to undertake responsible tasks. Finally, success in life.

Many youths and adults who are not well educated think they will always be inferior: they do not believe they are capable of performing either in ministry or in the promotion of others. They must realize that the regular study of the Bible will not only strengthen their faith, but it will be the starting point of human culture and it will enable them to guide others.

o Yahweh created me first, at the beginning of his works. Note the poetic way of presenting wisdom as if it were someone, as if it were a daughter of God: *I was playing in his presence; I played throughout the world.* Such figures of

speech contain a religious discovery of the last centuries before Christ.

For a very long time the Bible had insisted on the fact that there is only one God and that he has nothing to do with the countless gods of the pagans. But now, believers sense that there is something missing in their knowledge of Yahweh. How can God be a source of life and of love if he is locked up in his solitude? Thanks to the Bible, believers know that besides being the Almighty and Holy God, the Lord becomes present to his people, in the Temple and the Cloud, and that he reveals himself to the prophets to whom he sends his Spirit.

Thus, in the last books of the Old Testament, the authors speak of the Spirit, the Wisdom, the Power, the Providence of God as if they were both something of God and something different from him, like characters sharing God's mysteri-



nor the hills when I was born,
²⁶ before he made the earth or countryside,
 or the first grains of the world's dust.
²⁷ I was there when he made the skies
 and drew the earth's compass on the abyss,
²⁸ when he formed the clouds above
 and when the springs of the ocean emerged;
²⁹ when he made the sea with its limits,
 that it might not overflow.

When he laid the foundations of the earth,

³⁰ I was close beside him,
 the designer of his works,
 and I was his daily delight,
 forever playing in his presence.
³¹ while I played throughout the world,
 but my delight is with the sons of men.
³² Now then, my sons, listen to me:
 happy are those who follow my ways.
³³ Listen to my teaching and gain wisdom;
 do not ignore it.
³⁴ Happy are those who listen to me
 and wait for me at my gates every day,
 watching, close to my threshold.
³⁵ Those who find me find life:
 theirs is Yahweh's blessing.
³⁶ Those who offend me will undergo affliction;
 they hate me for they love death.

Wisdom invites to her table

+ 9

¹ Wisdom has built her house
 set upon seven pillars;
² she has prepared her wine and laid her table.
³ Next, she sent her servants to call
 from the central square of the city,
⁴ "Pass by here, you who are fools."
 To the senseless she says,
⁵ "Come, eat and drink
 of the bread and wine I have prepared.
⁶ Give up your foolishness and you will live;
 take the straight path of discernment."

29. Job 38, 8

31. Bar 3, 38; Jn 1, 14

4. Mt 22, 7

5. Is 55, 1-3; Jn 6, 35

ous life and through whom he is involved in human affairs.

This is a way of preparing the great revelation which will happen with the coming of Jesus. There are three Persons in God and from the beginning his eternal Son "through whom all things were made" and who came to live among us was with the Father (see John 1:1-4; Col 1:15 and Hebrews 1:2-3).

Thus, Wisdom is a figure of Christ. But Christians came to see it as an image of their mother, Mary. In fact, more than any other creature, she was present in God's plans from the beginning and deserves to be called "Throne of Wisdom," since she was so intimately united with the Son, the Wisdom of God.

Happy are those who listen to me (34). Thus the Wisdom of God speaks to the beginner



⁷He who corrects a mocker gains insults; and he who reprimands an evildoer receives abuse. ⁸Do not rebuke the mocker lest he hate you but counsel the wise who will be grateful. ⁹Give to the wise man and he will become wiser each day; teach an upright man and he will increase his wisdom.

¹⁰Fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom and to know the Holy One brings discernment. ¹¹Then I will multiply your days and increase your years of life. ¹²If you are

wise your wisdom will work to your advantage but if you mock you alone will be harmed.

¹³Lady Foolishness is impetuous, a simpleton who knows nothing. ¹⁴She sits at the door of her house, on a throne in the central square of the city, ¹⁵to invite all passers-by, "Come here, whoever is ignorant." ¹⁶To the foolish she says, ¹⁷"Stolen waters are sweet and pilfered bread is the tastiest."

¹⁸But they do not see the Shadow world lying there; its guests are heading towards the abyss of death.

SECOND PART: THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON

■10 ¹A wise son is his father's joy, a foolish one his mother's heartbreak.

²Treasures wrongfully acquired are of no value but upright living saves from death.

³Yahweh does not let the upright man go hungry but he denies satisfaction to the evildoers.

⁴The lazy hand brings poverty; the hard-working hand brings wealth.

⁵The prudent man reaps in summer; the one who sleeps at harvest time deserves scorn.

⁶Blessings on the head of the upright man! Violence silences the cry of the wicked.

⁷The upright man will be remembered with blessings, the name of the wicked will rot away.

⁸The sensible man is open to instruction, the chattering fool speeds towards ruin.

⁹He who behaves honourably will walk safely but the follower of crooked ways will be punished.

¹⁰The wink of an eye brings trouble; but a rebuke wins peace.

¹¹The mouth of an upright man is a source of life but violence is concealed in the mouths of evildoers.

¹²Hatred enkindles disputes, love covers over all offenses.

¹³Wisdom is to be found on the lips of the discerning man; the stick is for the fool's back.

¹⁴The wise man stores up learning but the mouth of the fool makes way for ruin.

¹⁵The rich man's fortune is his fortress, the evil of the poor is their undoing.

¹⁶The virtuous man's toil brings him life, the sins of the evil man destroy him.

¹⁷Respect for discipline is the path of life; he who ignores correction is doomed.

¹⁸Hypocritical is he who tolerates hatred; he who slanders is a fool.

¹⁹Sin will not be lacking where too many words are spoken; the prudent man controls his tongue.

13. 1 Pet 4, 8

19. James 3, 8

taking his first steps in searching for wisdom.

Who is this beginner? Perhaps the one who enrolled in a reading course because he wanted to better his situation; or one who dedicates his days off to take a course in unions in order to better serve his fellow workers; or the one who studies at night after work; or the one who does not go to bed without having read a biblical passage with his wife, etc. The wisdom you will gain comes from God himself, the source of all truth and who calls men and women to share in his wisdom.

This student may not reach a very valued knowledge, nor will he graduate in this world! it does not matter. Because he decided to live more responsibly and to develop his human potential, God will see him as one of his children and one day, he will give him the true wisdom which is in God.

We find two similar texts in Wis 7:21 and Sir 24:5.

+ We will easily discover the image of Christ in these few verses. Wisdom is the image of the Son of God.

We find the invitation to the banquet in Matthew 22:4. Rich and poor, sensible and foolish people, all are called to change their lives.

The bread and the wine which Wisdom gives will one day be the body and the blood of Christ (see John 6).

God is always present in our lives; he gives himself and he nourishes us. We are invited to open our hands to take what he offers. Each day, he gives us what we need to solve the problems of humanity now.

■ Here comes the oldest part of the book of Proverbs. It is a collection of proverbs and sayings attributed to king Solomon (chapters 11-22). Then will follow proverbs from others sources. See 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1 and 31:1.



²⁰ The upright man's tongue is pure silver, but the hearts of evildoers have little value.

²¹ The lips of one upright man feed many people while fools die for lack of sense.

²² The blessing of Yahweh is what brings riches, no effort can replace it.

²³ The fool delights in preparing evil and the wise man in acquiring wisdom.

²⁴ The evildoer will encounter the evil he dreaded whereas the upright man will receive what he looked forward to.

²⁵ After the storm, the wicked man is seen no more but the upright man remains forever.

²⁶ The lazy man is like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes of his master.

²⁷ Fear of Yahweh lengthens one's life, but the years of the wicked will be cut short.

²⁸ The hope of the upright ends in happiness but that of the wicked evaporates.

²⁹ The ways of Yahweh are a fortress for the upright but for evildoers only ruin.

³⁰ The virtuous man will never be disturbed but evildoers will not survive on the earth.

³¹ Wisdom springs forth from the mouth of the virtuous but the corrupt tongue will be torn out.
³² Goodness dwells on the lips of the upright, corruption in the mouth of the wicked.

11 ¹ Yahweh detests a false scale but a just weight pleases him.

² Disgrace always accompanies pride; wisdom resides with the humble.

³ Honesty illumines the path of the upright; but the corrupt are confounded by their own evil.

⁴ On the day of vengeance riches will prove useless but honest living will save from death.

⁵ The virtuous man's integrity smooths his way, while the wicked man falls by his own evil.

⁶ Upright living saves the virtuous while evildoers are caught in their own greed.

⁷ The hope of the wicked is buried with them and their trust in riches is wiped out.

⁸ The upright will escape from distress; a wicked man will take his place.

⁹ The godless man uses his mouth to destroy his neighbour but the virtuous use their wisdom to save themselves.

¹⁰ The city rejoices in the good fortune of the upright and delights in the ruination of the wicked.

¹¹ A city is raised on the blessing of honest men and destroyed by the mouth of the wicked.

¹² Whoever mocks his neighbour is a fool; the wise man chooses silence.

¹³ The gossip reveals information, but the trustworthy man keeps a secret.

¹⁴ Lack of guidance leads to a nation's decline whereas numerous counsellors bring success.

¹⁵ He who stands bail for a stranger harms himself; he who avoids going bail will be safe.

¹⁶ A gracious woman wins renown, and bold men acquire riches.

¹⁷ The generous man does himself a favour while a cruel man wounds his own flesh.

¹⁸ The pay of the wicked is an illusion; while the upright man reaps a sure reward.

¹⁹ Upright living leads to life but the way of evil leads to death.

²⁰ Yahweh detests the corrupt of heart but loves those whose life is upright.

²¹ Be assured that the wicked will not go unpunished, and the sons of the virtuous will be saved.

²² The pretty woman without discretion is like a gold ring in the snout of a pig.

²³ The upright desire nothing but good: the desires of the wicked are in vain.

²⁴ Those who are generous increase their riches; others are misers and impoverish themselves.

²⁵ The warmhearted soul will prosper; he who waters will himself be watered.

²⁶ He who hoards wheat is cursed by the people; blessed is he who sells his seeds.

²⁷ Yahweh rewards the one who seeks good; but he who pursues evil will be caught by it.

22. Ps 127

26. Gen 41, 47

It seems fitting here, more than elsewhere, to insist upon the fact that the words of the Bible are both words of God and human words.

Since these proverbs are the Word of God, they will always have a warning value and a teaching power. But they are also human words. They are words of wisdom gathered by an ancient people on the basis of their experience, quite different from our own. We cannot demand of them insights which would only come with time and with the teaching of Jesus. To give an example, these people had no concept of an

afterlife, nor of the mystery of God the Father nor of his mercy.

These proverbs point to qualities suitable for responsible men:

Farsighted, selfassured, capable of persevering in their behavior and not lazy.

Being prudent and not trusting anyone (see 12:23; 14:6; 14:15; 25:17).

Being just and able to forgive (28:2; 31:8; 21:26; 25:21).

Being in control of one's tongue (13:3).

Being able to correct one's children (13:1).



²⁶He who trusts in riches will stumble; while the upright will flourish like leaves.

²⁷Whoever mismanages his house will inherit only wind; the fool ends up a slave of the wise.

²⁸The fruit of the upright is a tree of life while the wicked are uprooted before their time.

²⁹If here on earth the upright are rewarded, how much more the wicked and the sinner!

12 ¹He who loves discipline, loves knowledge; foolish is he who rejects correction.

²The good man wins the favour of Yahweh who condemns the man of evil schemes.

³No man is made secure by evil but nothing undermines the roots of the upright.

⁴A good wife is her husband's crown while the shameless woman is like a cancer in his bones.

⁵The plans of the upright are honest and the plottings of the wicked deceitful.

⁶The words of the wicked are mortal snares but the virtuous refute and elude them.

⁷The evildoers are thrown down and are no more; but the house of the virtuous will never crumble.

⁸Everyone is praised in proportion to his prudence; while the corrupt of heart will be met with contempt.

⁹Better to be a common man and have a servant than to feel great and run short of bread.

¹⁰The upright man looks after his animals but the wicked are heartless.

¹¹He who cultivates the earth will have his fill of bread, while the fool chases after illusions.

¹²The desires of the wicked produce evil but the roots of the virtuous produce fruit.

¹³The wicked man is entangled in his own lies, but the virtuous man will be saved from misfortune.

¹⁴The man who meditates on wisdom will attain all that is good; each one is rewarded according to the works of his hands.

¹⁵The fool considers his way right while the wise man listens to advice.

¹⁶The fool shows his annoyance immediately but the discreet man overlooks an insult.

¹⁷He who tells the truth will find justice and he who lies falsehood.

¹⁸He who speaks thoughtlessly pierces like a sword; but the words of the wise bring healing.

¹⁹Truthful words endure forever but lies for only a moment.

²⁰Deceit dwells in the heart of the schemer, happiness in those who pursue peace.

²¹No misfortune will befall the virtuous but the wicked will have their fill of troubles.

²²Yahweh hates the lips of liars and loves those who speak the truth.

²³The discreet man conceals his wisdom while the hearts of fools make public their nonsense.

²⁴The hardworking hand will rule; and the lazy will have to obey.

²⁵Intense grief depresses the heart while a friendly word makes it glad.

²⁶The just man guides his neighbour while the way of the wicked leads them astray.

²⁷The lazy man will have no game to roast; a man's best wealth is his work.

²⁸Life is to be found on the path of virtue, the way of the wicked leads to death.

13 ¹An intelligent son listens to his father's advice, but a mocker listens to no correction.

²A man can taste goodness from the fruit of his own mouth but the treacherous feed on violence.

³He who guards his mouth preserves his life, the constant talker is lost.

⁴The lazy man hopes but his desires are in vain, whereas hard workers have their desires fulfilled.

⁵The upright man hates lying words but the evildoer slanders and defames.

⁶Virtue protects men of honest life; while sin brings ruin to the wicked.



⁷One pretends to be rich but has nothing, another, of great wealth, feigns poverty.

⁸A man's wealth lets him ransom his life but the poor man has nothing with which to do so.

⁹The light of the virtuous is bright, the lamp of the godless is extinguished.

¹⁰Arrogance only brings trouble; wisdom is found in those who take advice.

¹¹Sudden riches will decrease, he who gathers little by little will be enriched.

¹²Delayed hope makes the heart languish, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

¹³He who scorns teaching will be in want, while he who respects the commandment will be rewarded.

¹⁴The wise man's teaching is a life-giving fountain for escaping the snares of death.

¹⁵Prudent intelligence wins favour, the way of liars leads nowhere.

¹⁶Every prudent man acts with reflection, the fool parades his stupidity.

¹⁷A wicked messenger falls on misfortune, the reliable one brings healing.

¹⁸Poverty and shame to the one who rejects correction; honour to him who accepts rebuke.

¹⁹Desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul; but fools spurn rejection of evil.

²⁰Walk with the wise and you will gain wisdom; but he who befriends fools becomes wicked.

²¹Misfortune hounds the sinner, while the upright abound in good fortune.

²²A good man's inheritance is for his children's children, a sinner's wealth will be kept for the virtuous.

²³The tillage of the poor supplies food, while others perish because of their lack of righteousness.

²⁴Unloved is the son whom the father hates to punish; the loving father frequently corrects.

²⁵The upright man eats his fill, while the stomach of the wicked goes hungry.

14 ¹Wisdom builds her house, foolishness destroys it with her own hands.

²Upright living is fear of Yahweh, but he who deviates scorns him.

³From the fool's mouth comes the rod of his pride, the wise man's lips protect him.

⁴Where there's no oxen, there's no wheat, in the oxen's strength there's abundant harvest.

⁵The truthful witness does not lie; the false witness breathes deceit.

⁶The mocker searches for wisdom in vain; knowledge comes easily to the discreet man.

⁷Keep away from the fool for you will find no wisdom in his words.

⁸The wisdom of the discreet man lies in guarding his conduct but the foolishness of fools is full of deceit.

⁹Fools never make amends while good will dwells among the upright.

¹⁰The heart understands its own grief; no stranger can share in its joy.

¹¹The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will stand firm.

¹²To one, his way appears correct but, in the end, it leads to death.

¹³The heart feels pain in the midst of laughter, and joy ends in sorrow.

¹⁴The reckless man reaps the fruit of his ways; the good man will earn reward.

¹⁵The simpleton believes all he's told, the prudent man watches his step.

¹⁶The wise man fears and avoids evil, the fool goes near and feels safe.

¹⁷The angry man does foolish things, the crafty man makes himself hated.

¹⁸Foolishness is the inheritance of fools, the prudent choose wisdom as their crown.

¹⁹The wicked shall kneel before the good and the godless before the gates of the virtuous.

²⁰The poor man is detestable even to his neighbour while the rich man has many friends.

²¹A sinner is he who looks down on his neighbour, happy is he who shows pity to the poor.

²²Does evil plotting not lead to ruin? Do goodness and sincerity not belong to those devoted to good?

²³Hard work yields a profit but the idler brings misfortune.

²⁴Wealth is the wise man's crown, foolishness the diadem of fools.

²⁵A truthful witness saves lives; he who lies will be lost.

²⁶There is great security in the fear of Yahweh, his sons find refuge in him.

²⁷The fear of Yahweh is a life-giving fountain for escaping the snares of death.

²⁸Numerous people are a king's glory; lack of subjects ruins a prince.

²⁹The discerning man is slow to



anger, the impatient one displays stupidity.

³⁰ A peaceful heart is the body's life but the passions are a cancer in the bones.

³¹ Oppression of the weak insults their creator, he is honoured by those who have compassion on the needy.

³² The evildoer is overthrown by his own evil, the upright man feels safe up to death.

³³ Wisdom resides in the heart of the discerning; who ever sees her among fools?

³⁴ Virtue makes a nation great; the sinner disgraces the people.

³⁵ The clever servant enjoys the king's favour but the fool has to suffer his anger.

15 ¹ A kind answer soothes anger; while a cutting word increases wrath.

² The tongue of the wise speaks knowledge, but the mouth of fools spreads stupidity.

³ The eyes of Yahweh are everywhere, watching the good and the evil.

⁴ The pacifying tongue is a tree of life, while the viper's tongue destroys the heart.

⁵ Paternal correction is scorned by the fool, but the one who listens shows discretion.

⁶ Abundance resides in the house of the virtuous but disgrace descends on the profits of the wicked.

⁷ Wise men's lips sow knowledge whereas the fool's thoughts are not safe.

⁸ Yahweh detests the sacrifice of the wicked but listens to the prayer of the honest man.

⁹ Yahweh abhors the conduct of the wicked but loves him who seeks virtue.

¹⁰ Correct severely him who strays from the way; whoever hates being rebuked will die.

¹¹ Yahweh sees into hell and the abyss; how much more into the hearts of the sons of men!

¹² The mocker does not like being reprimanded; he does not go to the wise.

¹³ A glad heart brightens the face, a sad one weighs down the spirit.

¹⁴ A discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on stupidity.

¹⁵ Every day is evil to the afflicted one; while the happy heart is always feasting.

¹⁶ Better to have little but fear the Lord than to have a fortune accompanied by anxiety.

¹⁷ Better to have vegetables where there is love than to have a fattened ox with nothing but hatred.

¹⁸ The hot-headed man provokes disputes, while the man slow to anger reconciles differences.

¹⁹ The way of the lazy man is strewn with thorns, but the path of hard workers is a spacious road.

²⁰ The wise son is his father's joy, the foolish man despises his mother.

²¹ Foolishness appeals to the man with no sense but the discerning man goes on his way.

²² Plans fall through for lack of deliberation; a multitude of counsellors ensures success.

²³ Happy is he who knows how to answer. Welcome indeed is the apt word!

²⁴ To the discerning man, the way of life leads upward; he will be saved from the place of darkness below.

²⁵ Yahweh tears down the house of the proud but he strengthens the widow's boundaries.

²⁶ Yahweh detests corrupt designs but words of goodness are pleasing to him.

²⁷ He who craves dishonest gain brings trouble on his house; he who accepts no tempting bribes will live.

²⁸ The man of upright heart thinks before he speaks, the mouth of the wicked pours out evil.

²⁹ Yahweh stays far away from the wicked but hears the prayer of the virtuous.

³⁰ A kind look delights the heart, good news revives one's strength.

³¹ The ear which listens to helpful correction is found among the wise.

³² He who ignores correction despises himself, he who heeds the reprimand acquires discernment.

³³ The fear of Yahweh is a school of wisdom; humility precedes praise.

16 ¹ Man's heart makes plans but it is Yahweh who answers.

² Although people are satisfied with all of their deeds Yahweh considers the motives.

³ Entrust all you do to Yahweh and your plans will be realized.

⁴ Yahweh made everything for a purpose, even the evildoer for the day of punishment.



⁵Yahweh hates the arrogant heart; you can be sure it will not go unpunished.

⁶With goodness and faithfulness you atone for your sin; with fear of Yahweh you may turn away from evil.

⁷When Yahweh is pleased with a man's conduct, he reconciles even his enemies with him.

⁸Better to have little but be just than to have a great income without honesty.

⁹Man's heart seeks the right way but it is Yahweh who makes his footsteps sure.

¹⁰The lips of the king utter oracles; he will not be mistaken when he judges.

¹¹Yahweh demands a just balance and scales; the weights are the work of his hands.

¹²Kings who do evil are an abomination; it is justice that supports the kingship.

¹³He who judges according to justice wins the king's favour, honest men are pleasing to him.

¹⁴The king's anger is a messenger of death but the wise man knows how to appease him.

¹⁵The king's serene countenance means life, his favour is like the spring rain.

¹⁶Better to have acquired wisdom rather than gold, discernment rather than silver.

¹⁷The way of the honest man is to turn away from evil; he who watches his steps keeps his life safe.

¹⁸Pride goes before destruction, an arrogant spirit before a fall.

¹⁹Better be humble among the lowly than share the loot with the proud.

²⁰He who listens to the word will find happiness; blessed is he who trusts in Yahweh.

²¹He whose heart is wise will be proclaimed discerning; moderate speech brings knowledge.

²²Good sense is a life-giving fountain to those who possess it, foolishness is the punishment of fools.

²³The wise man's heart keeps guard over his mouth, making his words more effective.

²⁴Kind words are like a honeycomb: sweet to the spirit and healthy to the body.

²⁵To one, his way seems honest but, ultimately, it leads to death.

²⁶The worker's appetite works to his benefit; the need to eat spurs him on.

²⁷The troublemaker prepares disgrace, a scorching fire is on his lips.

²⁸The scoundrel stirs up trouble; his critical comments split up friends.

²⁹A violent man deceives his neighbour and leads him along a path that is not good.

³⁰He who closes his eyes and purses his lips to plot deceit already commits evil.

³¹White hairs are a magnificent crown for the man who has followed the path of virtue.

³²The patient man is to be preferred to the hero; better the man who masters himself than the conqueror of cities.

³³Fate is thrown in the bag but the decision depends on Yahweh.

17 ¹Better a crust of dry bread in peace than the discord of a house full of feasting.

²A shrewd servant will replace the foolish son of the master and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers.

³A crucible for silver and a furnace for gold but Yahweh is the tester of hearts.

⁴The evil plotter listens to the lips of liars and the liar gives an ear to the corrupt tongue.

⁵He who mocks the poor insults their creator, he who laughs at the deprived will not go unpunished.

⁶The crown of the aged is their children's children, the children's glory is their father.

⁷Noble language does not suit the fool and even less do lies suit a prince.

⁸The giver of gifts possesses a treasure wherever he goes he will succeed.

⁹Whoever covers over a fault promotes friendship, but he who reveals a word divides friends.

¹⁰A discerning man is more impressed by a reprimand than a fool is by a hundred lashes.

¹¹The wicked man seeks nothing but rebellion; a cruel messenger will be sent against him.

¹²It is better to meet with a bear deprived of her cubs than with a fool in his foolishness.

¹³He who repays good with evil will not enter his house of evil.

¹⁴To begin legal proceedings is like opening a dam; withdraw before the dispute erupts.

¹⁵To excuse the guilty and condemn the just: both are detestable to Yahweh.

¹⁶What good is money in a fool's hand? How would he buy wisdom? He has no sense.



¹⁷ A friend remains a friend at all times; he has become as a brother for times of adversity.

¹⁸ He who is full of promises and goes bail for his neighbour has no sense.

¹⁹ The sinner loves disputes, the man of arrogant words hastens his own ruin.

²⁰ The man of double-dealing will not find happiness, the sly tongue falls into disgrace.

²¹ He who fathers a fool has acquired misery, there is no joy for a fool's father.

²² A joyful heart gives health to the body, while a sad spirit dries up the bones.

²³ The corrupt man takes bribes to pervert the course of justice.

²⁴ The discerning man keeps wisdom before his eyes; the fool's eyes are on every corner of the world.

²⁵ The foolish son is a worry to his father and distress to her who gave him birth.

²⁶ It is not right to fine the upright; the noble ought not to be beaten.

²⁷ The prudent of speech are wise; he who keeps his temper is an educated man.

²⁸ Then the fool, if silent, can pass as wise; the clever man keeps his lips sealed.

18 ¹ He who holds himself aloof follows his own whims and is annoyed at others' advice.

² The fool does not relish reflection but only the airing of his own views.

³ When the wicked come, scorn also comes, and offense brings shame.

⁴ Man's words are like deep waters; an overflowing torrent is the fountain of wisdom.

⁵ It is not good to give consideration to the wicked or to harm the virtuous when giving judgment.

⁶ The fool's lips cause disputes and his mouth attracts blows.

⁷ The fool's mouth is his undoing; his lips will ensnare his life.

⁸ The gossip's words are tasty mouthfuls which go right to the bottom of the stomach.

⁹ He who dawdles at work is a brother of the destroyer.

¹⁰ Yahweh's name is a strong tower, the virtuous rely on it and are safe.

¹¹ The rich man's wealth is his fortress; he relies on it as on a high wall.

¹² Before its downfall, the heart is wrapped in pride; while humility goes before honour.

¹³ To argue before listening to the facts shows up stupidity which leads to disgrace.

¹⁴ The spirit of man sustains him when ill but who will lift the one of broken spirit?

¹⁵ The discerning heart obtains wisdom, the ear of the wise searches out knowledge.

¹⁶ A present opens all doors to you and brings you into the company of the powerful.

¹⁷ The first to plead his case seems to be right, but his opponent appears and there is matter for trial.

¹⁸ Casting lots terminates disputes and decides between the powerful.

¹⁹ An offended brother is more steadfast than a fortress but quarrels are like the bars of a castle.

²⁰ A man is filled with what comes from his mouth and is nourished by what his lips provide.

²¹ The tongue has power over life and death, those who like speaking will eat its fruit.

²² He who finds a wife finds happiness, he has won Yahweh's favour.

²³ The poor man pleads, while the rich man responds harshly.

²⁴ Some friends only bring ruin, others are closer than a brother.

19 ¹ Better the poor man who lives honestly than the fool who lies.

² It is bad for men not to reflect, and acting too quickly can lead one astray.

³ A man spoils his chances through his own stupidity but it is against Yahweh that his heart rages.

⁴ Wealth multiplies friends but the poor man is deprived of his only friend.

⁵ The false witness will not go unpunished, the liar will not escape.

⁶ Many are the flatterers of the noble man, the whole world is a friend to the rich man.

⁷ A poor man is hated by all his brothers, and even more so do his friends desert him. He searches for someone to talk to but finds no one.

⁸ He who acquires wisdom loves himself, he who respects knowledge will be happy.

⁹ The false witness will not go unpunished, the liar will perish.

¹⁰ It is not good that a fool live luxuriously, still less that a slave command princes.

¹¹ A clever man is slow to anger; his glory lies in forgetting offenses.

¹² The angry king is like a roaring lion but his favour is like the dew on the grass.

¹³ The foolish son is the ruin of his father; the nagging wife is like a dripping gutter.

¹⁴ House and wealth are inherited from a father but a sensible wife is a gift from Yahweh.

¹⁵ Laziness makes a man fall asleep, the idler will go hungry.

¹⁶He who keeps the commandment keeps his life; he who despises it dies.

¹⁷He who shows compassion to the poor lends to Yahweh, who will repay his good deed.

¹⁸Correct your son as long as there is hope, lest you be responsible for his death.

¹⁹The violent man leaves himself open to a fine; if you spare him he will continue.

²⁰Listen to counsel and accept correction, and you will be wise in the end.

²¹Plans abound in the human heart but only Yahweh's purpose will be realized.

²²Goodness is attractive in a person; better a poor man than a liar.

²³Love of Yahweh leads you to life; you will have your fill and live without fear.

²⁴The lazy man dips his hand in the dish but he cannot even lift it to his mouth.

²⁵Punish the mocker and the ignorant will be more careful; rebuke a discerning man and he will listen to reason.

²⁶He who dispossesses his father and evicts his mother is a shameful and degenerate son.

²⁷My son, listen to instruction and stop straying from the words of wisdom.

²⁸An unworthy witness makes a mockery of justice; the mouth of the wicked feeds on evil.

²⁹Punishments were made for mockers and blows for the backs of fools.

20 ¹Wine leads to vulgarity and strong drink to bravado; he who strays in it will never be wise.

²The angry king is like a roaring lion; whoever provokes him risks his life.

³It is good for man to avoid quarrels; it is the fool who does not master himself.

⁴Autumn is over, yet the fool does no work; come the harvest he searches and finds nothing.

⁵Counsel is like deep water in the heart, the discerning man has only to draw it out.

⁶Many are called good but where can the trustworthy man be found?

⁷The upright man who works honestly will make his sons happy after him.

⁸The king who sits in judgment discovers evil at a single glance.

⁹Who can say, "I have purified my heart, I am cleansed from sin?"

¹⁰The crooked measure and scales—these are the things that Yahweh detests.

¹¹The child reveals himself in his deeds; whether his actions are honest and upright.

¹²The ear that hears, the eye that sees, Yahweh has made them both.

¹³Do not love sleep lest you become poor keep your eyes open and you will have your fill of bread.

¹⁴"No good, no good," says the buyer but off he goes congratulating himself.

¹⁵Although you have gold and abundance of pearls, the most valuable adornment is lips which speak wisely.

¹⁶Get rid of his clothes because he has stood bail for a stranger; arrest him for the profit of those unknown!

¹⁷Stolen bread tastes good but later on your mouth is full of sand.

¹⁸Plans take shape thanks to advice; do battle, then, with wise strategies.

¹⁹The gossip reveals secrets; have nothing to do with chatters.

²⁰Whoever curses his father and mother will see his lamp extinguished in the midst of darkness.

²¹Advantage hastily gained in the beginning will not be blessed in the long run.

²²Never say, "I will take revenge." Trust in Yahweh; he will save you.

²³Yahweh detests false weights; it does no good to have false scales.

²⁴Yahweh directs a man's steps, who can know where his way leads?

²⁵It is dangerous to make hasty promises to Yahweh and only then reflect on them.

²⁶A king throws evildoers to the wind and runs the threshers over them.

²⁷Man's spirit is Yahweh's lamp which searches the hidden places of the heart.

²⁸Goodness and loyalty keep guard over the king; his throne stands due to goodness.

²⁹Energy is the adornment of youth, white hair the dignity of age.

³⁰Bleeding wounds purify evil, blows bring healing to the inner self.

21 ¹In the hands of Yahweh, the heart of the king is like running water; he directs it wherever he wishes.

²To the eyes of man all his ways are honest but it is Yahweh who weighs the heart.

³To do what is upright and just please Yahweh more than sacrifice.

⁴Haughty looks, proud heart, the light of the wicked is sin.

⁵The plans of a hardworking man result in earnings; poverty is for those who act too hastily.

⁶To make a fortune by means of deceit is like running after the wind; the end is death.

⁷ The violence of the wicked carries them away because they refuse to practise justice.

⁸ The way of the criminal is devious; but honest are the ways of the innocent man.

⁹ Better the corner of a barn to live in than a house shared with a raging woman.

¹⁰ The soul of the wicked desires nothing but evil; not even his friend is treated with compassion.

¹¹ When the mocker is punished the ignorant man grows wise; when the wise man is instructed he grows in knowledge.

¹² The Just One watches the house of the evildoer and hurls the wicked into misfortune.

¹³ He who is deaf to the poor man's cry will not be heard when he himself calls out.

¹⁴ A discreet gift pacifies anger, a bribe diverts violent rage.

¹⁵ Upright men are glad when justice reigns but evildoers tremble.

¹⁶ He who departs from the ways of prudence will sleep in the assembly of the Shades.

¹⁷ Pleasure-lovers remain poor, he who loves wine and perfume will never grow rich.

¹⁸ The wicked man will pay for the virtuous and the treacherous man for the honest.

¹⁹ Better to live in a deserted place than with a raging and abusive woman.

²⁰ There is oil and precious treasure in the wise man's house, things which the fool squanders.

²¹ He who seeks justice and mercy will gain life, prosperity and honour.

²² The wise man conquers a city of warriors and tears down the walls they trust in.

²³ He who keeps guard over his mouth and tongue saves himself from anguish.

²⁴ "Mocker" is the name of the arrogant and haughty, he in whom pride abounds.

²⁵ The idler's desires lead him to death because his hands refuse to work. ²⁶ He covets all day long while the upright man gives without stinting.

²⁷ Yahweh detests the sacrifice of the wicked, above all when they offer it for an unjust cause.

²⁸ The lying witness will perish but he who listens wisely will be given time to speak.

²⁹ The wicked man tries to appear firm and stable while the honest man confirms his way.

³⁰ No wisdom, prudence or advice can withstand the look of Yahweh.

³¹ The horse is equipped for the day of battle but it is Yahweh who gives the victory.

22 ¹ A good name is better than great wealth; fame is preferable to silver or gold.

² Rich and poor have something in common, Yahweh has made them all.

³ The discreet man foresees disgrace and hides, the ignorant keep going at their own expense.

⁴ The reward of humility is fear of Yahweh, wealth, honour and life.

⁵ The path of the wicked is paved with thorns and traps, he who loves his life will keep his distance.

⁶ Teach the child the way he should go, he will not stray from it while he lives.

⁷ The rich man lords it over the poor, the borrower is the moneylender's slave.

⁸ Whoever sows injustice reaps disaster; the power of the wicked will be broken.

⁹ The warmhearted man will be blessed since he shares his bread with the poor.

¹⁰ Throw out the mocker and the dispute will cease, fighting and insults will end.

¹¹ He who loves purity of heart and speaks sensibly will find a friend in the king.

¹² Yahweh's look protects the wise man and discredits the words of the liar.

¹³ The lazy man says, "There is a lion outside, he will kill me in the street."

¹⁴ The adulterous woman's mouth is a deep pit, he whom Yahweh wishes to punish will fall into it.

¹⁵ The heart of the child is naturally foolish, the beating of instruction will cure it.

¹⁶ When you oppress the poor, you make them grow; when you give to the rich, you waste everything.

The proverbs of the wise

¹⁷ Give ear, listen to the words of the wise and apply yourself to understanding them, ¹⁸ because it will be your delight to keep them deep within you, to have them always ready on your lips.

¹⁹ I wish now to teach you, so that you will place your trust in Yahweh. ²⁰ Have I not written for you thirty chapters of advice and knowledge ²¹ so that you may recognize the truth and be able to answer rightly him who sent you?

²² Do not take from the poor man just because he is poor or condemn the one in misfortune, ²³ because Yahweh will intercede for them and will carry off the life of their oppressors.

²⁴ Do not befriend the angry man or be a companion to the man of rage, ²⁵ for fear you adopt their ways and lose your life in their midst.

²⁶ Do not be one of those who undertake a



commitment and act as guarantor of debts; ²⁷ if you cannot pay, they will take from you the very bed in which you sleep.

²⁸ Do not move the ancient boundaries established by your forefathers.

²⁹ You see a clever man at work? He will enter the service of kings; he will not stay in the service of unknown people.

23 ¹ If you sit at a table with a great man, beware of what is in front of you; ² if your appetite is too great, put a knife to your throat. ³ Do not greedily desire his fine food for it is deceptive nourishment.

⁴ Do not wear yourself out trying to be rich, do not dwell on it. ⁵ Set your eyes on wealth and it no longer exists; it sprouts wings and flies into the sky like an eagle.

⁶ Do not eat with the wicked man or be greedy for his choice food. ⁷ All is appearance, except, what he plots in his heart. "Eat and drink," he says but he is not to be trusted. ⁸ You will spit it out as soon as it is tasted and your words of praise will be wasted.

⁹ Do not speak with a fool; he will not be able to appreciate your remarks.

¹⁰ Do not move the ancient boundaries or take possession of the orphan's land because his Avenger is powerful; ¹¹ he will take sides against you.

¹² Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of wisdom.

¹³ Do not hold back from correcting the youth; the rod will not kill him. ¹⁴ With several strokes, you save him from death.

¹⁵ My son, if your heart is wise, then my own heart is glad, ¹⁶ and my whole being will rejoice when you speak the truth.

¹⁷ Do not envy sinners but, each day, fear Yahweh; then you will have a future and ¹⁸ your hope will not be in vain.

¹⁹ Listen, my son, and you will be wise and you will make your heart go straight on its way.

²⁰ Do not be one of those who get drunk with wine or who stuff themselves with meat, ²¹ since the drunkard and the glutton impoverish themselves and the sleepy head is clothed in rags.

²² Listen to your father who begot you, do not despise your mother in her old age.

²³ Acquire truth and never sell it; gain wisdom, discipline and discernment.

²⁴ Happy the father of a virtuous man! How he will rejoice, ²⁵ he who fathers a wise man! May your father and mother rejoice and may she who bore you be glad.

²⁶ My son, give me your heart, that your

eyes may delight in my ways. ²⁷ You should know that the prostitute is a deep abyss and the unknown woman a narrow well. ²⁸ Like a thief she lies in wait and she increases the sinners among men.

²⁹ For whom are the cries and laments? For whom the complaints and sighs? For whom the blows without reason? For whom the eyes which see double?

³⁰ For those who abandon themselves to wine and go in search of the well blended wine.

³¹ Do not consider the wine; how red it is and how sparkling the glass! How smoothly it flows!

³² In the end, it bites like a snake and stings like a viper. ³³ Your eyes will see strange thing and you will end up speaking nonsense. ³⁴ You will be like a man asleep on the high seas or at the rudder: "They hit me but I am not hurt" ³⁵ They beat me but I feel nothing. When will I wake up? I will go in search of more."

24 ¹ Do not envy the wicked or desire their company, ² for their hearts dream only of violence and their lips speak nothing but evil.

³ With wisdom a house is built. ⁴ It is strengthened by prudence. Its granaries are filled by knowledge with all that is good precious and desirable.

⁵ The wise man is powerful; the man of knowledge adds to his strength. ⁶ Because of this, he goes into battle with wise plans, since success depends on many advisors.

⁷ Wisdom is beyond the reach of the fool let him not open his mouth in the assembly.

⁸ The plotter of evil is called an unscrupulous mastermind.

⁹ The fool dreams only of sin, the mocker deserves only contempt.

¹⁰ If you lose heart when misfortune come your strength is but weakness.

¹¹ Rescue those who are being carried away to die; save those who are being dragged away to torture. ¹² Afterwards, you will say, "We did not know." But he who weighs the heart, does he not understand? He who watches over the soul is aware and he will give to each one according to his deeds.

¹³ Eat honey, my son, because it is good the honeycomb is sweet to the taste. ¹⁴ So also will wisdom be to your soul. If you find it, you have a future and your hope will not be in vain.

¹⁵ Evildoer, do not spy on the house of the virtuous man, do not disturb his home. ¹⁶ Because, even though the virtuous man fall

seven times, he gets up again, while the wicked sink in their adversity.

¹⁷ Do not rejoice if your enemy falls or let your heart be glad if he stumbles. ¹⁸ lest Yahweh see and be displeased and his anger be turned on you.

¹⁹ Do not be incensed by the wicked or envious of the ungodly. ²⁰ since there is no future in evil and the lamp of the wicked will be extinguished.

²¹ Fear Yahweh and the king, my son; make no deals with agitators. ²² for disaster will befall them without warning and who knows when their ruin will come?

Other proverbs of the wise

²³ It is not good for judges to show partiality. People curse and nations hate him ²⁴ who says to the wicked man, "You are just." ²⁵ But those who punish the evildoer can boast; blessing and happiness will be theirs.

²⁶ An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.

²⁷ Finish your work out-of-doors and plan your work in the fields; afterwards, you can think of building your house.

²⁸ Do not lightly bear witness against your neighbour lest you lie.

²⁹ Do not say, "I will do to him what he did to me; I will repay him for his deeds."

³⁰ I passed by the lazy man's field, near the vineyard of the senseless man. ³¹ Everywhere it was full of weeds, thistles covered the ground and the stone wall had fallen apart.

³² Seeing all this, I reflected and drew this lesson from what I saw. ³³ A little sleep, a little drowsiness and ³⁴ your laziness creeps upon you and then, like a tramp, poverty comes, bringing misery like a vagabond.

25 ¹ These are also Proverbs of Solomon, recorded in the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

² The glory of God is in hiding secrets and the glory of the king in revealing them. ³ As high as the skies, as deep as the earth, such is the heart of kings.

⁴ Remove the impurity from silver and it will become a vessel in the hands of the silversmith. ⁵ Remove the wicked from the king's presence and he will affirm his power through justice.

⁶ Do not boast before the king or put yourself among the great. ⁷ It would be better to be invited, "Come up here," than to be humiliated after having seen the prince.

⁸ Do not be too hasty in accusing your neighbour for what would happen to you should he confound you?

⁹ Defend your case against your neighbour but do not reveal the secret of another ¹⁰ lest he overhear it and despise you and your reputation be lost.

¹¹ An opportune word is like golden apples encased in silver. ¹² A gold ring or an ornament of fine gold, such is the wise man's rebuke to a responsive person.

¹³ The trustworthy messenger is like the coolness of snow at harvest time, to him who sends him; he revives the soul of his master.

¹⁴ Clouds and wind but no rain, such is the man who promises but does not fulfill.

¹⁵ With a little patience you will persuade the judge; a soft tongue can break bones.

¹⁶ If you find honey, eat enough but not too much, lest you bring it up again.

¹⁷ Go rarely to your neighbour's house lest he tire of you and grow to hate you.

¹⁸ A mace, a sword, a keen arrow: such is the man who lies about his neighbour.

¹⁹ A decaying tooth, a lame foot, such is the trust put in the ungodly, on the day of trouble.

²⁰ Singing songs to a grieving person is like taking off your cloak in frosty weather or pouring vinegar into a wound.

²¹ If your enemy is hungry give him something to eat, if thirsty, something to drink; ²² thus you pile up red-hot coals on his head and Yahweh will reward you.

²³ As the north wind brings the rain so the gossiping tongue leaves annoyed faces.

²⁴ Better the corner of a barn to live in than a house shared with a whimsical woman.

²⁵ Good news from a distant country is like cool water to a dry throat.

²⁶ A churning river or a polluted

spring is like the virtuous man who trembles before the evildoer.

²⁷ It is not good to eat too much honey and even less good to be greedy for honours.

²⁸ The man who cannot contain his anger is like an open city, without defences.

26 ¹ Honours do not suit the fool just as snow in summer and rain at harvest.

² The sparrow escapes, the swallow flies off, so the motiveless curse will have no effect.

³ A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, a stick for the backs of fools.

⁴ Do not answer the stupidity of fools lest you become like them.

⁵ Answer the stupidity of the fool lest he consider himself intelligent.

⁶ He who sends messages by a fool is cutting his own feet.

⁷ Like the unsteady legs of a lame man, such is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

⁸ Honouring a fool is like tying a stone in the catapult.

⁹ Like a thorn branch in a drunkard's hands, such is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

¹⁰ Like an archer wounding all passers-by so is he who employs a fool.

¹¹ The fool reverts to his stupidity just as a dog returns to his vomit.

¹² See that man who thinks himself wise? There is more hope for a fool!

¹³ "There's a lion in the street," the lazy man says, "A lion in the square."

¹⁴ The door turns on its hinges and the lazy man on his bed. ¹⁵ The idler dips his hand in the dish but is too tired to lift it to his mouth. ¹⁶ The idler considers himself wiser than many people who answer tactfully.

¹⁷ Interfering in the disputes of others is like grabbing a passing dog by the tail.

¹⁸ As a madman hurls flaming, deadly arrows, ¹⁹ so does the man who lies to his friend and then says, "It was just a joke."

²⁰ For lack of wood the fire goes out, for want of a gossip, the quarrel dies down.

²¹ Charcoal on hot coals, wood on a fire and a quarrelsome man for stirring up disputes.

²² The words of the gossip are delicious mouthfuls which go right down to the bottom of the stomach.

²³ Like silver on earthenware so are smooth lips with a corrupt heart.

²⁴ The man who hates, disguises his words and keeps his treachery inside; ²⁵ do not trust

his sweet language for seven evils fill his heart.

²⁶ But, although he conceals his hatred like a hypocrite, his evil will be revealed in the assembly.

²⁷ He who digs a pit falls in it and the rock he rolls away falls back on him.

²⁸ The liar hates his victims, the flattering mouth brings destruction.

27 ¹ Do not feel confident about tomorrow since you do not know how today will end.

² Let another praise you but not your own mouth; a stranger but not your own lips.

³ Heavy the stone and weighty the sand but the fool's anger outweighs both.

⁴ Wrath is cruel and anger impulsive but who can withstand jealousy?

⁵ Better an honest rebuke than false affection.

⁶ Worthy of trust is the friend who speaks honestly; the enemy is he who multiplies caresses.

⁷ The full mouth looks down on honey, the hungry one finds any bitter thing sweet.

⁸ Like a bird far from its nest, so is the man who wanders from his own place.

⁹ Oil and perfume gladden the heart; so too does the sweetness of friendship comfort the soul.

¹⁰ Never desert your friend or your father's friend; do not hasten to your brother's house when troubles strike: better a friend nearby than a brother far away.

¹¹ Learn to be wise, my son, and make me happy so that I can reply to those who insult me.

¹² The discerning man foresees danger and takes cover, but fools keep going, to their own loss.

¹³ Get rid of his clothes since he has gone: surety for a stranger, seize him for the benefit of those unknown.

¹⁴ If he, at dawn, blesses his neighbour in a loud voice, it shall be interpreted as a curse.

¹⁵ The constant dripping of a gutter on a rainy day and a nagging woman have something in common. ¹⁶ Stopping her is like stopping the wind and grasping oil in one's hand.

¹⁷ Iron is sharpened with iron, contact with a neighbour sharpens a man's wit.

¹⁸ He who tends the fig tree eats its fruit, he who looks after his master will be honoured.

¹⁹ As the face is reflected in water so man finds himself in his own heart.

²⁰ Death and hell are never satisfied; so also, the eyes of men.

²¹ A crucible for silver, a furnace for gold: you will know man by his reputation.

²² Even though you grind the fool in a mortar, you will not rid him of his stupidity.

²³ Know well the state of your herd and tend to your flock ²⁴ because wealth does not last forever and riches are not handed down from generation to generation. ²⁵ Once the pasture is mowed and the aftergrowth appears and the hay is gathered in from the hills, ²⁶ you should have lambs to clothe you and goats to pay for your fields, ²⁷ sufficient goats' milk to feed you, to sustain your household and provide for your serving girls.

28 ¹ The wicked man runs away even when no one is after him but the virtuous man feels as safe as a lion.

² A country, for its sins, has many rulers; but with one wise ruler there is stability.

³ The evildoer oppressing the poor is like destructive floods which leave no food.

⁴ Those who forsake the Law applaud evil; those faithful to the Law fight evil.

⁵ The wicked have no understanding of justice but those who seek Yahweh understand all.

⁶ Better the poor but honest life than devious living, with riches.

⁷ A clever man keeps the Law, while he who associates with scoundrels brings shame to his father.

⁸ He who adds to his wealth by usury and greed amasses it for another who has compassion on the poor.

⁹ If anyone turns a deaf ear to the Law, even his prayer is contaminated by sin.

¹⁰ He who leads the virtuous astray will fall into his own trap. The upright will inherit happiness.

¹¹ The rich man thinks himself wise while the poor but sensible man knows how to show him up.

¹² When the virtuous triumph there is great feasting, but when the wicked dominate everybody hides.

¹³ Whoever conceals his faults will not prosper, but he who confesses and renounces them will be shown mercy.

¹⁴ Happy the man who always lives in the fear of God; he who hardens his heart will fall on disaster.

¹⁵ A roaring lion, a hungry bear, such is the bad leader of a poor people.

¹⁶ The ruler lacking intelligence multiplies oppression; but he who abhors greed will endure.

¹⁷ The man wanted for murder will be on the run until death. Let him go!

¹⁸ He who goes his way honestly will be saved, he who vacillates between two ways will fall in one of them.

¹⁹ He who tends his land will have an abundance of bread, while he who chases illusions will have his fill of misery.

²⁰ The trustworthy man will be heaped with blessings, but he who is preoccupied with getting rich will not be guiltless.

²¹ It is not good to show partiality but a man will do wrong for a mouthful of bread.

²² The greedy-eyed man is on the lookout for wealth not knowing that misfortune will befall him.

²³ He who reproves another will eventually enjoy more favour than the flatterer.

²⁴ He who steals from his father and mother saying, "It's not a sin," is just like a criminal.

²⁵ The greedy man brings about trouble; but he who trusts in Yahweh will be filled with good things.

²⁶ He who trusts in himself is just like a fool; while he who walks wisely will be saved.

²⁷ He who gives to the poor will not be in need; but he who turns a blind eye to them will have his fill of disgrace.

²⁸ When the wicked triumph everybody hides; but when they perish the virtuous multiply.

29 ¹ He who resists correction will be broken suddenly and without remedy.

² When the virtuous rule, the people are happy, but they groan when the wicked are in power.

³ He who loves wisdom makes his father happy, but whoever maintains prostitutes will lose his wealth.

⁴ Through justice a king makes his country prosper; but the extortioner brings it to ruin.

⁵ The man who flatters his neighbour lays a snare at his feet.

⁶ In the wicked man's sins lies a snare for himself, while the upright man runs on rejoicing.

⁷ The virtuous man is concerned about the problems of the poor; the evildoer, however, understands nothing.

⁸ Mockers create disturbances in the city but the wise turn troubles away.

⁹ When the wise man argues with the fool, whether he is annoyed or joking, he will get nowhere.

¹⁰ The violent hate the blameless man but the virtuous seek out his presence.



¹¹ The fool gives free rein to his rage; while the wise man restrains it.

¹² When a ruler listens to false reports, all his ministers will be scoundrels.

¹³ The poor man and usurer have something in common: both receive the light of day from God.

¹⁴ The king who judges the poor with justice will affirm his throne forever.

¹⁵ Both the stick and rebuke bring wisdom, while the spoilt child brings shame to his mother.

¹⁶ When the wicked rule, sin abounds, but the virtuous shall witness their downfall.

¹⁷ Correct your son and he will bring you rest; you will be happy in him.

¹⁸ Where prophets are lacking, the people get out of hand; happy is he who obeys the Law.

¹⁹ A slave is not corrected by words; even if he understands he will take no notice.

²⁰ You see a man dying to speak? There is more hope for a fool.

²¹ If you spoil your slave from childhood, he will end up a rebel.

²² The hot-tempered man provokes disputes, his anger multiplies his sins.

²³ A man's pride results in his humiliation, but he who humbles himself will achieve honours.

²⁴ He who shares with the thief harms himself; even you who kept silent when you should have denounced him.

²⁵ To be afraid of men is a trap; but whoever trusts in Yahweh will be safe.

²⁶ Many seek a ruler's favour but each one's fate comes from God.

²⁷ The upright man detests the wicked and the evildoer hates the honest man.

30 ¹ The sayings of Agur, Son of Jakeh, of Massa.

² He says, "My God, my God, I am worn-out and weary. Too stupid to be human, I am devoid of intelligence; ³ I have not acquired wisdom or grasped the knowledge of the Holy One."

⁴ Who has ascended the heavens and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his hands? Who has encircled the waters with his cloak? Who has established the limits of the earth? What is his name or the name of his son?

Do you know?

⁵ Every word of God is true, he is a shield in whom man can find refuge. ⁶ Add nothing to his words lest he rebuke you and take you for a liar.

⁷ O God, two things I beg of you, do not deny me them before I die. ⁸ Keep lying and falsehood far away from me, give me neither poverty nor riches. Give me just as much food as I need lest, ⁹ satisfied, I deny you and say, "Who is Yahweh?" Or else, out of necessity, steal and profane the name of my God.

¹⁰ Do not accuse a slave to his master's face lest he curse you and you have to pay.

¹¹ What a people are those who curse their father and do not bless their mother, ¹² who consider themselves pure but their sins have not been cleansed! ¹³ They have a haughty look and disdainful eye; ¹⁴ their teeth are like daggers and their fangs like blades to devour the weak of the land and the poor of the people.

¹⁵ The leech has two daughters, "Give me!" and "Give me!"

¹⁶ There are three insatiable things and four which never say, "Enough": the grave, the sterile womb, the earth longing for water and the fire which never cries, "Enough."

¹⁷ The eye which challenges a father and despises his aging mother, will be gouged out by the ravens of the valley and devoured by the eagles.

¹⁸ There are three things which I cannot comprehend and four which I do not understand: ¹⁹ the way of the eagle through the sky, the way of the snake on the rock, the way of the ship on high seas and the way of the human being within the mother.

²⁰ What can I say of the adulterous woman. She eats and, having wiped her mouth, she says, "I have done nothing wrong."

²¹ Three things make the earth tremble, there are four which it cannot withstand: ²² the slave who becomes king, the fool stuffed with bread, ²³ the unbearable woman who marries and the maid who inherits from her mistress.

²⁴ There are four tiny creatures on the earth that are among the wisest of the wise: ²⁵ the ants, that are without strength but in summer make sure of their supplies; ²⁶ the rock-rabbit that are without vigour but make their home in the rocks; ²⁷ the locusts, that have no king but move forward in organized groups; ²⁸ the lizards which can be caught by hand but live in the palaces of kings.

²⁹ Three things have a stately step and four have a noble bearing: ³⁰ the lion, the bravest of animals, that retreats before nothing; ³¹ the cock that struts proudly among the hens; ³² the goat that leads his flock and the king at the head of his army.

³³ If you have been foolish enough to get angry and afterwards regret it, cover your



mouth with your hand.³³ Since by churning the milk butter is produced, by squeezing the nose blood flows, and by stirring up anger arguments arise.

31 ¹ *The sayings of Lemuel, king of Massa, taught him by his mother.*

² No, my son! Son of my womb, no!

No, my most beloved son!

³ Do not waste your strength on women or your life on those who destroy kings.

⁴ It is not for kings, O Lemuel, not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to love strong drink. Lest in drinking they forget what they have decreed and override the cause of the helpless.

⁵ Give strong drink to the one about to die and wine to the heart full of bitterness;⁷ so that he may drink and forget his misfortune and remember his pain no more. ⁸ Speak on behalf of the dumb and defend the cause of all who are destitute.

⁹ Open your mouth, pronounce just sentences, defend the needy and the poor.

The perfect wife

■ ¹⁰ The woman of character, where is she to be found? She is more precious than any jewel.

¹¹ Her husband has complete confidence in her; she will be of great benefit to him.

¹² She brings him only good and not evil, all the days of her life.

¹³ She has obtained wool and flax, and works them with skillful hands.

¹⁴ She is like the merchant ships which bring provisions from afar.

¹⁵ She gets up while it is still dark, feeds her household and allots tasks to the servants.

¹⁶ If she sets her heart on a field, she

buys it and plants a vineyard with her own hands.

¹⁷ She is full of energy and her arms show her strength.

¹⁸ She knows her work is successful and, at night, her light remains unextinguished.

¹⁹ She puts her hand to the distaff and her fingers hold the spindle.

²⁰ She reaches out her hand to the helpless and gives to the poor.

²¹ When snow comes, she has no fears for her household since they are all doubly clothed.

²² She makes her own quilts and her clothes are purple and fine linen.

²³ Her husband is well-respected; he sits in council with the elders of the people.

²⁴ She weaves linen cloth and sells it; she supplies the merchants with sashes.

²⁵ She is strong and dignified and looks with confidence to the future.

²⁶ She speaks wisely and her words are kind.

²⁷ She keeps an eye on the conduct of her household and is never idle.

²⁸ Her sons rise up and call her blessed, her husband sings her praise:

²⁹ "Many women have done wonders but you surpass them all."

³⁰ Charm is deceptive and beauty useless; the woman who is wise is the one to praise.

³¹ May she enjoy the fruits of her labour and may all praise her for her works.

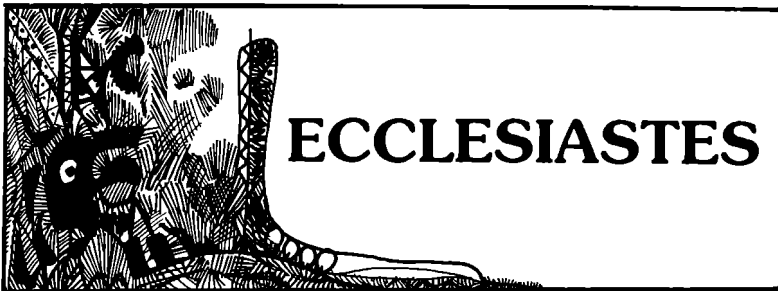
3. Dt 17, 17

■ Mother's Day was established recently to celebrate the women who spend their lives in the hidden tasks of the home, and who, through their sacrifices and their love, build the best of our world. This poem concluding the book of Proverbs expresses a similar viewpoint.

In Israel, men dominated. Women worked more than men. While the men would talk "at the gate" of their village, women would look after

the house and the orchard and raise the children. This poem urges all husbands to praise their wives and to be grateful to them.

There is a listing of the many activities of women. A happy and prosperous home comes from the combination of attention and tasks which are usually not stressed nor really appreciated. Women achieve something spiritual: peace and happiness with their many tasks.



Perhaps Ecclesiastes summarized the essence of his thought in this verse in chapter 3: "God made everything fitting in its time; but he also set eternity in our hearts, though we are not able to embrace the worth of God from the beginning to the end" (3:11-14; 8:16-17).

Man, created in the image of God, is the master of the universe. Nevertheless, he is no more than a servant made of clay upon whom God imposed the laborious task of always searching. It is not realistic to think that one day he could adequately clarify the meaning of his own life or give a final solution to the tensions and conflicts tearing mankind apart.

Ecclesiastes lived in the third century before Christ, when Greek culture reached the Jewish people. The dynamism of the Greek civilisation came from its confidence in the unlimited resources of human thinking. Greek philosophers strove to explain all the mysteries of human destiny (and it is known that this aim is still the core of western humanism).

Ecclesiastes opposes this optimism. When he points to many deficiencies in the human condition, he does not mean: see how deceptive life is; think then, about heavenly things. But rather, he teaches us that all these deficiencies are the result of something fundamental: man is a mortal and limited being. This should not lead us to being passive, but rather it urges us not to waste our time or energies in illusions. Live fully the present moment by solving the problems within your reach day by day and enjoy the happiness that God has in store for you today: leave the rest up to God.

What about religion: Does it not explain everything to us? This is not the thinking of Ecclesiastes. Even though God's commandments teach us the secure way, they do not solve many problems nor answer many questions. In those days, pious people declared that God rewards the good and punishes the wicked in this life. Ecclesiastes denies this based on facts. The same is true now: think of some satisfactory and soothing answers for believers which are not obvious if we take an honest look at the facts.

The author of this book in the third century before Christ did what many writers and poets do now, namely, signing their works with a pseudonym, or a made up name. He presents his teaching as if it were the work of king Solomon, David's son. It is well known that Solomon had the reputation of being well versed in human wisdom. Here, Solomon is called *Ecclesiastes*, or the one who gathers the assembly to teach his brothers.

Vanity of vanities

o 1 Here are the words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

²All is meaningless – says the Teacher, – meaningless, meaningless!

³What profit is there for a man in all his work for which he toils under the sun?

⁴A generation goes, a generation comes and the earth remains forever

⁵The sun rises, the sun sets hastening towards the place where it again rises

⁶Blowing to the south, turning to the north the wind goes round and round and after all its rounds it has to blow again.

⁷All rivers go to the sea but the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers come from, there they return again.

⁸All words become weary and speech comes to an end, but the eye has never seen enough nor the ear heard too much.

⁹What has happened before will happen again; what has been done before will be done again: there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰If they say to you, "See, it's new!" know that it has already been centuries earlier.

¹¹There is no remembrance of ancient people, and those to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Even wisdom is meaningless

¹²I, the teacher have been king of Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³I set my heart on

studying and examining critically all that is done under heaven.

¹⁴It is a burdensome task which God has given to the sons of men! I have seen everything that is done under the sun, but all is meaningless: it is chasing the wind. ¹⁵What is bent cannot be straightened; what is not will not come to be.

¹⁶I thought to myself, "See, I have increased and promoted wisdom more than anyone who ruled Jerusalem before me and I have experienced to the full both wisdom and knowledge. ¹⁷I set my heart on comparing wisdom with foolishness and stupidity, and I discovered that this also is chasing the wind.

¹⁸For the wiser you are, the more worries you have, and the more you learn the more you suffer.

Empty pleasures

+ 2 ¹I said in my heart, "I will try pleasure! taste happiness!" But I found that was useless. ²Laughter is foolishness!

16. 1 K 3, 12; 5, 9; 10, 1

o *All is meaningless* – We are used to the old translation of this verse: *vanity of vanities, everything is vanity*. In fact, the first word of the book – which, like a refrain, will be repeated many times – means what carries little weight as well as what is not serious, what is vain, useless, what has no explanation.

There is nothing new under the sun. The prophets saw the world led by God toward a happy future. On the contrary, other people had the notion that the world only keeps on repeating the same events, with kingdoms, wars, success and failure. For them, there was nothing happening which could give to men the fulfillment of their desires.

Those with such convictions can only forget or ignore what happens in this world where all is illusion, as Buddhists do, or enjoy life without concerns.

Ecclesiastes, like all the people of the Bible, lives fully the earthly life. But he lives in a time without conflict, which is also a time without prophets and great hope. He wants us to use rightly daily life instead of being led by idealistic theories. Do not believe that you belong to the generation that discovered everything and that

you will prevent men from suffering. Let go of your illusions and act according to reality.

Under the sun: these words will come back as a refrain: man works hard and passes as a shadow while the sun remains. The sun is like an image of God who endures and who, alone, does things "with a view to eternity" (3:14).

The more you learn, the more you suffer. We find the same restlessness in today's world. The promoters of science assured us that progress was going to liberate men from all evil. Following the atomic bomb and the recent wars, many have lost this faith. Similarly, Marxists thought that the revolution was going to create a new world. Now, in countries where revolutions took place a few decades ago, we can see that the social changes were not enough to make people either happy or good. Wherever there has been greater material progress, the young people are rebelling against a life without problems, where the profound human longing for authentic love is frustrated.

+ *And I hated all I had laboured for* – Ecclesiastes had a hard time thinking that others would waste what we have slaved over. But, he also understands that *he had not benefited*

foolishness! As for pleasure what good is it? ³I thought of cheering my body with wine while my heart searched for wisdom. So I gave myself to folly in order to find out what would be good for man to do under the sun throughout his life.

⁴I did great things: I built houses and planted vineyards. ⁵I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶I constructed reservoirs to irrigate the nurseries for trees. ⁷I bought slaves and servants as well as having slaves born in my household. I had flocks and herds in abundance more than anyone before me in Jerusalem. ⁸I acquired silver and gold – the wealth of kings and nations. I had choirmaster and singers and, besides, what most delights men. ⁹I became great, surpassing all my predecessors in Jerusalem without losing wisdom. ¹⁰I refused myself nothing that my eyes desired nor did I deprive my heart of any pleasure. I enjoyed all I undertook and that was my reward for my work.

¹¹Then I considered all I had achieved by my work and all the toil it had entailed and found that it was all meaningless and chasing wind. There is no profit under the sun.

¹²I then decided to compare wisdom with folly and madness and I thought, "What will my successor as king do?" (We know what he did!)

¹³I understood that wisdom is more profitable than folly, just as light is better than darkness:

¹⁴The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in darkness.

But it dawned on me that the same fate overtakes them both. ¹⁵And I thought, "If the fate of the fool will be mine as well, what did my wisdom profit me?" I thought to myself that too is meaningless. ¹⁶There is no more remembrance of the wise man than of the fool: both will be forgotten in the days to come. Why is a wise man's death like that of a fool?

¹⁷So I hated life seeing the wrong in everything that is done under the sun: all is meaningless and chasing wind. ¹⁸I hated all I had laboured for under the sun and which I have to leave to my successor. ¹⁹Who knows whether he will be foolish or wise? Yet he will be master of all ²⁰I have achieved by my own efforts and wisdom: that too is meaningless.

And I began to despair in my heart over all my labour under the sun. ²¹For here was a man who toiled in all wisdom, knowledge and skill and he must leave all to someone who has not worked for it. This is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²²For what profit is there for a man in all his work and heart-searching under the sun? ²³All his days bring sorrow, his work grief;

12. 1 K 12, 13

14. Jn 8, 12

16. Sir 44, 9

from what he had done even though he had enjoyed it in peace.

We worry about the future. Through our work and our children, we think we are preparing for the rest rewarding our efforts. But, oftentimes, when we reach the limit of our desires, we feel empty, isolated, unhappy and when we are not driven by the desire for conquests, we get bored as if we lacked what the human heart really needs. How many people die right after retiring because they no longer have a reason to struggle and live!

My lot will be the same as the fool's. Then, what is the meaning of life? What is happiness?

Science, beauty, wealth, power, youth, friendship are nothing but illusions since everything ends with death.

■ Note verses 11-14 whose commentary is found in the introduction.

In the following chapters, Ecclesiastes looks at all the aspects of the human condition, one after the other, beginning with the surest: death. Death destroys all the illusions of man who tries to forget the lack of meaning of his life.

What is now has already been. See what was said with regard to 1:10. So, if all that man builds must be destroyed, what is left to man? This is



he hasn't, moreover, peaceful rest at night: that too is meaningless.

²⁴There is nothing better for man to do than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. I understood that this too comes from the hand of God. ²⁵For without him who can eat or find enjoyment?

²⁶To the man who pleases him, he gives wisdom, knowledge and joy, while to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up what will be given to another who pleases God: this too is meaningless and chasing wind.

A time for everything

3 ¹There is a given time for everything and a time for every happening under heaven:

²a time for giving birth, a time for dying; a time for planting, a time for uprooting.

³A time for killing, a time for healing; a time for knocking down, a time for building.

⁴A time for tears, a time for laughter; a time for mourning, a time for dancing.

⁵A time for throwing stones, a time for gathering stones; a time for embracing, a time to refrain from embracing.

⁶A time for searching, a time for losing; a time for keeping, a time for throwing away.

⁷A time for tearing, a time for sew-

ing; a time to be silent and a time to speak.

⁸A time for loving, a time for hating; a time for war, a time for peace.

⁹What profit is there for a man from all his toils?

¹⁰Finally I considered the task God gave to the sons of men. ¹¹He made everything fitting in its time, but he also set eternity in their hearts although man is not able to embrace the work of God from the beginning to the end.

¹²I know that there is nothing better for him to do than to seek pleasure and well-being during his life. ¹³To eat, drink and find satisfaction in his work is a gift from God.

¹⁴I know that everything God does remains forever; there is nothing to add, nothing to take from it. Yet God has ordained that men fear him.

¹⁵What has happened comes again; what is now has already been; God recovers what has gone. ¹⁶I have also seen under the sun, instead of justice, wickedness, and in the place of the just, the wicked. ¹⁷And I said to myself, "God will judge the just and the wicked for there is a time for everything, and a judgment for every deed."

◆ ¹⁸I also thought about men, how God wants to test them and let them see that they themselves are animals.

¹⁹For the destiny of man and animal is identical: death for one and the

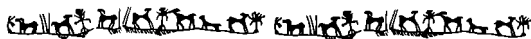
23. Sir 40, 5	24. Sir 14, 14	26. Ps 49, 11;	Job 27, 16	11. Rom 11, 33	14. 5, 6; 7, 18
19. Ps 49, 13	20. Gen 2, 7; Ps 104;	Joh 34, 15	21. Sir 16, 29		

meaningful for us too as we believe that the world is changing and that history has a direction. Every generation works for the one after, without enjoying the fruits of their work and struggles. And besides, we must be certain that after us, new problems will come up and what we see as our most valuable steps forward, to be considered harmful.

◆ *Who knows if the human spirit...* (v 21). Until a few years before Christ, for the Jews, the word *soul* (sometimes replaced by *spirit*) meant the life-breath of man and the warmth of his

blood. According to them this was where life was (Lv 17:11). We must understand that God had not yet revealed the human destiny after death, and let us not say – as some do – that the soul, or the human spirit, dies along with the body. With the New Testament the *soul* will mean the person who does not die (Mt 10:28).

Who knows? Even for believers of our time, knowing about another life, our faith cannot usually destroy our natural fear of death. In our experience, we are left bewildered by the death of our loved ones as well as by the certainty of our own death.



other. ²⁰Both have the same spirit; man has no superiority over animal for all passes away like wind. Both go to the same place, both come from dust and return to dust.

²¹Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the beast descends earthward? ²²I understood that the best man can do is to be happy in what he does, for that is his lot. For who will take him to see the beyond?

4 ¹I considered also how much oppression there is under the sun: the tears of the oppressed and no one to console them, the violence of the oppressors and no one to hold them back.

²More fortunate are the dead for being dead, than the living who have to live, ³and even more fortunate than both is the one not yet born who has not seen the abuses under the sun.

⁴I saw that all that is done, all that succeeds results from rivalry with the neighbour: all is meaningless and chasing of the wind.

⁵The fool folds his arms and eats his meat.

⁶Yet better half a fistful of rest than fistfuls of toil and chasing of wind.

⁷I saw another senseless thing under the sun: ⁸a man alone, without son or brother, working endlessly, his greed never satisfied with wealth: "For whom do I work and deprive myself of pleasure?" This too is nonsense and mistaken investment.

⁹Happier two than one alone, for their work brings a higher salary, ¹⁰and when one falls the other lifts up his companion. Unfortunate he who is alone and has no one to lift him up. ¹¹Moreover it's warmer with two in bed; how can one alone be warm? ¹²One person may be overcome by an aggressor, but two can easily oppose him; triple-stranded thread is not easily broken.

¹³Better a youth who is poor and wise than a fool of an old king who shuns advice. ¹⁴He may even pass from prison to the throne, though born poor in his kingdom. ¹⁵I saw all who live under the sun follow the youth who replaced the latter and there was no end to the people who sided with him. ¹⁶And yet those who will come after will not be satisfied. This too makes no sense; it's nothing but chasing wind.

Wise sayings

¹⁷Watch your step when you go to God's house; it's a better offering to listen, than to present sacrifices as do the fools; for they do not know the evil they do.

5 ¹Don't be impulsive and hasty with words in the presence of God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. For that reason let your words be few.

²For dreams come from over anxiety and foolish talk from too many words.

³When you make a vow to God, waste no time in fulfilling it, for he takes no pleasure in fools. Do what you vowed.

⁴Better not to make a vow than to fail to fulfil one.

⁵Don't let your speech cause you to sin, and then tell God's minister it was a mistake. Why anger God by what you say and destroy the work of your hands? From much dreaming and many words comes emptiness. ⁶So fear God.

⁷If you see the poor oppressed, right and justice denied in the province, do not be surprised for over a high-placed official a higher one watches, and over both of these a still higher one watches. ⁸The produce of the land benefits everyone and the king serves the land.

⁹Whoever loves money will not be satisfied with money. Whoever loves wealth hasn't sufficient income. This is senseless.

¹⁰When there is abundance of good things, there is abundance of consumers. What profit is there for the owner except to look on.

¹¹Sweet the sleep of the labourer, whether he eats little or much. But the rich man who has had his fill cannot sleep.

¹²There is a great evil that I found under the sun, the rich man who kept his wealth to his own harm. ¹³A mistaken investment and these riches are lost; a son is born but there is nothing to leave him.

¹⁴Naked he came from his mother's womb, he returns as he came – naked. Nothing of the fruit of his toil is he able to take with him.

¹⁵That too is a grievous evil: As he came so he goes. So what was his gain when he worked chasing wind? ¹⁶Why did he eat in darkness all through his life, amidst great sorrow, suffering and vexation?

¹⁷This is what I saw as most fitting for man: to eat, drink and be happy in all the work he does under the sun during the days God grants him; this is his reward. ¹⁸And when God

3. Jer 20, 18; Job 3, 16

4. Lev 27, 2; Dt 23, 22

17. 1 S 15, 22; Pro 21, 3

5. Lev 4, 30

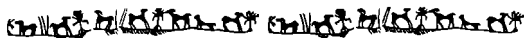
1. Dt 4, 39

7. Job 29, 24

2. James 3, 8; Pro 10, 19

14. Ps 49, 18

16. Job 14, 1



gives a man riches and property with the possibility of enjoying them and being happy in his work, this is a gift from God. ¹⁹As long as God keeps him occupied in the gladness of his heart, he is not concerned about how long he will live.

6 ¹There is another very evil thing which I saw under the sun: a man has riches, property, honour, and lacks nothing he could desire. ²yet God does not permit him to benefit from them: a stranger has the enjoyment. That is nonsense and a grievous hurt.

³What if a man had a hundred sons and lived many years but without tasting happiness and even without a tomb! More fortunate, I would say, the one untimely-born. ⁴For he came worthless and goes to darkness and in darkness will his name be hidden. ⁵He has not seen the sun and has not known it. Finally he has had more rest than that man. ⁶Even if he should live a thousand years twice over, but without tasting happiness; do not both go to the same place?

⁷Man works to fill his stomach, yet he himself is not satisfied.

⁸Has the wise man more than the fool? what benefit is it to the poverty-stricken person who holds his own among the living?

⁹What the eye sees seems better than what the heart desires. That too is senseless and chasing wind.

¹⁰Everything has already been evaluated. One knows what man is and that he cannot dispute with the one stronger than himself.

¹¹Many words, much emptiness; what does it profit? ¹²Who knows what is the good way of life for man, during the days of his meaningless life which passes like a shadow? Who will let him know what will happen after he has gone?

7 ¹An honourable name is better than perfumed oil. Better the day of death than the day of birth.

²Better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, for to this end all come, and let the living take this to heart: ³Sorrow is better than laughter, for a sad face brings healing to the soul. ⁴The heart of the wise man is in the house of mourning, while the heart of the fool is in the house of feasting.

⁵Better to heed the rebuke of a wise man than to listen to a fool's song. ⁶Like the crackling of thorns under a pot is the fool's laugh.

⁷Oppression makes a wise man mad, but a bribe corrupts his heart.

⁸Better to reach the end than to begin. Better patience than a haughty spirit.

⁹Don't be easily dejected, for dejection resides in the womb of fools.

¹⁰Do not ask why former times were better than the present. It is not wisdom that prompts such a question.

¹¹Wisdom is as precious as an inheritance; it is a blessing for those on whom the sun shines. ¹²If wisdom protects you, money will do the same. This is the benefit of acquiring wisdom: it makes its owner live.

¹³See the work of God. Who can straighten what he has bent? ¹⁴Be happy in the day of prosperity and in the day of sorrow reflect: ¹⁵God has given both one and the other so that man may not discover what comes later.

¹⁶Do not be over-righteous or excessively wise, lest you harm yourself. ¹⁷Do not be too wicked or too stupid, lest you die before your time.

¹⁸It is well to hold to one and not to loosen your grasp on the other. The God-fearing man copes with both.

¹⁹Wisdom makes the wise man stronger than ten rulers in the city. ²⁰There is no righteous man on earth who always does good and never sins.

²¹Don't take seriously all that you hear, lest you hear your servant speak ill of you. ²²You know well how many times you have spoken ill of others!

²³After having examined all this critically I said, "I will be wise!" ²⁴But how far it is from me! more remote than anything, and deep, very deep. Who could discover it?

²⁵I set myself in all earnestness to know, study and pursue wisdom and reason, so I saw that wickedness is folly, and foolishness, stupidity.

²⁶I find woman more bitter than death. She is a pitfall; her heart is a snare and her arms, chains. He who pleases God will escape from her, but the sinner will be caught.

²⁷See what I discovered — says the Teacher — after considering them one after another, anxious to understand. ²⁸I have been searching but have not yet found; for a man among a thousand I may find, but not a woman among all of them.

²⁹See what I discovered: God made man simple, but they get lost in their many thoughts.

8 ¹Who is like the wise man? Who else can solve a problem? A man's wisdom lights up his expression — his stern look is changed.



²Obey the command of the king because of the oath before God and ³don't be eager to ignore it. Do not stubbornly support a bad cause, for he will do what he pleases. ⁴The king's word holds. Who will say to him, "What are you doing?"

⁵Whoever obeys a royal precept avoids trouble. The wise man knows the time and the judgment – ⁶the time to act and the value of everything.

This misfortune weighs heavily on man: ⁷he has no knowledge of what will happen. Who can tell him what will happen? ⁸No man controls the wind or holds back the day of death. Struggle is useless and not even wickedness saves its author. ⁹I have observed this and set myself to consider everything that is done under the sun when man is given the power of harming another.

¹⁰And so I have seen the wicked buried and people come from the holy place to honour them, forgetting how they acted. This too is futile.

¹¹It is because sentence against wrongdoing is not passed at once that men turn to evil designs. ¹²The sinner may do wrong a hundred times and yet survive.

I know well that there will be happiness for the God-fearing man because he fears God, ¹³but there will be no happiness for the wicked; and because he doesn't fear God, he will pass like a shadow and his days will not last.

¹⁴Another kind of nonsense is found in what humans do on earth: the righteous are treated as the wicked deserve, and the wicked, as the righteous merit. This too is meaningless.

¹⁵So I praise joy, since for man there is no happiness under the sun other than eating, drinking and taking pleasure in his work throughout the life God gives him under the sun. ¹⁶When I set out to get wisdom and considered the human condition on earth, by day or by night when people sleep and are not conscious, ¹⁷I saw that with regard to God's work, as a whole, no man is able to discover what the work is that goes on under the sun; though he tire himself searching, he will not find. And even if the wise man claims to know, he has not found it.

9 ¹I have pondered on all this and now I understand that the just, the wise and all they do are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether hate or love is in store for him. ²What is most senseless is that the same destiny awaits all, the virtuous and the wicked,

the clean and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who doesn't. It is then the same for the good man and the sinner, for the one who swears and the one who refrains from swearing.

³The same fate comes to all: this is the evil which corrupts all that is done under the sun. This is why man's heart is full of evil and foolishness during his life and his end is with the dead. ⁴As long as he shares with the living there is hope, a live dog being better than a dead lion. ⁵The living at least know they will die but the dead know nothing; neither do they receive any reward; the memory of them has vanished. ⁶Their love, hate and jealousy have already perished and they no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

⁷Go, eat your bread with gladness and drink your wine joyfully; this is God's approval of your work. ⁸Dress in white and perfume your head.

⁹Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of the meaningless life given you by God under the sun, for this is your lot in life and in the work you do under the sun.

¹⁰Fulfil your projects while you are able, for among the dead where you are going there is no work, no planning, no knowledge, no wisdom.

¹¹I saw something else under the sun: the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread go to the wise nor riches to the intelligent; favour is not for the learned, for fortune and misfortune overtake them all.

¹²For man is not aware of his time: just as fish are caught in the treacherous net and sparrows trapped in the snare, man like them is caught by misfortune suddenly falling on him.

More proverbs

¹I have considered something else very grave under the sun. ²There was a small town with few inhabitants. A king set out to attack it, laid siege to it and built great siege-works around it. ³But a poverty-stricken wise man was found, who by his wisdom saved the town. No one, however, remembered the poor man. ⁴So I said, "Better wisdom than heroism," but the wisdom of the poor is despised and his words are not heeded.

⁵The words of the wise spoken calmly are heard above the shouts of a ruler of fools.

⁶Wisdom is better than weapons; one sinner spoils much happiness.



10 ¹As dead flies spoil a jar of perfumed oil, a little folly weighs heavier than wisdom and honour.

²The heart of the wise man leads him to the right, the heart of the fool leads him to the left.

³Even when a fool is on the road, his way of walking is senseless and lets everyone see he is a fool.

⁴If the ruler gets angry with you do not stir, for composure prevents many grave mistakes.

⁵An evil I discovered under the sun, an error of rulers: ⁶folly is exalted to the heights while rich men take the lowest places. ⁷I have seen slaves riding on horses, princes going on foot like slaves.

⁸He who digs a pit may fall into it and he who pierces a wall may be bitten by a serpent.

⁹He who quarries stones may be hurt by them and he who splits logs may be wounded.

¹⁰If the axe is blunt and the edge not sharpened, you must strike stronger blows, but the advantage of sharpening is called wisdom. ¹¹If the serpent doesn't allow itself to be charmed and bites, what is the use of the charmer?

¹²The words from the lips of a wise man are gracious but the lips of a fool bring about his own ruin. ¹³Folly marks the beginning of his speech and pure madness the end. ¹⁴Let him multiply his words! (Man does not know what will happen and who will let him know what comes after him?) ¹⁵Any work wears the fool; he doesn't even know the way to go to town.

¹⁶Alas for you, O land! if your ruler is a young man whose princes feast in the morning. ¹⁷Happy the land where the king is nobly born and where the princes eat at appropriate times, as fitting to men, rather than being drunk.

¹⁸Laziness in man causes a ceiling to sag and because of a man's slackness a house leaks.

¹⁹Man prepares a meal for pleasure; wine gives cheer to life while money is the answer to everything.

²⁰Even in your mind do not curse the king and in your bedroom do not curse the rich, for the birds of the air will retell what you say and winged carriers will make it known.

11 ¹Cast your bread on the water for after a given time you will find it again.

²Share with seven or even with eight for you never know what misfortune may strike the earth.

³When clouds are heavy they shower the earth and when a tree falls facing south or north there in that place it will lie.

⁴He who watches the wind will not sow and he who watches the clouds will not reap.

⁵Just as you do not know how the spirit pervades the members in the mother's womb, neither will you understand the work of God, creator of all things.

⁶Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle until the evening for you don't know whether one or the other will succeed. What if both prove to be good?

So man goes forward to his eternal home

o ⁷Light is pleasant and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. ⁸If a man lives for many years, let him rejoice in them all, thinking that dark days will be many and all that comes after will be meaningless.

⁹Rejoice, young man, in your youth and may your heart give you joy when you are young; follow your desires and achieve your ambitions but recall that God will take account of all you do.

¹⁰Drive sorrow from your heart and pain from your flesh, for youth and dark hair will not last.

12 ¹Be mindful of your Creator when you are young, before the time of sorrow comes and when you have to say, "This gives me no pleasure."

²and before the sun, moon and

1. Gal 5, 9	4. Pro 16, 14	17. Is 3, 4	5. Ps 139, 14; Jn 3, 8	9. Sir 14, 11
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o If a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all. Ecclesiastes loved life and the world. The perspective of death must not sadden our days. Those who live always remembering their dead or thinking about death are not in a position to discover the presence of God in the now. It is better to thank God for our daily bread and happiness (see 9:7).

Be mindful of your Creator when you are young. This is what we must do and not resort

to God when our strength and pleasures are gone: let us not be like the frivolous girl who became pious when her lovers were gone. In fact, old age is not basically a question of the body, but of the spirit, incapable of desire, love, enthusiasm, or sacrifice. The bitterness of old age does not affect those who chose God in their youth. To the end, they will be able to pray in the words of psalm 42: "I will go up to God, the delight of my youth."



stars withdraw their light, before the clouds gather again after the rain.

³On the day when the guardians of the house tremble, when sturdy men bow and those at the mill stop working because they are too few, when it grows dim for those looking through the windows, ⁴and the doors are shut and the noise of the mill grows faint, the sparrow stops chirping and the bird-song is silenced, ⁵when one fears the slopes and to walk is frightening; yet the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is fat and the caperberry bears fruit that serves no purpose,

because man goes forward to his eternal home and mourners gather in the street,

⁶even before the silver chain is snapped or the golden globe is shattered,

before the pitcher is broken at the fountain or the wheel at the mill,

⁷before the dust returns to the earth from which it came and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

⁸Meaningless! meaningless! the Teacher speaks, all is meaningless!

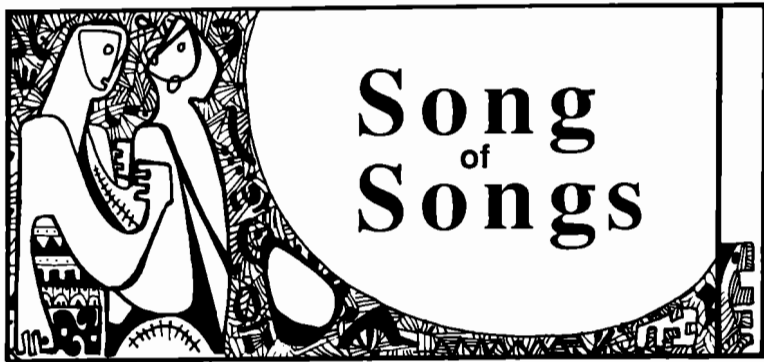
⁹Besides being a wise man Qoheleth taught the people; he listened, studied and classified a great number of proverbs.

¹⁰Qoheleth tried to write in a pleasant style and express honestly the words of truth.

¹¹The words of the wise are spurs, their collected sayings like embedded nails; they are the gift of one unique Shepherd.

¹²Beware, my son, of searching beyond. Writing many books would be useless, and intense study wearies the body.

¹³Conclusion: fear God and obey his precepts; for man depends entirely on this. ¹⁴God brings every deed to judgment, all that is hidden, be it good or bad.



+1

¹ Song of Songs: it has come from Solomon

She

² Shower me with kisses of your mouth:
your love is more delicious than wine

³ Your fragrance is better than any perfume,
your name spreads out like an ointment;
no wonder the maidens love you madly.

Lure me to you, let us hurry,
bring me, O king, into your room!
We will rejoice in you and exult,

LONGING FOR LOVE

The Song of Songs is unique among the biblical books: a lovers' dialogue, filled with sensual allusions. The Song of Songs is the only biblical book which does not mention God. How, then, did it come to the Bible?

Many people think that, here, we have a compilation of love songs between the groom and the bride on their wedding day, and that only later, these poems were interpreted in a religious sense. However, this supposition leaves many objections unanswered: there is nothing similar in any Oriental culture. It does not deal with popular poetry, and there are no reference to the hope for children, in contradiction with the Israelite understanding of marriage.

It seems obvious to modern people that love is first discovered in the couple and, then, it is possible to speak of divine love. But, historically speaking, this has not been the way of love. In all the cultures of the world, the love of the couple has a very reduced place, coming far behind courage, companionship, the beauty of the world, the pleasure of life. In fact, the people of the Bible began to discover the values of marriage and of love on the basis of the religious experience of the prophets: Hosea, Jeremiah, third Isaiah.

It was only in the 12th century after Christ, in the Middle Ages, when the feeling of love appeared in the culture. This took place in Christian countries, and the discovery was due, in the first place, to the Christian mystics who had experienced and lived the ways of divine love in the light of the Song of Songs, and who were able to speak of God Love and Lover.

Thus, it is simpler to think that from the beginning, the Song of Songs was a parable of divine love, or better, the longing for love on the part of that most fervent minority who was hoping for God in Israel. This is the way Jews and Christians understood it.

A longing and finding again. Such is the double movement of Song of Songs, inspired – in this respect – by the previous writings of the prophets (Hosea). "The groom hides when he is sought, so that, when she does not find him, the bride may look for him more ardently; and the bride is delayed in her search for the spouse, in order to find more fully what she was looking for." (St Gregory)

+ *I am black yet lovely ... darkened by the sun.* The beloved represents the Jewish community, poor and fervent, returning home after the exile, when Israel had lost its reputation and its independence. She is the one who admits: *I failed to tend my vineyard*, namely, my land, Palestine.

And the King, the Lover, is the Lord. This first love poem is the dream of the beloved already enjoying the day of her return to the king and telling herself the longed for dialogue that they will have "on that day." The choir shows her the place, which she already knows, where she will find the lover: *The Shepherds' Tent*, an expression designating Mount Zion, the Holy City, where the descendants of David – the King-Shepherd – were ruling.

At the end comes the Lord's answer to those who ask: *When will this dream come true? When she decides*: namely, when people seek me, then, my love will be aroused and I will go to meet them.

I am black yet lovely. *Black*: meaning, with her face burned. She was chosen and looked upon despite her burned face. Perhaps she was chosen because she was burned, that is branded by hard work and suffering; men and women of common and despised condition. Because God likes "to call those who do not count to confuse those who are something" (1 Cor 1:28). She may have been burned by the gaze of the one who wanted her for himself. But, if she were not already

7. Gen 37, 16; Jn 20, 1; Jer 31, 22

and praise your caresses more than wine.
How rightly are you loved.

⁵ *I am sun-burned yet lovely,*
O daughters of Jerusalem,
dark as the tents of Kedar,
as the tent curtains of Solomon.

⁶ *Stare not at my dark complexion;*
it is the sun that has darkened me.
My mother's sons were angry with me
and made me work in their vineyards,
so I failed to tend my own.

⁷ *Tell me, my soul's beloved,*
where do you graze your flock,
where do you rest your sheep at noon?
Why must I wander like a veiled woman
beside the flocks of your companions?

Chorus

⁸ *If you do not know, most beautiful woman,*
follow the tracks of the flock
and pasture your young goats
beside the shepherds' tents.

He

⁹ *To a mare in Pharaoh's chariot*
would I liken you, my love

¹⁰ *Your cheeks look lovely between pendants;*
your neck beautiful with strings of beads.

¹¹ *We will make you earrings of gold*
and necklaces of silver.

She and he

¹² *While the king rests on his couch,*
my perfume gives forth its fragrance.

¹³ *My lover is for me*
a sachet of myrrh lying all night
between my breasts.

And so, we must not ask: "Who is this King and Shepherd? Whom does the bride represent? Is it dealing with divine or human Love?" But all true love comes from God and is of God.

- The poet often thinks about the love dialogue of the Lord with his people, as we will say
- He also expresses the concerns and the joys of the one who seeks God and longs to experience his presence already in this life.
- He also speaks for anyone who discovers and seeks love. In surrendering to his bride or spouse, he experiences, along with her, the "divine love" which, alone, can fill his life.

burned. Love would burn her, because a creature cannot experience the power of God while feeling filled with the advantages and the riches of life. A lot must be burned away for love to move freely. Because nothing which is flesh and blood can enjoy the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50).

◆ Thus, love comes looking for the beloved. The winter is over meaning, the time of testing: we cannot really understand God's promises in Song of Songs without having read Lamentations. The same person, Israel, is the protagonist of these two poems, the first about despair, and the second, about hope.

For lovers, the love encounter is the spring of life: it erases the past, alleviates pain and enlightens everything. So it is with the believer's encounter with his God, so much more joyful and profound when there has been suffering, following the way of the cross.

There appears here the yearning of those who have come back after the exile and who hope for the coming of the reign of the Lord, as he had promised. They are seeking God who delays in manifesting himself. This text has several allusions to the precarious situation in which they are: hostile neighbours (the foxes), foreign guards who occupy the city of Jerusalem. Just as the Lord had

¹⁴My lover is for me a cluster of henna from the vineyards of Engedi.

¹⁵How beautiful you are, my love, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves!

¹⁶How handsome you are, my love, how handsome! Our bed is ever green!

¹⁷The beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are fir.

2 ¹I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley.

²As a lily among thorns, so is my love among women.

³As an apple tree in a forest, so is my lover among men. I lie down in his shade with pleasure; his fruit is sweet to my taste.

⁴He has taken me to the banquet hall; his banner over me is love.

⁵Oh, strengthen me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for love makes me sick!

⁶His left hand is under my head; his right arm embraces me.

⁷I beg you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and hinds of the field, not to arouse or stir up love before her time has come.

She

◆ ⁸The voice of my lover! Behold he comes, springing across the mountains, jumping over the hills,

⁹like a gazelle or a young stag.

Now he stands behind our wall, looking through the windows, peering through the lattice.

¹⁰My lover speaks to me,

"Arise, my love, my beautiful one!

¹¹Come, the winter is gone, the rains are over.

¹²Flowers have appeared on earth; the season of singing has come; the cooing of doves is heard.

¹³The fig tree forms its early fruit, the vines in blossom are fragrant. Arise, my beautiful one, come with me, my love, come.

said so many times to his people, "Come back to me," they, in turn, now say to him: *Come back*. When they do not see him coming, they persevere in the conviction of their hopes.

+ *On my bed at night I looked for the one I love.* Love makes us stay up. Mary Magdalen goes through the entire city looking for Jesus and, for the first time, passers-by laugh at her. She comes into the house in such a way that the porter does not dare stop her and she reaches Jesus without having seen any of the people eating. *I would not let him go*, but one day, Jesus will say to her: "Do not hold on to me" (Jn 20:17).

St John of the Cross, after many others, will comment on the Song of Songs, summarizing the search for God which always takes place in the midst of painful trials:

"On a dark night
for love longing and yearning,
O blessed venture!
I slipped away unnoticed,
my house now still and at rest,
with no other light or guide
than the one burning in my heart.

It guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where He waited for me –
Him I knew so well –
in a place where no one else
appeared.

O night that guided me!
O night more lovely than the dawn,
O night that joined
Beloved with lover,
lover transformed in the Beloved."

16. Hos 2, 21	4. Gen 24, 67
1. Is 65, 1;	6. Rev 12, 6
Jer 22, 13	8. Ps 91, 5
2. Mt 7, 7	

¹⁴ O my dove in the rocky cleft,
in the secret places of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice.
Your face – how lovely!
Your voice – how sweet!"

¹⁵ Capture the foxes, the little foxes
that spoil the vineyards,
our vineyards in flower.

¹⁶ My lover is mine and I am his;
he shepherds his flock among the lilies

¹⁷ Before the dusk blows and shadows flee,
return, my lover, be like a gazelle
or a young stag on the rugged hills.

She

+ 3 ¹ On my bed at night
I looked for the one I love,
I sought him without finding him;
I called him and he did not answer.

² I will rise and go about the city,
through the streets and the squares;
I will seek the love of my heart...

³ The watchmen came upon me
as they made their rounds of the city.
"Have you seen the love of my heart?"

⁴ As soon as I left them,
I found the love of my heart.
I held him and would not let him go
till I had brought him to my mother's house
to the room of her who conceived me.

He

⁵ I beg you, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles and hinds of the field,
not to arouse or stir up love
before her time has come.

Chorus

o ⁶ Who is this coming from the wilderness
like a pillar of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense?

⁷ Look, it is Solomon's carriage
escorted by sixty warriors,
the strongest of Israel,
⁸all girded with swords,
all seasoned in battle;

o With the image of Solomon, the magnificent king (see 1 Kg 10), the King of Peace, the Messiah is announced. Believers are hoping for his coming. In Moses' time, the Lord accompanied his people in the desert, hidden in a column of smoke. He will come again this way, accompanying his Messiah.

Now the lover sings the praises of his beloved. The first part of this text resembles the verses of poets singing the beauty of their beloved. Perhaps, these poetic figures are a way of describing the natural beauty of the Holy Land (it will continue in chapter 7).

each is ready with sword at his side,
each prepared for the terrors of the night.

⁹ King Solomon has made for himself
a carriage of wood from Lebanon,

¹⁰ its columns of silver,
its back of gold,
its seat of purple cloth,
its framework inlaid with ivory.

¹¹ Come, daughters of Zion,
see King Solomon wearing the diadem
with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
on the day his heart rejoiced.

He

4 ¹ You are beautiful, my love,
oh, how beautiful you are!
Your eyes behind your veil are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
streaming down the heights of Gilead.

² Your teeth are like sheep newly shorn,
coming in droves from the washing,
each one beside its twin,
not one alone, barren or grieving,
³ Your lips are like a thread scarlet;
your voice in enchanting;
your cheeks behind your veil
are like halves of a pomegranate.

⁴ Your neck is like the tower
of David, a display of trophies
a thousand bucklers hang on it,
all of them worn by heroes of war.

⁵ Your breasts are like twin fawns
of a gazelle feeding among the lilies.

⁶ Before the dusk blows and shadows flee,
I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh,
to the hill of frankincense.

⁷ You are wholly beautiful, my love,
perfect and unblemished.

⁸ Come from Lebanon, my bride,
come with me from Lebanon.
Come down from the summit of Amana,
from the crest of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions,
from the mountains haunts of leopards.

10. 1 K 10, 18	11. 62, 3
11. Is 61, 10	7. Eph 5, 25

My sister, you have ravished my heart. It is hard to speak well about God-Love until we have known him as God-Lover. It is not difficult to fear Almighty God, but it takes spiritual maturity to enter into the calm conviction that God lowers himself and becomes everything for those who love him. God in search of love: because God is the one who loves himself through us. Then, it is not so difficult to assume that Mary – the only one – was and is as important to God as all others together.

But also, in the mud of humanity, there are many pearls for the beloved's neck, many glances which move God. What marvels God accomplishes in the humble, especially in times of oppression.

+ After Isaiah's poems celebrating the new Jerusalem, the bride of the Lord (Is 61:10 and 62:5), the Song of Songs contemplates the virginal bride who will be the New People.

She is an *enclosed garden*, because totally reserved for the lover. She is the virginal bride whom God (Is 61:10 and 62:5) hoped for after the many "prostitutions" of his people, honouring him with words, but at the same time remaining attached to their idols. But, if there are no faithful hearts in which God has his *enclosed garden*, how could the Church be that garden? And if there is no appreciation among the faithful for virginity consecrated to God, how may we speak of the virginal Church?

Here again, we find Mary.

Let my beloved come to his garden. Most of the time, our good deeds are not particularly important to God because they were not wholly for him, we have rather already cashed 95% of their value. We hoped that others would see and know about them, we feel better for having done them, and finally, we also ask God to take them

⁹ You have ravished my heart,
my sister, my bride;
you have ravished my heart
with one of your glances,
with one bead of your necklace.

¹⁰ How sweet is your love,
my sister, my bride!
How delicious is your love more than wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume,
than any spice!

¹¹ Your lips distil nectar, my bride;
milk and honey are under your tongue.
Your garments have the scent of Lebanon.

+ ¹² You are a garden enclosed,
my sister, my bride;
a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

¹³ Your plants are an orchard
of pomegranates, all with choice fruits,
with henna and nard,

¹⁴ nard and saffron,
calamus, and cinnamon
with every kind of incense trees,
myrrh and aloes
and all the finest spices.

¹⁵ You are a garden fountain,
a well of living water
streaming down from Lebanon.

She

¹⁶ Arise, north wind! Awake, south wind!
Blow upon my garden
and spread its fragrance abroad.
Let my lover come to his garden
and eat its choicest fruits.

He

5 ¹ I have come to my garden,
my sister, my bride;
I have gathered my myrrh with spices,
I have eaten my honey and my honeycomb,
I have drunk my milk and my wine.
Friends, eat and drink!
Drink your fill, my dearest ones!

into account. In the end, he found no fruit which had not been touched or tasted by others.

◆ One of the torments of love is the inability to meet. When one seeks the other, the other is not ready, and when one is ready, the hour will have passed. Thus, God always comes at the least expected hour.

I slept, but my heart kept vigil. In the poem, this refers to the small group of believers who are hoping for the Lord's return while they live in the midst of a materialistic people. And yet, when he comes laden with his blessings (this is the meaning of the *dew*), they always miss the opportunity and they recognize him when it is too late.

I slept, but my heart kept vigil. Our dreams are not foreign visitors; rather what creates them in the subconscious is our soul in constant communication with the spirit. When love has grown, there is no sleep, no dream which escapes its law. Love is for the twenty-four hours of the day.

My soul went after him. And thus, the beloved lives as in foreign lands. "All of life seems like a dream to me," St Teresa used to say. Such is the paradox of authentic love that we cannot serve it and make it grow without renouncing the enjoyment of it.

I rose to open the door; myrrh from my hands dripped. He remains out of reach, but when passing, he pours seeds of divine gifts, the effect of which we will verify later.

● Now the beloved describes her lover with images which may refer to the Temple, the pride of Israel and the place of

She

◆² I slept, but my heart kept vigil.
I heard the knock of my beloved.
"Open to me, my sister, my love,
my perfect one, my dove!
My head is wet with dew,
my hair with the drops of the night."
³ I have taken off my robe;
must I put it on again?
I have washed my feet;
must I soil them again?

⁴ My lover thrust his hand
through the lock opening
and my heart thrilled for him.
⁵ I rose to open the door.
Myrrh from my hands dripped
on the handle of the lock.

⁶ I opened to my lover
but he had turned and gone –
my soul went after him!
I sought him but did not find him;
I called him but he did not answer.

⁷ The watchmen came upon me
as they made their rounds of the city;
they beat me and wounded me;
they took away my mantle –
oh, those guardians of the walls!

⁸ I beg you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you ever find my lover –
Oh, what will you tell him?
Tell him that love makes me sick.

Chorus

⁹ How is your lover better than others,
most beautiful woman?
How is your lover better than others,
that you do so beg us?

She

○¹⁰ Radiant and ruddy, my lover
stands out among thousands
¹¹ Pure gold is his head,
palm fronds are his hair,
glossy black like the raven.
¹² His eyes are doves
beside running waters,

Yahweh's presence. Israel remembers the splendour of the first Temple and now that Israel has a temporary shrine, she dreams of the New Temple, when the Lord comes.

bathed in milk

and set like jewels.

¹³ His fragrant cheeks
are like beds of spice;
his lips like lilies
dripping with myrrh.

¹⁴ His hands are rods of gold
adorned with jewels;
his body is polished ivory
covered with sapphires,

¹⁵ set upon bases of gold;
his legs are pillars of alabaster.
He has the stature of Lebanon,
excelling like the cedars.

¹⁶ His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is most worthy of desire.
O daughters of Jerusalem,
such is my friend and lover.

Chorus

6 ¹ Where has your lover gone,
most beautiful woman?
Where has your lover turned,
that we may help you look for him?

She

² My lover has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to pasture his flock in the garden
and to gather lilies.

³ My lover is mine, and I am his;
he shepherds his flock among the lilies.

He

⁴ My love, you are lovely
as Tirzah, beautiful as Jerusalem,
majestic as bannered troops.

⁵ Turn your eyes away from me
for they hold me in captivity.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down the heights of Gilead.

⁶ Your teeth are like sheep
coming in droves from the washing,
each one beside its twin,
not one alone barren or grieving.

⁷ Your cheeks behind your veil
are like halves of a pomegranate.

My lover is mine and I am his. How far we are from Moses after ten centuries of sacred history! And this, above all, because the prophets have come. But if God is Love and Lover, it is not only a game for him, or a way of being with men, but rather it is his very nature. God's eternity is a Love feast in its ongoing creativity, from which proceed the Persons of the Son and of the Spirit, constantly consummated in the joy of oneness.

My dove is unique, my perfect one. How can we think that God does not have favorites? The immensity of his love does not make it anonymous: he loves each and every one in his own and unique way, yet there is no room for jealousy in the Glory of God. We will praise God for his apostles who, "seated on thrones govern the tribes of Israel." But, we will praise him even more for the "beloved and favoured one, blessed among all women."

⁸ Sixty queens, eighty concubines,
virgins beyond number –
⁹ but my dove, my perfect one,
is unique, the only daughter
and favourite of her mother.
She was called blessed by the virgins
and praised by queens and concubines:

¹⁰ "Who is this coming like the dawn,
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,
majestic as bannered troops?"

¹¹ I went to the nut orchard
to look over the valley in bloom,
to see if the vines had flowered,
or if the pomegranates had blossomed.

¹² Before I became aware of it,
my desire had set me on the chariot
with the daughter of the prince.

Chorus

7 ¹Return, return, O Shulammitte,
return, that we may look at you!

He

Why would you look at the Shulammitte,
as dancing between two rows?

² How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
daughter of the prince!

Your shapely thighs are like jewels,
the work of a master artist.

³ Your navel is a bowl well rounded,
never lacking exquisitely blended wine.
Your belly is a mound of wheat
with lilies around it.

⁴ Your breasts are two fawns,
twins of a gazelle.

⁵ Your neck is an ivory tower.
Your eyes are pools in Heshbon
by the gate of Bath-rabbim;

Your nose, the tower of Lebanon
looking towards Damascus.

⁶ Your crowned head is Mount Carmel;
your flowing hair is royal purple,
which holds a king captive in its tresses.

⁷ How beautiful you are, how lovely,
my beloved, in your delights!

⁸ Like a palm tree, you are stately
and like its clusters are your breasts.

o In this text, the beloved expresses both a foolish desire and an encouraging conviction. *If only you were my brother.* If only God could come as a man! Believers are accustomed to having others laugh at them saying, as in psalm 42: "Where is your God?" And they sigh: "Let Emmanuel come, namely, God-with-us."

What a most foolish wish! The Gospel tells us that among the Jews many stumbled over this: they did not believe that God had visited them in the person of Jesus.

The encouraging conviction of the beloved is expressed in the following way: *I am my lover's but it is he who depends on me.* In the union with the Lord, the word of Genesis (3:16) has been inverted. There, we have the announcement of the suffering of women in most marriages: women need their husbands while at the same time they are dominated. Differently here, with the beloved so weak and poor before the lover. God is the one who longs for her. A believer trying to encourage a lost woman to change her life style tells her: "For God, you are unique and irreplaceable."

⁹ I said, "I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruits."
May your breasts be clusters of the vine,
your breath sweet-scented as apples,
and your mouth like the best wine.

She

¹⁰ May the wine flow straight to my lover,
flowing over from my lips.

¹¹ I am my lover's
but it is he who depends on me.

¹² Come, my love,
let us go to the countryside,
and pass the night in the villages.
¹³ Let us go early to the vineyards
to see if the vines have flowered,
if the buds have opened,
and the pomegranates have blossomed.
There I will give you my love.

¹⁴ The mandrakes yield their fragrance;
at our doors are the rarest fruits;
both new and old I have stored
for you, my love.

She

8 ¹ If only you were my brother,
nursed at my mother's breasts,
I could kiss you outside if we met,
without anyone despising me for it.
² I would lead and bring you
into the house of my mother,
and you would teach me there.
I would give you wine with spice
and the juice of my pomegranates.

³ His left hand is under my head;
his right arm embraces me.

He

⁴ I beg you, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles and hinds of the field,
not to arouse or stir up love
before her time has come.

Chorus

⁵ Who is this coming from the wilderness,
leaning upon her lover?

+ *Love is as strong as death.*

The poem concludes with the promise of eternal union of the Lord with his people. Strong is the love of the jealous God, and strong also is the love that he places in the hearts of his children: "who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom 8:35).

How will human love be strong as death? If it accepts to look at God's eternal love. Love does not consist in looking at each other, but in the common search for God. Spouses do not become idols for each other, nor do they make their happiness the goal of their lives: that would be sterile. Rather, they want to respond to a call from God and to build their lives with him. God is the one who will grant them happiness.

Love is as strong as death.

The beloved knows that the union with her lover will have no end. For us, it is intolerable to think that death destroys those whom we love and that nothing remains of our love, not even a memory. True love believes in the resurrection and the inscription we read on so many tombs witness to that: "to my unforgettable; eternal remembrance; to you for ever." Love is either eternal eternal or it is not at all.

◆ The last verses of Song of Songs, from 8.8 were phrases added to the poem later: they make political references.

6. Gen 38, 18; Is 28, 15;
Hos 13, 14; Dt 32, 24

He

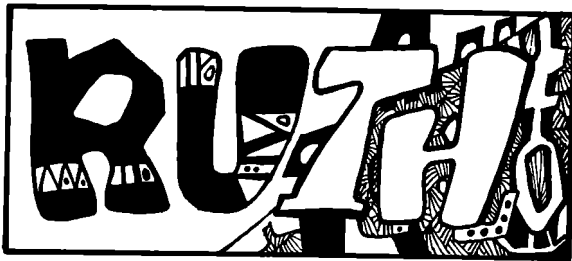
I woke you under the apple tree,
where you were conceived by your mother,
where she who bore you was in travail.

+ "Set me as a seal on your heart,
set me as a seal on your arm.
For love is strong as death;
its jealousy lasting as the power of death,
it burns like a blazing fire,
it blazes like a mighty flame.

⁷No flood can extinguish love
nor river submerge it.
If a man were to buy love
with all the wealth of his house,
contempt is all he would purchase.

◆⁸ We have a little sister
with her breasts yet unformed.
What shall we do for her
when her courtship is begun?
⁹ If she were a rampart,
we would build towers of silver on it.
If she were a gate,
we would enclose it with panels of cedar.
¹⁰ I am a rampart
and my breasts are towers;
thus I have become, in his eyes,
like one who brings peace.

¹¹ At Baal-hamon Solomon had a vineyard,
which he gave over to caretakers,
and, for the fruit of which, each keeper
had to pay a thousand pieces of silver.
¹² But my vineyard is mine and I myself keep it.
You, Solomon, may have the thousand,
and the fruit keepers two hundred pieces.
¹³ You who dwell in the gardens,
with your friends in attendance,
let me hear your utterance.
¹⁴ Make haste, my love;
be like a gazelle or a young stag
on the spice-laden hills!



Your God will be my God

1 ¹There was a famine in the land during the time of the Judges, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah departed with his wife and two sons to sojourn in the country of Moab. ²The man was Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. A little later, after they had settled in Moab, ³Naomi's husband Elimelech died. She was left with her two sons, ⁴who married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth.

After living in Moab for about ten years, ⁵Mahlon and Chilion also died and Naomi was left bereft of husband and two sons. ⁶Having heard that Yahweh had come to help his people by giving them food, Naomi prepared to return home. ⁷With her two daughters-in-law, she took the road back to Judah.

⁸It was then that Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's house. And may Yahweh be kind to you, as you have been to your dead and to me. ⁹May he also grant each of you rest in the home of another husband." She kissed them goodbye. But they wept aloud ¹⁰and said to her, "No, we will go back with you to your people."

¹¹Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why should you come with me, when I have no more sons to become your husbands? ¹²Return home, my daughters. I am now too old to marry again. Even if I hope to have a husband tonight and give birth to sons, ¹³would you remain unmarried waiting for them to grow up? No, my daughters. I won't share my lot with you for it is too bitter. Yahweh's hand has been raised against me!"

¹⁴Again they sobbed and wept. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law

1. Jdg 2, 16

4. Dt 23, 4; Est 9, 1

11. Dt 25, 5; Mt 22, 23

With the book of Ruth, we have an old tradition, developed in the form of a delightful novel, whose intention is to promote a supranational spirit.

An old tradition held that among David's ancestors, there was a foreign woman, Ruth, a Moabite woman.

A delightful novel. In the simple life of peasants we find true culture, an exquisite human quality, and unconscious nobility. These pages preserve for us scenes from the lives of the Palestinian farmers, Christ's ancestors, as they lived for centuries.

A spirit of supranational openness inspires this story written around the fourth century B.C. Shortly before, the one who reorganized the Jewish community, Ezra, had forced the Jews to get rid of their foreign wives who could have enticed them to follow pagan religions. This had given rise to excessive nationalism. On the contrary, here, the protagonist of the story is a foreign woman. Ruth accepts the true God of Israel and she is welcomed into the community of the people of God.

goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law returns to her people and her gods. You too must return. Go after her."

¹⁶Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you. For I will go where you go and stay where you stay. Your people will be my people and your god my God. ¹⁷Where you die, there will I die and be buried. May Yahweh deal with me severely if anything except death separates us." ¹⁸Realizing that Ruth was determined to go with her, Naomi stopped urging her.

¹⁹So the two went on till they reached Bethlehem. Their arrival set the town astir. Women asked, "Can this be Naomi?" ²⁰She said to them, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara for Yahweh has made it bitter for me. ²¹I went away full but came back empty. Why call me Naomi, when Yahweh has afflicted me?"

²²Thus it was that Naomi returned from Moab with her Moabite daughter-in-law and arrived in Bethlehem as the barley harvest began.

Ruth gleans in the field of Boaz

2 ¹Naomi had a well-to-do kinsman, Boaz from the clan of her husband Elimelech. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to pick up the left-over grain in the field whose owner will allow me that favor." Naomi said, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³So she went to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. It happened that the field she entered belonged to Boaz of the clan of Elimelech.

⁴When Boaz came from Bethlehem, he greeted the harvesters, "Yahweh be with you." They returned the greeting, "Yahweh bless you."

⁵Noticing Ruth, Boaz asked the

foreman of his harvesters, "To whom does that young woman belong?"

⁶The foreman replied, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷She came this morning and asked leave to glean behind the harvesters. Since then she has been working without a moment's rest."

⁸Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Don't go away from here to glean in anyone else's field. Stay here with my women servants. ⁹See where the harvesters are and follow behind. I have ordered the men not to molest you. They have filled some jars with water. Go there and drink when you are thirsty. ¹⁰Bowing down with her face to the ground, she exclaimed, "Why have I, a foreigner, found such favor in your eyes?"

¹¹Boaz answered, "I have been told all about you – what you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband's death, how you have gone with her, leaving your own father and mother and homeland, to live with a people you knew nothing about before you came here. ¹²May Yahweh reward you for this! May you receive full recompense from Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"

¹³Ruth said, "May I prove worthy of your favor, my lord. You have consoled your servant with your kind words, though I am not the equal of your maidservants."

¹⁴Boaz called her at mealtime, "come over, have some bread and dip it in the wine." As she sat among the reapers, he handed her some roasted grain. She ate her fill and had some left over.

¹⁵When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his men, "Let her glean even

among the sheaves and do not scold her. ¹⁶And pull some stalks from the bundles; leave them scattered for her to glean." ¹⁷Till evening she worked, and when she threshed what she had gleaned it amounted to about an ephah. ¹⁸Ruth carried back to town the threshed barley, which she showed to her mother-in-law. She also gave her what she had left over from lunch.

¹⁹Naomi asked her daughter-in-law, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? May the man who took notice of you be blessed." Ruth told her mother-in-law about the owner of the field where she had worked. "His name is Boaz," she said. ²⁰Naomi exclaimed, "May Yahweh bless him! God indeed is merciful both to the living and the dead. This man is a close relative, one with a right of redemption over us."

²¹Ruth continued, "He even told me to stay with his servants until they finish harvesting the grain." ²²Naomi said, "It will be better for you, my daughter, to go out with his maidservants than to go working in some other field where harm might come to you."

²³Ruth, therefore, stayed close to the maidservants of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the wheat and barley harvests. And she continued living with her mother-in-law.

She went and lay down at his feet

+3 ¹Later Naomi talked to Ruth: "My daughter, is it not my duty to see you settled in a home where you will be well provided for?

²And is not Boaz, who has treated you kindly with his maidservants, a close relative of ours? Tonight at the threshing floor, he will be winnowing barley. ³So bathe and perfume yourself, then put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor. But don't make yourself known to him till he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴Take note of the place where he lies down to sleep. Then go, uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do."

⁵Ruth answered, "I will do as you say." ⁶She went down to the threshing floor and did as her mother-in-law told her.

⁷Feeling happy after eating and drinking, Boaz went to lie down at the end of the pile of grain. Ruth then approached quietly, turned back the covering of his feet and lay there. ⁸At midnight the man awoke when he turned over and felt someone lying at his feet. He got up and was startled to find a woman there. ⁹"Who are you?" he asked.

The answer came, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread the corner of your cloak over me for you are a kinsman who has right of redemption over me." ¹⁰Boaz said, "May Yahweh bless you, my daughter! This kindness of yours now is even greater than that which you have shown earlier, for you have not gone after young men, rich or poor. ¹¹Have no fear, my daughter; I will do for you all that you ask, since all my townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. ¹²It is true that I am a close relative, but there is

his son.

This explains Ruth's sacrifice. She gives up marrying a young man and accepts being the wife of an older man because that man, Boaz is the one who can give her a son "for" her dead husband. Thus, Ruth fulfills the mysterious plan of God who predestined her to be among Christ's ancestors (see Matthew 1:5).

16. Lev 19, 10

3. Est 2, 12; Jud 10, 3

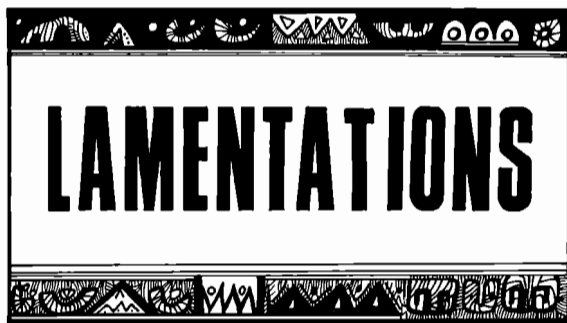
13. Dt 25, 5; Mt 22, 24

+ Why does Ruth want to have Boaz for her husband? In order to follow the so-called "Levirate" law, mentioned in chapter 38 of Genesis.

When a man dies without leaving children, the sacred duty of his widow is to marry the nearest relative of her deceased husband. The first son she would have from him would bear the name of the dead man and would be considered

¹⁶Naomi took the child as her own and became his nurse. ¹⁷And the women of the neighborhood gave him his name, saying, "A son has been born for Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, who was David's father.

¹⁸This, then, is Perez's family line: Perez was the father of Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, ²¹Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, ²²Obed of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.



First lamentation

1 ¹How forlorn the city lies,
once teeming with people!

How like a widow she is,
once mistress of the nations!
A princess among the cities,
she has now become a vassal.

²She spends her nights weeping,
drenching her cheeks with tears.
Who is there to comfort her
among all her lovers?
All her friends have betrayed her
and have become her enemies.

³After her downfall,
Judah has gone into exile;
but she finds no home in the nations
where she sojourns;
her pursuers have caught her up
where there is no way out.

⁴In mourning are all roads to Zion;
no one comes to her feasts anymore.
Her gates are deserted,

her priests groan,
her virgins grieve.
What bitter anguish she undergoes!

⁵She is at the mercy of her foes
who enjoy prosperity and power.
Yahweh himself has made her suffer
for all her iniquity.
Her children, driven into captivity,
take the lonely road to exile.

⁶Gone from the daughter of Zion
is all her majestic splendor.
Her rulers, like harts
that find no pasture,
have fled in consternation
before the oppressors.

⁷Jerusalem recalls her wretched
condition,
her days of wandering and affliction,
when her people fell before the enemy,
and no help came in her calamity,
when haters gloated over her downfall
and mockers laughed at her destruction

⁸Greatly has Jerusalem sinned;
she has become a thing unclean.
Honoured before, but now despised
by those who have seen her naked,
she herself groans in dismay
and turns her face away.

⁹Her filth clings to her skirt.
She gave no thought to her doom,
and so her fall came suddenly,
with no one to offer comfort.
"Look, O Yahweh, upon my misery,
for my enemy has overcome me."

¹⁰She has seen how the enemy
has laid hands on her treasures.
She has seen how the nations
have defiled her sanctuary –
those peoples you have not allowed
to come into your assembly.

¹¹All her people groan
as they search for bread;
just to keep themselves alive,
they give their jewels for food.
Look, Yahweh, and mark
how I have been despised.

¹²All you who pass by,
take a look and see.
Is there any calamity
like this inflicted on me
by Yahweh on the day
of his burning anger.

¹³From above he sent a fire
into my very bones;

he ensnared my feet
and threw me down,
and left me in pain
the whole day long.

¹⁴He bound my sins into a yoke
and fastened them together,
then set them upon my neck
and caused my strength to fail.
Yahweh gave me into the hands
of those I cannot withstand.

¹⁵Yahweh has spurned
the bravest of my fighters;
he has summoned an army
to crush my young warriors.
Yahweh has trodden in his
winepress
Judah's virgin daughter.

¹⁶These are the things I weep about,
the things that make my tears well
up.

No one is near to restore my spirit,
no one at hand to cheer me up.
My children are desolate,
for the enemy has triumphed.

¹⁷The hands of Zion reach out,
but there is no one to give comfort.
Yahweh has decreed for Jacob
that his neighbours should become
his foes.

An unclean thing among them
has Jerusalem become.

¹⁸Yahweh acts justly,

9. Is 47, 7

15. Is 63, 2

16. Jer 13, 17

Following the fall of Jerusalem and the horrendous things that took place then, believers are trying to understand. They are not complaining; they see the ruin as deserved punishment for their many excesses and for constantly rejecting God's warnings. And yet, they know that the Lord loves his people: they believe this, feel it and proclaim it.

When the exiles returned to Jerusalem, they may have gathered to pray together on the ruins of what had been the Temple, and taken turns with these laments. Later, they continued yearly to pray them on the date catastrophe, and much later the church got into the custom of using them to remember the death of Jesus.

In the Lord's Passion, the believer sees the sum total of the suffering and the anxieties of humankind. These poems help us to unite the suffering of Christ and the destitution of the many who are suffering, in the same compassion. They will help us to unite the vision of universal pain and the sense of human sinfulness and responsibility.

A Jewish tradition attributes these poems to Jeremiah; they do manifest a spirit very similar to his.

for I have defied his order.
Listen, all you peoples,
and see how I suffer.
My young men and maidens
have all gone into exile.

¹⁹I cried for help to my lovers,
but they betrayed me.
My priests and my elders
perished in the city
as they sought food to keep alive,
and ended up losing their lives.

²⁰Look, Yahweh, upon my distress—
all within me is in anguish.
My heart recoils from my offence
that brought about my disgrace —
See, outside the sword that kills,
and within, death that stalks.

²¹People have heard my moaning
but no one comes to comfort me.
My foes have known of my
suffering,
and they rejoice at my affliction.
Bring near the day you have
proclaimed,
that they may be even as I am.

²²Let all their evil come
before you, and deal with them
as you have dealt with me
on account of all sins.
Many indeed are my groans
and I am sick at heart.

Second lamentation

2 ¹Oh, how Yahweh in his anger
has despised the daughter of Zion!
Israel's glory he has flung
from heaven down to earth;
unmindful of his footstool
on the day of his wrath.

²Without pity Yahweh has shattered
in Jacob every dwelling.
He has torn down in his anger
the ramparts of Judah's daughter.
He has thrown her rulers and her king
together to the ground, dishonoured.

³He has cut down in his anger
the horn of Israel's might.

He has withdrawn his right hand
at the approach of the enemy.
In Jacob, he has burned like fire

⁴Like an enemy he has bent his bow,
his right hand steadying the arrow.
All our pride of manhood he slew
as he took his stand as a foe,
pouring out fury like fire
upon the tent of Zion's daughter.

⁵The Lord has become an enemy
who has laid Israel in ruins.
He has destroyed all her palaces
and laid waste her fortresses.
He has multiplied the mournings
of the daughter of Judah.

⁶Yahweh has wrecked his dwelling,
laid waste his place of meeting.
He has made Zion forget
her appointed feasts and sabbaths;
he has spurned in his fierce wrath
king and prophet and priest.

⁷The Lord has rejected his altar,
has forsaken his sanctuary.
He has handed the walls of her tower
over to the enemy,
whose triumphant shouts are heard
in the temple of Yahweh.

⁸Yahweh resolved to tear down
the walls and rampart of Zion's daughter;
He stretched out the measuring line,
and did not relent from bringing ruin.
He made both wall and rampart mourn,
till together they crumbled down.

⁹Her fates have sunk into the ground;
broken and removed are their bars.
Her king and rulers
live in exile among the nations.
No more law, no more visions
for her prophets estranged from God.

¹⁰The elders of the daughter of Zion
sit in silence upon the ground,
their heads sprinkled with dust,
their bodies wrapped in sackcloth,
while Jerusalem's young women
bow their heads to the ground.

¹¹With weeping my eyes are spent;
my soul is in torment
because of the downfall
of the daughter of my people,
because children and infants faint
in the open spaces of the town.

¹²To their mothers they say,
"Where is the bread and wine?"



as they faint like wounded men
in the streets and public squares,
as their lives ebb away
in their mothers' arms.

¹³To what can I compare you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
How can I comfort you,
O virgin daughter of Zion?
Deep as the sea is your affliction,
and who can possibly heal you?

¹⁴Your prophets' visions
were worthless and false.
Had they warned of your sins,
your fate might have been averted.
But what they gave you instead
were fallacious, misleading signs.

¹⁵Passersby shudder;
some clap their hands at the sight;
others wag their heads at the fate
of the daughter of Jerusalem.
"Is this the city that was called
the loveliest, the joy of the world?"

¹⁶All your enemies open
their mouths wide against you;
they gnash their teeth, they hiss,
they crow: "We have destroyed her!
This is the day we have waited for.
we have lived to see it happen."

¹⁷Yahweh has accomplished his purpose;
he has fulfilled his word
which he decreed in the days of old.
He has made your enemy
overthrow you without mercy;
he has exalted the horn of your foe.

¹⁸Cry out to the Lord, O wall
of the daughter of Zion!
Oh, let your tears fall
day and night, like rain.
Give yourself no relief;
grant your eyes no respite.

¹⁹Get up, cry out in the night,
as the evening watches start;
like water pour out your heart
in the presence of the Lord.
Lift up your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint with hunger
at the corner of every street.

²⁰Look, Yahweh, and answer:
Why have you treated us like this?
Why must women eat their little ones,
whom they have nursed in their arms?
Why must priest and prophet be

slaughtered

in the sanctuary of the Lord?

²¹In the dust of the streets
lie the young and the old,
both virgins and young men –
all fallen by the sword.
You have killed on the day of your fury;
you have slaughtered without mercy.

²²As for a feast day, you bade
terrors to come from every side.
There was, on the day of your anger,
neither fugitive nor survivor.
My enemy has murdered
all whom I bore and reared.

Third lamentation

3 ¹I am a man who has known
calamity

from the rod of his wrath;
²he has driven and brought me
into darkness, not into the light.

³He turns his hand against me
alone,
all the day long, again and again.

⁴He has worn away my flesh and
skin;
all my bones he has broken.

⁵He assails me and surrounds me
with tribulation and bitterness.

⁶He leaves me to dwell in darkness,
like those who have long been dead.

⁷He has walled me in without
escape;
he has weighed me down with
chains.

⁸I could not even cry for help,
for he has stopped my prayer.

⁹He bars my way with sharp stones
and makes my path impassable.

¹⁰Like a bear lying in ambush,
like a lion waiting for its prey,

¹¹he lunged at me, tore me to pieces,
and left me alone and helpless.

¹²Then he drew his bow
and aimed at me his arrow.

¹³He pierced my sides
with arrows from his quiver.

¹⁴I have become the laughing stock,

the topic of songs for the mocker.

¹⁵He has sated me with bitter food;
he has made me drunk with
wormwood.

¹⁶He has broken my teeth with
gravel

and thrown me down in the ashes.

¹⁷Of peace he has deprived my soul,
till I have forgotten happiness.

¹⁸Now I say, "Gone are my hopes
and all my confidence in the Lord."

¹⁹Recalling my affliction and
homelessness
is wormwood and gall.

²⁰Thinking it over and over
makes my soul downcast and
humble.

²¹But this, when I ponder,
is what gives me hope in distress:

²²Yahweh's love abides incessantly.
His compassion is never consumed;

²³every morning it is renewed.
And his love remains ever faithful.

²⁴"My portion is Yahweh," says my
soul.

"On him shall I rely."

²⁵Yahweh is good to those who
hope in him,

to souls who search for him.

²⁶It is rewarding to wait in silence
for the Lord's salvation

²⁷It is good for man to bear the yoke
from his youth.

²⁸Let him sit alone in solitude
when Yahweh fastens the yoke on
him.

²⁹Let him put his lips to the dust
— there may be hope for him yet.

³⁰Let him offer his cheek to be
struck;
let him be overwhelmed with insult.

³¹For it is not forever
that the Lord rejects man.

³²In the abundance of his love

he punishes, but has compassion.

³³For he does not willingly abase
or afflict the human race.

³⁴To trample underfoot
the prisoners of the land,

³⁵to deny a man his rights
in the presence of the Most High,

³⁶to deprive a man of justice —
the Lord approves not of this.

³⁷Who can command and execute
if the Lord has not willed?

³⁸From the mouth of the Most High
all things — good or bad — emanate.

³⁹Why then should a man complain
when punished for his sin?

⁴⁰Let us search and examine our
ways

and return to the Lord.

⁴¹Let us lift up our hearts and hands
to God in heaven, and say:

⁴²"We have sinned and rebelled,
and you have not forgiven us.

⁴³You have pursued us in anger
and slain us without mercy.

⁴⁴You have wrapped yourself in
clouds

so that no prayer can get through.

⁴⁵You have reduced us to scourings
scattered among the nations.

⁴⁶Wide have all our foes
opened their mouths against us.

⁴⁷Terrible is our lot:
terror, ruin and desolation.

⁴⁸Great is my grief over the
downfall

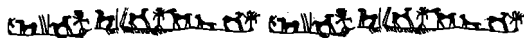
of the daughter of my people.

⁴⁹No respite, no relief will come;
my tears will flow and never cease,

⁵⁰till the Lord looks down
from heaven and sees.

⁵¹My soul will grieve in pity
for the women of my tormented city.

⁵²Like a bird I have been hunted
by my foes without cause.



⁵³ Into a pit they flung me alive
and cast stones on me.
⁵⁴ As the waters closed over my head,
I thought I would never again live.

⁵⁵ Out of the depths I called
on your name, O Lord.

⁵⁶ You heard; you have not been deaf
to my cry for relief.

⁵⁷ When I called you even came near
and told me not to fear.

⁵⁸ O Lord, you took up my case
and rescued me from this strife.

⁵⁹ You have seen the wrong they did.
Uphold my cause!

⁶⁰ You have seen how they plotted
vindictively to destroy my life.

⁶¹ O Lord, you have heard their insults
hurled at me, their insidious plots;

⁶² you have been aware of their thinking,
their muttering against me all day long.

⁶³ Look at them – sitting or standing –
mocking me in their song!

⁶⁴ Requite them as they deserve,
according to their deeds, O Lord.

⁶⁵ Harden their hearts;
hold them in doom under your curse.

⁶⁶ Pursue and destroy them in fury."

Fourth lamentation

4 ¹ How tarnished has become the
gold!

The fine gold has lost its lustre
Why, the sacred stones lie strewn
at every street corner!

² Oh, the precious sons of Zion,
once worth their weight in gold –
but now they are reckoned no more
than earthen jars from a potter's mold!

³ Even jackals bare their breasts
to suckle their young,
but my people have become heartless,
like ostriches in the desert land.

⁴ In thirst the infant's tongue
cleaves to the roof of its mouth.
Emaciated children are begging for alms,
but there is no one to help them out.

⁵ Those accustomed to dainty food
now lie dying in the streets.
Those accustomed to wear purple
now lie destitute upon the ash heaps.

⁶ The punishment of my people
is greater than that of Sodom,

which was overthrown in an instant,
without a helping hand.

⁷ Brighter than snow were their rulers,
even whiter than milk;
their bodies rosier than coral,
their beauty as radiant as sapphires.

⁸ But now they are blacker than soot,
unrecognized as they go about.
Their emaciated form shows lack of
food,

their skin shrivelled and dry as wood.

⁹ To have died by the sword is better
than to have perished in hunger.
The famine-stricken people waste away,
and slowly, wretchedly, pass away.

¹⁰ Once loving mothers, our women,
now cook for food their own children.
They have done so since the downfall
and destruction of my people.

¹¹ Yahweh has given full vent to his
wrath:
he has poured his anger out.
He has kindled a fire in Zion,
which has consumed her foundation.

¹² Never had the kings believed
nor the world's people perceived
that the enemy could break
through the gates of Jerusalem.

¹³ But this happened because of the
priests
who sinned, because of the prophets
who transgressed, shedding in her midst
the blood of the innocent and the just.

¹⁴ They wandered, like blind men,
groping through the streets,
so defiled with blood
that none could touch their garments.

¹⁵ "Go away!" men cried at them.
"Do not touch us! You are unclean!"
They became fugitives wandering about,
but even the nations would drive them
out.

¹⁶ Yahweh himself has dispersed them;
no longer does he watch over them.
The priests are shown no honour;
the elders are given no favour.

¹⁷ Our watchmen strained their eyes,
looking for help in vain.
We anxiously waited for an ally,
who failed to save us anyway.

¹⁸ Like dogs our enemies hounded us.



Afraid to come out, each of us cowered
within the corners of our house.
We knew our days were numbered.

¹⁹Our pursuers, swifter than eagles,
chased us over mountains and hills.
They waylaid us in the wilderness;
they waited for us in ambushes.

²⁰Our life's breath, Yahweh's anointed,
was taken captive in their pit –
he of whom we said, "In his protection
we shall live among the nations."

²¹Rejoice and be glad, O Edom's
daughter,
you who dwell in the land of Uz.
But you shall be drunk and stripped bare,
for to you also the cup will pass.

²²Your ordeal, Zion's daughter, will end;
for your exile will not be prolonged.
But Edom's daughter will be chastised,
and her wickedness will be exposed.

Fifth lamentation

5 ¹Remember, Yahweh, what
has befallen us. Look, and
see our disgrace,

²our home handed over to stran-
gers, our inheritance to foreigners.

³We are as orphans, fatherless, and
early widowed are our mothers.

⁴Our drinking water we must buy;
for our own wood we have to pay.

⁵With the yoke stifling our breath,
without rest we work to death.

⁶We have bowed down to Egypt,
and to Assyria, just to subsist.

⁷Our fathers who sinned are no
more but we bear their guilt.

⁸Slaves rule us, and there is no one
to rescue us from their hands.

⁹We brave the desert heat and the
sword just to get our hard-earned
food.

¹⁰Our skin is hot, as with fever –
dried up and shrivelled by hunger.

¹¹Ravished are the wives in Zion;
the virgins in the towns of Judah.

¹²Princes are hung up by their
hands; elders shown no respect.

¹³Young men toil at the millstones;
boys stagger under heavy loads.

¹⁴The old have shunned the city
gate, the young their song and music.

¹⁵From our hearts joy is gone; we
danced then, but now we lament.

¹⁶From our heads garlands have
fallen. For our sins we are in torment.

¹⁷Over all this our hearts are sick
and our eyes have grown weak:

¹⁸for we see Mount Zion desolate;
the jackals prowl within.

¹⁹You, O Lord, forever reign; you
throne endures from age to age.

²⁰Why, then, should you abandon
us, why forget us for so long a time?

²¹Lead us to you again, O Lord,
that we may be restored; renew our
days as of old.

²²Have you utterly rejected us? Is
your wrath turned against us?

ESTHER

Mordecai's dream

11 ¹On the first day of Nissan, in the second year of the reign of Ahasuerus the Great, a dream came to Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. ²Mordecai was a Jew residing at Susa who held a prominent position at the king's court. ³He was one of the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had deported from Jerusalem with Jeconiah, king of Judah.

⁴According to his dream, there were cries and tumult, thunder and earthquake and confusion upon the earth. ⁵as two great dragons came, both ready for combat. They roared, terribly ⁶and at the sound every nation prepared to fight against the holy nation. ⁷On earth it was a day of darkness and gloom, tribulation and distress, affliction and great disturbance. ⁸The whole nation of the just was troubled because of the fear of evils awaiting them, and were ready to perish. ⁹But they cried

out to God, and a little spring appeared, from which grew a great river with a flood of water. ¹⁰Light came as the sun rose, and the humble were raised up and devoured the mighty.

¹¹In this dream Mordecai saw what God intended to do. On awakening he thought deeply about the matter and tried all day to understand its meaning.

12 ¹Lodging at court with Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs and palace guards, ²Mordecai overheard them plotting; he made an investigation, discovered the plot to assassinate Ahasuerus, and informed the king. ³King Ahasuerus had the two eunuchs questioned. They confessed and were put to death.

⁴By order of the king, these events were recorded by Mordecai ⁵who was rewarded and appointed to an office in the court.

⁶In revenge for the king's two eunuchs, Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite who enjoyed the king's favour, sought to harm Mordecai and his people.

THE NOVEL ABOUT ESTHER

The book of Esther is a novel more real than many historical books. If the events are fictitious, they express the anguish, the resentment and the hopes which, for centuries, were those of the dispersed and persecuted Jews. Fear of the pagans, contempt for those who do not know God; constant effort to obtain the favor of the authorities; persistent pleas to God who cannot let his people disappear; hope for the day when they could take revenge on their enemies for the greater glory of God.

All of this is of interest to modern Christians persecuted or barely tolerated in several countries. But another lesson also stands out in the story of Esther: the Jews had to be saved, whatever the danger may have been, since the Jewish people had to survive for Christ to come.

There was among the Jews the custom of sending gifts and celebrating a feast in the *days of Purim*. The novel takes this custom and justifies the feast by telling about the persecution in which the Jews were saved, thanks to the intervention of Esther and Mordecai on that same day.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

In the Greek Bible the book of Esther includes many passages not found in the Hebrew Bible. Some believe that these sections were added in the Greek Bible. Others, however, think that the Greek text is closer to the primitive one, and that later, some passages were taken out for the Hebrew Bible.

We put the text proper of the Greek Bible *in italics*.

1 In the days of Ahasuerus — this was the Ahasuerus whose empire stretched from India to Ethiopia and comprised one hundred twenty-seven provinces — ² when he was occupying the royal throne in Susa, ³ in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officers and ministers, the Persian and Median aristocracy, the nobles and the governors of the provinces. ⁴ For a hundred and eighty days, he displayed the riches and splendor of his empire and the wealth and pomp of his royal estate.

⁵ At the close of this period, the king gave a seven-day banquet at the palace garden for all the people, great and small, living in Susa. ⁶ There were white cotton curtains and blue hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings on marble pillars. On a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and colored stones were gold and silver couches. ⁷ Drinks were served in a variety of golden goblets, and the royal wine flowed freely, in keeping with the king's generosity. ⁸ By the king's order, each guest was allowed to drink as he pleased; all the stewards had been instructed to serve everyone what he wished.

⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Ahasuerus.

¹⁰ Merry with wine on the seventh day, the king ordered the seven eunuchs who served him as chamberlains — Mahuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas — ¹¹ to bring into his presence Queen Vashti with her royal crown, for she was very lovely and he would like to display her beauty to the people and nobles. ¹² Queen Vashti, however, refused to come, and the king burned with rage.

¹³ As was his procedure, the king consulted experts in law and justice. ¹⁴ He summoned the seven nobles of Persia and Media who were in his personal service and held first rank in the kingdom — Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan. ¹⁵ He asked them, "According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti for disobeying the king's order issued through the eunuchs?"

¹⁶ In the presence of the king and nobles, Memucan replied, "It is not the king alone that Queen Vashti has wronged but all the nobles and the whole populace in the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷ All the women will soon know what she did, and so they will despise their husbands and say: 'King Ahasuerus ordered his wife to be brought before him and she would not come.' ¹⁸ When the Persian and

Median ladies hear of that, they will treat the royal officials in the same manner. So, there will be no end to this kind of disrespect. ¹⁹ If it pleases the king, therefore, let there be issued an irrevocable royal decree, to be written among the laws of Persia and Media, that Vashti is never again to come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and that the king is authorized to give her royal position to someone else more worthy than she. ²⁰ When this decree of the king is proclaimed throughout his vast kingdom, all wives will honor their husbands, from the least to the greatest."

²¹ This proposal pleased the king and his officials; so the king acted on Memucan's advice. ²² He sent letters to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, declaring that every husband should be master in his own household.

2 ¹ Later when his anger had cooled, King Ahasuerus remembered Vashti's disobedience and his decree against her. ² The king's courtiers proposed, "Let beautiful young girls be chosen for the king. ³ Let him appoint commissioners throughout the provinces of his realm to bring all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa. Let them be put under the care of the royal eunuch Hegai, custodian of women, and let them be given ointments for beauty treatment. ⁴ Then let the girl who pleases the king take Vashti's place." The king was pleased with the suggestion and he acted on it.

⁵ Now there lived in Susa a Jew named Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite ⁶ who had been exiled from Jerusalem among the captives taken away with King Jeconiah of Judah by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. ⁷ Mordecai was foster father to his cousin Hadassah, that is Esther, who had lost both father and mother. The girl had a lovely face and figure. On the death of her parents Mordecai had adopted her as his daughter.

⁸ In compliance with the king's edict, a great number of young girls were brought to Susa and entrusted to Hegai. Esther was among them. ⁹ Esther pleased the custodian of women and won his favor. He not only promptly provided her with cosmetics and good food but assigned to her seven servants, maids from the king's household and transferred her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

¹⁰ Esther did not reveal her nationality to

family, for Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. ¹¹Each day Mordecai would walk up and down the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was faring.

¹²After a preparation of twelve months decreed for the women, each of them had to appear in turn before King Ahasuerus. This preparatory period was for beautifying treatment: six months with oil of myrrh and the other six months with perfumes and cosmetics. ¹³Then when the girl was to present herself to the king, she was allowed to take with her from the harem to the king's palace anything she wanted. ¹⁴She would go there in the evening and return the following morning to another harem under the care of the royal eunuch Shaashgaz, custodian of the concubines. She would not go back to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

¹⁵When the turn came for Esther – the daughter of Abihail whom Mordecai had adopted from his uncle – to go to the king, she asked for nothing beyond what the eunuch Hcgai had given her; and yet she won the admiration of all who saw her. ¹⁶Esther was brought to King Ahasuerus in his palace in the tenth month called Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷The king liked Esther more than any of the other women. Having won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins, she received the royal crown and was made queen in place of Vashti. ¹⁸The king then gave a great banquet in honor of Esther for all his officials and ministers; he proclaimed a holiday for all the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

¹⁹When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰Up to this time Esther had not revealed her family background or nationality, in compliance with Mordecai's instructions. She followed his advice just as she had when she was being brought up by him. ²¹It was during the time that Mordecai spent at the king's gate, that Bagathan and Thares, two of the royal eunuchs who guarded the entrance, conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus. ²²Mordecai learned of the plot and informed Queen Esther who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. ²³The matter was investigated, found to be true, and the two conspirators were

hanged on the gallows. The incident was recorded in the Book of Chronicles in the presence of the king.

3 ¹After these events, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, to a rank higher than that of all the other officials. ²On orders of the king, all the royal officials at the king's gate would kneel and bow down to Haman. This Mordecai refused to do.

³The royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's order?" ⁴They spoke to him day after day, but he refused to comply, explaining that he was a Jew. To find out if this explanation was acceptable, they reported the matter to Haman.

⁵Haman was enraged when he saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. ⁶Having learned who Mordecai's people were, he thought it would not be enough to lay hands on him alone but sought to destroy all the Jews throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

⁷In the first month, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, the *pur* or lot was cast in Haman's presence to determine the day and the month for the destruction of Mordecai's people. The lot fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar.

⁸Haman talked to King Ahasuerus, "Scattered throughout the provinces of your kingdom is a certain people, their customs differ from those of other people. Since they do not obey our laws, it is not in the king's best interests to tolerate them. ⁹If it

1. Gen 41, 40 2. Gen 41, 43 4. Dn 3, 12 8. Lev 26, 33; Dn 4, 27; Dn 3, 8; Ezr 4, 19

o Haman is a high ranking minister of an "absolute" king. His subjects consider him a god. This type of people never tolerate at their side men who are able to speak frankly, but they easily let the ambitious and mediocre deceive them.

Haman hates the Jews because they are of a different race. Haman wants power and all authority. The means are irrelevant to him as long as he can eliminate his rivals. After seeking Mordecai's death, he coldly plans the death of thousands of families.

please the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them. I will deposit in the royal treasury ten thousand silver talents for the men who carry out the king's business."

¹⁰The king took the signet ring off his finger, handed it to Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, enemy of the Jews, and said, ¹¹"Keep the money, and do with these people as you please."

¹²On the thirteenth day of the first month, the royal scribes were summoned. As Haman dictated they wrote orders in the script of each province and in the language of each people to the king's satraps, the governors of every province, and the officials of every people. Written in the name of King Ahasuerus himself and sealed with his own ring, ¹³these dispatches were sent by couriers to all the royal provinces with the order to kill, destroy and wipe out all the Jews – young and old, women and children – on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

+ ¹⁴A copy of the edict to be promulgated as law in every province was published for all the people to know so that they would be ready for that day. ¹⁵The couriers, spurred on by the king's command, set out in haste, and the edict was first promulgated in Susa. As the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in bewilderment.

13 ¹The text of the letter was as follows:

The Great King Ahasuerus to the rulers of the hundred and twenty seven provinces from India to Ethiopia and to the governors under them:

²As ruler of many nations and master of the whole world, I have resolved never to be carried away by the arrogance of power but always to rule with fairness and clemency, to provide for my subjects a life free of distress, and to restore the peace that all men desire by making my government humane and truly civilized as far as the borders of my kingdom.

³When I consulted my advisers on how this might be accomplished, Haman, who excels among us in wisdom, who has earned distinction for trustworthiness and loyalty, and who has attained the second rank in the kingdom, ⁴brought to our attention the existence throughout my realm of a people of ill will, whose laws are opposed to those of every nation. Their continuous disregard of the decrees of kings hinders the establishment of unity in the empire.

⁵Considering, therefore, the continuous opposition of this people to all humankind, its outlandish system of laws and strange manner of life, its hostility to our interests and the harm it does to the stability of our kingdom ⁶we hereby decree that the people indicated in the letters of Haman, who

9. Wis 2, 12; Acts 16, 20
6. 1 Mac 3, 42

12. Ezr 8, 36

2. Jud 2, 5; 2 Mac 11, 3

5. 1 Mac 1, 44; 2 Mac 14, 6

+ This "letter of Ahasuerus" is one of the most outstanding pages of the book of Esther. It is a model of what totalitarian governments think, say and write, everywhere and in all ages. According to them, one is subversive simply because one thinks and does not blindly submit to the orders of the rulers who naturally equate their interests and whims with the security of the nation.

This letter emphasizes the freedom of conscience of the Jewish people who, in this, can be

a model for Christians. It makes us see why the totalitarian countries of the past could not tolerate the Jews and also why "Christian" people who were not very tolerant – did not respect them. This can also be applied to the present situation of repression of the Church in military, economic or marxist dictatorships.

In all the above cases, a man or a party considers himself the only one authorized to decide what is the Common Good, and he imposes. Anyone who for conscience reasons, rejects



in charge of affairs and a second father to us, he utterly destroyed by the sword, without mercy, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, of the present year, ¹so that when these people, with their past and present ill will, have gone down into the world of the dead on a single day, they may at last leave our government in complete stability and peace.

4 ¹When Mordecai learned what had happened, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and walked through the city crying bitterly and loudly. ²But he came only as far as the king's gate, for no one in sackcloth was allowed to enter. ³In every province where the king's edict was read, there was great mourning among the Jews; fasting and weeping with lamentation, and many of them slept on sackcloth and ashes.

⁴Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs informed her about Mordecai. Overcome with grief, she sent clothes for Mordecai to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he refused. ⁵Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend to her, and ordered him to find out the reason for Mordecai's action.

⁶So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the public square in front of the king's gate. ⁷Mordecai told him all that had happened, as well as the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸He also gave Hathach a copy of the written decree for their destruc-

tion, to show and explain to Esther. He further told him to urge her to go to the king to beg for mercy and intercede for her people. Mordecai's words to Esther transmitted through Hathach were, "Remember the days of your lowly estate when you were brought up in my charge. Haman, who is next to the king, has asked for our death. Pray to the Lord and speak to the king for us. Save us from death."

⁹Hathach returned to Esther and told her what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰In reply, Esther gave Hathach this message for Mordecai, ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of his provinces know that any man or woman who goes to the king in the inner court without being summoned suffers the death penalty, unless the king grants him his life by holding out to him his golden scepter. But I have not been called to go to the king for thirty days now."

■ ¹²When Mordecai received Esther's words, ¹³he sent back this answer, "Do not suppose that because you are in the king's palace, you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴If you remain silent now, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another source, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows – perhaps you have come to the throne for just such a time as this."

¹⁵Esther sent back her reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa. Fast for me – all of you; do not eat or drink for three days,

1. Gen 27, 34; Is 58, 5; Dn 9, 3
Mt 17, 21

3. 1 Mac 1, 25; Jud 4, 9; Ne 9, 1

16. Est 8, 21; Jon 3, 6;

some demand of those in power, is seen as a traitor to the country or the people. The Jews cannot accept this idolatry and neither can Christians. Besides, the nations and their armies or proletariat institutions, are no more than means at the service of the international community and of peace, which is built by conscious and free persons.

■ In difficult times, there are always those in better positions who think about saving themselves or their jobs. And they prefer to keep quiet instead of being in solidarity with those who are mistreated or deprived of their rights. Moreover, if they have more knowledge of religion, they know better how to excuse their silence. That is why Mordecai insists on reminding Esther of her

night or day. My maids and I will also fast. Then I will go to the king, even if it is against the law. If I die for this, let it be."

¹⁷ Mordecai went away and carried out Esther's instructions.

Mordecai's prayer

13 ⁸Recalling all that the Lord had done, he prayed to him and said:

⁹Lord, King and Master of all, everything is under your power; no one can withstand you in your will to save Israel.

¹⁰You made heaven and earth and all the marvels under heaven. ¹¹You are the Lord of all – no one can resist you, Lord.

¹²You know all things, O Lord; you know that no insolence, no vain-glory or arrogance prompted me to act thus – to refuse to bow down before the proud Haman. ¹³Readily would I have kissed his feet for Israel's safety.

¹⁴But what I did, I did so as not to place man's glory above the glory of God. I will not bow down to anyone except to you, O Lord. My refusal has not been out of pride.

¹⁵And now, Lord God, King, God of Abraham, deliver your people! Our enemies plot our ruin; they are bent upon destroying the inheritance that was yours from the beginning.

¹⁶Do not forsake your own which you redeemed out of Egypt for your own.

¹⁷Hear my supplication, have mercy on your inheritance. Turn our grief into rejoicing, that we may live to sing praise to your name, O Lord. Do not silence the mouths of those who give you praise.

¹⁸And Israel cried out with all their might, for they were faced with death.

The prayer of Esther

14 ¹Seized with anguish in her fear of death, Queen Esther likewise had recourse to the Lord. ²Taking off her splendid robes, she put on garments of distress and mourning. In place of expensive perfumes, she covered her head with dirt and ashes. Humbling her body severely, she put aside all her festive adornments and left her hair disheveled. ³Then she prayed to the Lord God of Israel:

⁴My Lord, our King, the only God, come to my rescue, I am alone and have no help but you. Through my own choice I am endangering my life.

⁵As a child I was wont to hear from the people of the land of my forebear, that you, O Lord, chose Israel from among all peoples, and our father, from among their ancestors to be your lasting heritage; that you did for them, all that you have promised.

⁶But we have sinned, and for this you have handed us over to our enemies; ⁷we have worshipped their gods, but you, O Lord, are just.

⁸Dissatisfied with our bitter servitude, they made a pact with their idols

⁹to abolish what you have decreed to blot out your heritage, ¹⁰to shut the mouths that give you praise, to quench the glory of your house and your altar and instead to let the pagans sing the praise of worthless idols, and idolize forever a king of flesh.

¹¹Do not give up your scepter, O Lord, to non-existent beings. Never

⁸. Sir 42, 15 ⁹. Dn 9, 3 ¹⁴. Is 42, 15
⁵. Dt 4, 32; Dt 7, 6 ⁷. Ne 9, 27

¹⁶. Ex 15, 13 ¹⁷. Is 38, 19; Ps 115, 18

responsibility.

Fast, praying to God for me. Esther's great confidence in her people's prayers makes her

willing to put her life in danger. As Mordecai himself does, Esther understands that God will not let his people disappear.



let them gloat over our ruin, but turn their designs against themselves and make an example of our chief enemy.

¹²Remember us, Lord; reveal yourself in the time of our calamity. Give me courage, King of gods and master of all power. ¹³Make my words persuasive when I face the lion; turn his heart against our enemy, that the latter and his like may be brought to their end.

¹⁴Save us by your hand; help me who am alone and have none but you, O Lord.

¹⁵You know everything; you know how I hate honour from the goddess, how I loathe the bed of the uncircumcised and of any foreigner.

¹⁶You know I am here under constraint, that I loathe the diadem about my brow when I appear in public; as a filthy rag I loathe it and do not wear it in private.

¹⁷Your handmaid has never eaten at Haman's table, nor taken pleasure in royal banquets, nor drunk the wine offered to their gods.

¹⁸Neither has your handmaid found pleasure from the day of her promotion till now except in you, Lord God of Abraham.

¹⁹O God, more powerful than all, hear the voice of those in despair; save us from the evil man's power, and deliver me from my fear.

Esther appears before the king

15 ¹Ending her prayer on the third day, Esther took off her penitential garments and put on her

royal attire. ²After invoking the all-seeing God and Saviour, she took her two maids with her, ³and leaned gently on one of them for support, ⁴while the other followed leading her train. ⁵Although her heart was frozen with fear, she looked radiant in her perfect beauty.

⁶After passing from door to door, she found herself face to face with the king seated on his throne, awe-inspiring in the full array of his majesty, his robes all covered with gold and precious stones. ⁷As he looked up, his face flushed with majestic anger, the queen faltered, turned pale and leaned weakly upon the shoulder of the maid in front of her.

⁸Then God changed the king's anger to gentleness. Alarmed, he sprang from his throne, took Esther in his arms and comforted her with soothing words. ⁹"What is it, Esther?" he said. "I am your brother. Take heart. ¹⁰You are not going to die, because our decree applies only to ordinary people. ¹¹Come, speak to me." ¹²He raised the golden scepter, touched her neck with it, then embraced her.

¹³Esther spoke: "My lord, I saw you like an angel of God, and I trembled with fear. ¹⁴For you look awesome although you are full of kindness." ¹⁵But she fell fainting as she spoke. ¹⁶The king was troubled, and his attendants tried to revive her.

5 ¹The king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? Tell me what you wish. Even if it is half of my kingdom, I will give it to you." ⁴Esther re-

13. Jud 9, 10; Pro 21, 1

16. Is 64, 5

10. Is 6, 1

12. Tob 7, 16

3. Mk 6, 23

◆ Note this paragraph where Ahasuerus is described as if he were a divine person. Yet, it is the same pagan king about whom Esther spoke with contempt in the previous chapter.

This is why: the pagans obeyed their kings as if they were gods, and the Jews, instead of opposing them – which would have brought about their own persecution – praised them even

more. But doing this was a sort of game for them because they were thinking: what my lips are saying about this king of Persia, I am saying to my Lord from the heart (see the same in Judith 12:14).

This dialogue between Esther and Ahasuerus was written as a parable: Ahasuerus personifies the Almighty King who gave in to the sacrificial



plied, "If it pleases your majesty, come with Haman to a banquet I have prepared today." ⁵The king gave the order: "Call Haman at once so that Esther may have her wish."

So the king and Haman went to the banquet prepared by Esther. ⁶During the drinking of wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition? Speak up and it will be given. What is your request? Even half of my kingdom is yours for the asking."

⁷Esther replied, "My petition and request is this: ⁸if I have found favor with your majesty, if it pleases you to grant my petition and request, come with Haman tomorrow to another banquet I will prepare. Then I will answer your question."

⁹Haman left that day happy and in good spirits, but when he saw Mordecai at the royal gate neither rising nor showing signs of fear of him, he was filled with rage towards the man. ¹⁰He did not show it, however, but went home and summoned his friends and his wife Zeresh.

¹¹After boasting about his vast wealth, his many sons, and the promotion he received from the king placing him above the officials and royal servants, ¹²Haman further said, "Even Queen Esther invited no one but me to go with the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me again tomorrow together with the king. ¹³Yet none of this satisfies me, so long as I see the Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

¹⁴His wife Zeresh and all his friends said, "Have a fifty-cubit gallows built. In the morning ask the king

to have Mordecai hanged on it. The go to the banquet merrily together with the king." Satisfied with the suggestion, Haman had the gallows erected.

Haman is humiliated before Mordecai

6 ¹As he was sleepless that night, the king asked for the Book of Chronicles and ordered that the record of his reign be read to him. ²He came across the passage wherein Mordecai exposed a plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus, the plot of two royal eunuchs guarding the gate Bagathan and Teresh. ³The king asked, "What reward did Mordecai receive for this?" The king's attendants answered, "None, your majesty."

⁴Meanwhile Haman, who wanted to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows, had entered the outer court. "Who is there in the court?" the king asked. ⁵His attendants answered, "Haman is there standing in the court." The king ordered, "Let him come in."

⁶When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done to the man the king wishes to honor?"

Haman thought to himself: whom would the king wish to honor but me? ⁷So he replied, "For the man the king wishes to honor, ⁸let royal robes be brought which the king has worn, and a horse, which the king has ridden with a royal diadem on its head. ⁹Then robes and the horse should be handed to one of the king's noblest officers who should array the man the king

10. Ps 49, 7 3. Gen 40, 23; Eccl 9, 15

8. Dn 5, 29

9. Gen 41, 43

faith of Esther and who welcomed her as a sister with a tenderness which she, herself, could not have foreseen. God is the one who cannot bear to see Esther's anxiety and who grants her the salvation of her people.

With all of this, we will more easily understand

why the Church in praising Mary, remembers words from the book of Esther: because, Christ's side, Mary intercedes for us.

+ God helps those who ask but we must always use our human resources. Esther trusted God, but she uses prudence and the necessary



wishes to honor and lead him on horseback through the city street, proclaiming before him: This is what is done for the man the king is pleased to honor!"

¹⁰The king ordered Haman, "Hurry! Take the robes and the horse and do as you have said for the Jew Mordecai sitting at the royal gate. Do not leave out anything you have recommended."

¹¹So Haman took the robes and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the streets, proclaiming, "This is what is done for the man the king is pleased to honor!"

¹²After this Mordecai returned to the king's gate, while Haman hurried home greatly disappointed. ¹³He told his wife and all his friends everything that had happened, and they said to him, "If Mordecai, who started your downfall, is of Jewish origin, you will not win against him. You will surely be ruined." ¹⁴While they were yet talking, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman off to the banquet Esther had prepared.

The banquet Esther prepared

7 ¹So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. ²And again, on that second day, while they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther "Whatever is your petition, Queen Esther, shall be granted. Whatever request you make shall be fulfilled, even for half of my kingdom."

³Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life; and spare also the lives of my people. This is my petition and re-

quest for myself and for my people. ⁴For we have been delivered to destruction, slaughter and extinction. Had we been sold merely as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, for our calamity would not be as great a loss to the king."

⁵King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, "Who and where is the man who dared do such a thing?" ⁶Esther answered, "He is no other than this wicked Haman—an enemy and a foe!"

At this, Haman was seized with terror. ⁷The king left the banquet in anger and went to the garden. Haman stayed to beg Queen Esther for his life, realizing that the king had decided on his doom.

⁸When the king returned from the garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the bed where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Is he going to molest the queen even before me in my own house?" No sooner had the king spoken than his assistants covered Haman's face. ⁹Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said, "This man built a fifty-cubit gallows for Mordecai who gave the report that saved the king's life. It is standing there at his house."

The king said, "Very well, hang him on it." ¹⁰So Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.

8 ¹That same day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, enemy of the Jews. Mordecai was admitted into the king's presence, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her. ²The king took off his signet ring, which he had recovered from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai, whom Esther appointed in charge of Haman's house.

³Once more Esther had an opportunity of

13. Dn 4, 34; Lk 1, 51 2. Mk 6, 22 7. Pro 16, 14 9. Dt 21, 35; Gal 3, 13 10. Pro 5, 22; Eccl 10, 8

tactics so as not to destroy what God is about to achieve.

History has demonstrated that those who persecute God's people never come out victori-

ous.

We will have no trouble seeing with what irony the author of this book depicts the great kings, with their whims and vanity.

being heard by the king. Weeping and falling before him, she begged him to frustrate the evil plot of Haman the Agagite against the Jews. ⁴The king held out the golden scepter to her, and she rose and stood before him, saying,

⁵"If it please your majesty, if I am pleasing to your eyes and have found favor with you, and if you think it proper to do so, let an order be issued revoking the letters which Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, wrote to destroy the Jews in all the royal provinces. ⁶For how can I bear to see the destruction of my people, the extermination of my race?"

⁷King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "I have given Haman's house to Esther and had Haman hanged on the gallows for plotting to destroy the Jews. ⁸Now you can write a decree as you please concerning the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the royal signet ring; for any document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring cannot be revoked."

⁹The royal scribes were summoned that very day, the twenty-third of the third month of Sivan, and as Mordecai dictated they wrote an order to the Jews, to the satraps, governors and officials of the hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia, to each province in its own script, to each people in its own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. ¹⁰These letters written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the royal signet ring were carried by couriers mounted on the king's thoroughbred steeds.

¹¹The king's edict granted the Jews in each city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to kill, destroy and wipe out any armed group of any nation or province that might attack them and their women and children, and to seize their goods as spoil. ¹²This edict took effect throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar. ¹³A copy of the text of the edict to be promulgated as law in every province was published among all the peoples so that the Jews might be prepared on the day stated to avenge themselves on their enemies.

¹⁴Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers, mounted on the king's steeds, rode out in haste, and the edict was promulgated in the citadel of Susa.

o In some way, this letter completes the first one we read in chapter 13. The king favours the Jews in the same irresponsible way as he had commanded them to be killed. But, naturally, it was not his fault: Haman was the one who had deceived the king. He finds no problem in decreeing the opposite of what he had decided shortly before. In fact, this change is proof that

¹⁵In royal garments of blue and white, with a large golden crown and a cloak of purple and fine linen, Mordecai left the king's presence! There was a celebration in the city of Susa! ¹⁶For the Jews it was a time of splendor and merriment, honor and triumph. ¹⁷Wherever the king's edict was read in every province and in each city, there was rejoicing and feasting among the Jews. Many people of other nationalities were seized with fear of the Jews, and they embraced Judaism.

16 ¹The text of the letter read as follows:

"The great King Ahasuerus to the satraps, governors and all our loyal subjects in the one hundred twenty-seven provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia: Greetings!

²The more some men are honored through the generosity of their patrons, the prouder they become. ³Gloating in their power and in capable of responsibility, they seek to injure our subjects and even plot against their own benefactors. ⁴They drive out gratitude from the human heart. Carried away by the arrogant boasts of men who know nothing of goodness, they think they will escape the justice of the all-seeing God.

⁵It often happens also that those in authority, through the influence of friends entrusted with the administration of public affairs, become accomplices in the shedding of innocent blood and involved in inflicting irremediable calamities. ⁶Even rulers with upright intentions become misled by evil corruptors.

⁷These evil practices of past times, as attested by the records, have been carried over to the present in the crimes perpetrated by unworthy officials. ⁸For the future, however we will strive to make our kingdom a realm of peace for all ⁹by starting now to adopt new policies and by treating with the utmost justice all matters that come to our attention.

¹⁰To give an example, Haman, son of Hammedatha, a Macedonian who is alien to Persian blood and devoid of our kindness, was treated hospitably by us. ¹¹Enjoying the goodwill that we have towards every nation, he was even proclaimed our "father," before whom as second in rank to the king, everyone bowed down. ¹²But his arrogance turned his head

he acts with much wisdom to correct errors of others.

Again, the author of Esther captures the stupidity and vanity of these great men who always try to convince their people that they are indispensable and that, without them, people would live in chaos. If the book of Esther aspires to show God's providence for his people, it also



and he schemed to deprive us of our kingdom and our life. ¹³ He plotted for the destruction of Mordecai, our saviour and constant benefactor, of Esther, our blameless royal partner, and of their whole race. ¹⁴ In that way he hoped to make us defenseless and facilitate the transfer of rule by the Persian's to the Macedonians.

¹⁵ We find, however, that the Jews consigned to extinction by this accursed man are not evildoers but are governed by the most just of laws. ¹⁶ They are, in fact, children of the Most High, the great living God, who has made our kingdom prosperous for us and for our ancestors.

¹⁷ You will, therefore, do well to ignore the letter sent by Haman, son of Hammedatha, for the man himself, together with his entire family, has been hanged at the gate of Susa. Thus speedily has God, who rules over all, given him the punishment he deserved.

¹⁸ Post a copy of this letter in every public place, give the Jews freedom to live by their own laws, and come to their aid against those who plan to attack them on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar. ¹⁹ For God, who rules over all, has turned this day from one of destruction into one of joy for his chosen people.

²⁰ You should, therefore, celebrate this memorable day among your designated feasts with all rejoicing, so that both now and hereafter it may be for us and the loyal Persians a celebration of salvation, and for those who plot against us a reminder of destruction.

²¹ Every city and country, without exception, that fails to observe this decree shall be destroyed with sword and fire. It will then be left untroubled not only by men but by the beasts and birds as well.

9 ¹ When the day came for the order of the king to be carried out – the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to crush them – the reverse happened, for it was the Jews who got the upper hand over those who sought their harm. ² In their towns throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the Jews gathered to strike at those who planned their destruction. But no one dared

resist them, for they were feared by all the other nationalities. ³ In fact, all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, governors and the king's administrators supported the Jews out of fear of Mordecai, ⁴ who had become more and more powerful and prominent not only in the palace but throughout the provinces.

⁵ The Jews struck down their enemies, killing them by the sword, doing as they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ In Susa alone, they killed five hundred men. ⁷ They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Porathai, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman, who was Hammedatha's son and enemy of the Jews. But they laid no hand on the spoils.

¹¹ That same day the number of those slain in Susa was reported to the king, ¹² who in turn told Esther: "The Jews have killed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in Susa alone. Imagine what more they have done in the rest of my provinces! But you shall again be granted whatever you ask; whatever you request shall be fulfilled."

¹³ Esther replied, "If it please the king, let the Jews in Susa be permitted again tomorrow to carry out today's edict, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows."

¹⁴ The king then ordered that this be done. The edict was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. ¹⁵ On the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, the Jews in Susa gathered again and put to death three hundred men. But again they laid no hand on the spoils.

¹⁶ The other Jews in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and rid themselves of their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of their foes, but did not lay their hand on the spoils. ¹⁷ This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and the Jews rested on the fourteenth, making it a day of feasting and rejoicing.

¹⁸ The Jews in Susa, however, assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth and rested on the fifteenth, making this a day of feasting and rejoicing. ¹⁹ That is why the rural Jews have a different day of rest and celebration: the fourteenth of the month of Adar on which they send presents to each other.

1. Ps 18, 41

19. Ne 8, 12; Rev 11, 10

undermines personality worship and the official image created by the services of the dictatorship.

■ It is hard for us to understand that the awful things related in the book were done in the name of God, and at the request of Esther who seems to have been a pious woman.

Such was the mentality of the time: the God who triumphed was the authentic God and triumph was measured by the disaster inflicted on the enemy. Esther's purpose was to show that the Lord is the true God. Achior used the same argument in speaking to Holofernes (Judith 5:5-21).

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far. ²¹ directing them to celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth of the month of Adar ²² as the days when the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into feasting. They were to observe these as days of festivity and rejoicing, days for giving food presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

²³ The Jews agreed to observe annually this celebration instituted on Mordecai's written order. ²⁴ For Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, enemy of the Jews, had plotted to destroy them and had cast the *pur* or lot for their ruin. ²⁵ Yet through Esther's intervention, the king ordered in writing that the wicked plan against the Jews should instead be turned against Haman whom he ordered to be hanged as well as his sons. ²⁶ These days, therefore, have been called Purim after the word *pur*. Because of this written order and of what they had been and experienced, ²⁷ the Jews took upon themselves, their descendants and all who would join them to celebrate these two days every year without fail, in the manner prescribed and at the time appointed. ²⁸ Commemorated and celebrated thus, in every family, province and city, through all generations, these days of Purim were never to fall into disuse among the Jews nor into oblivion among their descendants.

²⁹ Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with the Jew Mordecai, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. ³⁰ Letters were sent to all the Jews in the one hundred twenty-seven provinces of Ahasuerus' kingdom, in words conveying goodwill and assurance. ³¹ enjoining them to observe these days of Purim at the designated time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed and just as the Jews had prescribed for themselves and their descendants, with respect to their duty of fasting and lamentation. ³² Esther's decree fixed these

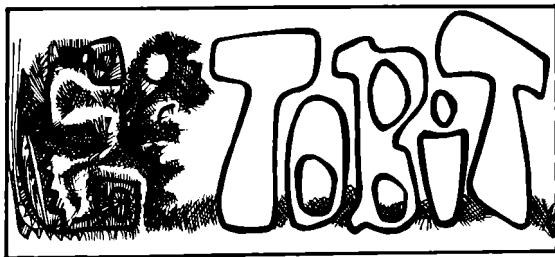
practices of Purim, and it was recorded in the book.

10 ¹ King Ahasuerus levied tribute: throughout the empire including the distant islands. ² All his acts of power and valor, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai who was raised by the king to high honor, are recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. ³ The Jew Mordecai was second in rank to King Ahasuerus; he was great among the Jews and esteemed by many of his brothers as the harbinger of peace and welfare for all his people.

11 ¹ And Mordecai said, "This is God's work. ² I remember the dream I had about this, nothing of which has failed to be fulfilled — ³ the little spring that became a river the light, the sun and the flood of water. Esther is the river, whom the king married and made queen. ⁴ Haman and I are the two dragons. ⁵ Those who assembled to destroy the Jews are the nations. ⁶ And the nation of the just — this is Israel, my people, who cried to God and were saved. Yes, the Lord has saved his people and delivered us from all these evils. God has worked such signs and great wonders as have never occurred among the nations.

⁷ For this purpose, God prepared two destinies — one for his people and the other for all the nations. ⁸ These two destinies were fulfilled at the moment, the hour and the day laid down by God among the nations. ⁹ He remembered his people and rendered justice to his inheritance. ¹⁰ Thus, gathering together with joy before God on the fourteenth and fifteenth of the month of Adar, Israel will celebrate these days from generation to generation.

¹¹ In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who affirmed he was a priest and a Levite, and his son Ptolemy brought to Egypt the foregoing letter concerning the Purim, maintaining that it was genuine and had been translated by Lysimachus Ptolemy's son and a resident of Jerusalem.



The examples of Tobit

o1 This is the story of Tobit son of Tobiel, son of Ananiel, son of Adonel, son of Gabael of the race of Asiel, of the tribe of Naphtali. ²In the days of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, Tobit was deported from Thisbe, which is to the south of Kedesh of Naphtali in Galilee, above Asher.

³I, Tobit, have walked in the ways of truth and justice all the days of my life; I have given many alms to my brethren and to those of my countrymen who were deported with me to Nineveh, a city in the country of the Assyrians.

⁴When I was a young man in my country, the land of Israel, all the tribe of my father Naphtali broke away from the family of David in Jerusalem. This was however the city chosen among all the tribes of Israel to be the place of sacrifice for all the tribes, and where the Temple, the house of God the Most High, had been built and consecrated for all generations forever.

⁵All the tribes which had separated, including the tribe of Naphtali, my father, sacrificed to the calf Baal which Jeroboam, King of Israel, had set up at Dan, in the hills of Galilee. ⁶I, alone, often went to Jerusalem for the feasts, as is ordered for all the people of Israel by an everlasting decree. I went with the first fruits and tithes of my crop, and with the first shearings of the sheep. ⁷I gave these for the altar, to the priests, sons of Aaron; I gave a tithe

of the corn, the wine, the olives, the pomegranates, the figs and the other fruits to the Levites who officiated in Jerusalem. I sold the second tithe every six years and went to distribute the money in Jerusalem.

⁸I gave the third tithe to the orphans and widows and to the pagan converts who had joined the Israelites. I gave them every three years and we ate according to the rules which had been laid down on this matter in the Law of Moses, and according to the recommendations made by Deborah, my father's mother, for my father had left me an orphan.

⁹When I reached manhood I married Anna of the race of our forefathers and she bore me a son, Tobias. ¹⁰When I was taken to the city of Nineveh as a prisoner all my relatives and those of our family ate the pagans' food. ¹¹But I watched over myself so as not to eat it ¹²because I remembered God with all my heart. ¹³The Most High let me be esteemed by Shalmaneser and I became his purchaser. ¹⁴I used to go to Media to make purchases for him until he died; one day I left on deposit with Gabael, brother of Gabria, at Rages in Media, a sack containing ten talents of silver.

¹⁵When Shalmaneser died, his son Sennacherib became king in his place. In his time the highways of Media were in a state of insurrection so that I could no longer go to Media. ¹⁶In the days of Shalmaneser I gave many alms to my kinsmen. ¹⁷I gave my bread

2. 2 K 15, 19	3. Dt 10, 12	4. Dt 12, 5	5. 1 K 12, 26	6. Dt 16, 6	7. Num 18, 8
8. Dt 14, 28	17. Mt 25, 35				

o The Book of Tobit is a short story (see introduction to the book of Esther).

Who is Tobit? He is a Jew from the north of Palestine, of the tribe of Naphtali, exiled to Assyria.

Tobit Senior is a man tested by God but not rejected by him. His perseverance in prayer brings God's blessings upon him. As we say today, "God may delay, but he does not forget."

When Tobit becomes the king's administrator, he is not conceited nor does he look down on others, but he remains faithful to his poor,

exiled brothers. He is an example of solidarity for us.

Even though the good he does brings him misfortune, he remains faithful to his God and faces up to difficult situations. In his poverty he is concerned about his brothers.

He is not overcome by other people's jokes, nor by his wife who reproaches him for the good he does.

His wife, Anna, copes with the situation by working in Ahikar's household, although they were rich before.

to those who were hungry, my garments to those who were naked, and if I saw anyone of my tribe dead, and his body thrown over the ramparts of Nineveh I would bury him. ¹⁸ I buried secretly those whom king Sennacherib killed on returning from Judea in the days when he was punished by the king of Heaven because of the blasphemies which he had uttered. In his anger he slew a great number of Jews. The king looked for their bodies but could not find them. ¹⁹ One of the inhabitants of Nineveh went and told the king that I had buried them so I went into hiding.

Then, I learned that they were looking for me to put me to death. I was afraid and I fled to a distance. ²⁰ All my goods were confiscated and nothing was left to me that was not taken for the royal treasury except Anna my wife and Tobias my son.

²¹ But only forty days had passed when Sennacherib was killed by his two sons. They fled to Mount Ararat and his son Esarhaddon became king in Sennacherib's place. Esarhaddon appointed Ahikar, the son of my brother Anael, over all the administration. ²² Ahikar intervened on my behalf and I returned to Nineveh. My nephew Ahikar was head of the cup bearers, keeper of the seals, administrator and accountant. Esarhaddon made him second only to himself.

2 ¹ When I returned to my house, my wife Anna and my son Tobias were given back to me. At the feast of Pentecost, the sacred feast of the Seven Weeks, they prepared a good meal for me and I sat down to eat. ² I saw the many dishes and I said to my son: "Go and bring as many as you can find of our relatives who are in need and who remember the Lord. I will wait here for them." ³ When Tobias returned, he said: "Father, one of ours has been strangled and thrown into the public square." ⁴ Before I ate anything I hurried out and carried this man into the house and waited till sunset. ⁵ When I returned home I washed myself and ate my food in sorrow. ⁶ I remembered the

prophecy which Amos uttered against Bethel: "Your feasts will be turned into mourning. All your sons will be turned into lamentations," and I wept.

After sunset I went out and, after I had dug a trench, I buried the man. ⁸ My neighbours mocked me, saying: "He no longer fears to be put to death for doing that; he had to flee but look he is again burying the dead." ⁹ That same night, after I had buried the body, I returned home. I washed myself and went out into the courtyard to sleep against the wall; my face was uncovered because of the heat. ¹⁰ I did not see that there were sparrows on the wall of the courtyard and, as my eyes were open, the hot droppings from the sparrows fell into my eyes and formed a white film on my eyes. I went to find doctors to attend to me for medical treatment but the more ointments they smeared on my eyes, the more blind I became because of the film. Finally I became totally blind. I suffered from blindness for four years. All my brothers were burdened because of me. Ahikar kept me for two years before he departed for Elymiade.

¹¹ My wife Anna worked hard at a woman's task, weaving. ¹² On the seventh day of the month of March she cut the cloth and delivered it to her employers. They paid her wages and gave her, over and above, a young goat for food. ¹³ When she returned home the kid began to cry. I said to her, "Where does the little kid come from? Did you steal it? Return it to its owners for we are not allowed to eat anything that is stolen"

¹⁴ But she said, "It is a gift which has been given to me in addition to my wages." "I don't believe it. I tell you to return it to its owners." I was ashamed of her.

She replied, "What about your own almsgiving and your good deeds? I have to put up with all this from you."

Prayer of Tobit

+ 3 ¹ Distressed, I wept and prayed and expressing my sorrow, I said, ² "You are

18. 2 K 19, 35 6. Am 8, 10 10. Mk 5, 26 13. Dr 22, 1

Tobit's preoccupation about handing his religion down to his son and his concern for the future of his son, show that he is a real father.

+ He dedicated his life in faithfulness to God and he finds himself poor, blind and, moreover, insulted by his wife, Anna. What is his attitude? He presents his problem to God without complaining about anyone, not even about his wife.

In the Bible we repeatedly see that God tests us before granting us a special favour. We will really understand when we hear what Christ says to the disciples of Emmaus: "Did not the Messiah

have to suffer all this to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26).

He is in solidarity with the sins of his people and he finds it just to be punished, even though he asks to be freed from this punishment.

He feels incapable of fighting alone in life, and he asks for death, but he leaves everything in God's hands. Christ did exactly the same (Matthew 26:39).

His prayer is to ask for strength and the ability to fulfil what God says, what he demands and not to present God his own plan and ask him to realize it, as we often do when we pray.

just, O Lord; all your actions and all your ways are merciful and just; your judgments are always true and just. ³Remember me, Lord, and look on me. Do not punish me for my sins nor for the wrongs I have committed through ignorance. Pardon the sins which my fathers have committed in your sight, ⁴for they disobeyed your commandments. You have allowed us to suffer pillage, captivity and death. You have allowed us to be mocked by all the pagan nations among whom we have been dispersed. ⁵Ah well! All your judgments are just when you choose to punish me for my sins and those of my fathers, because we have not accomplished your will, nor have we sincerely obeyed your commands. We have not walked before you in truth.

⁶Do with me as you will. Take my life and turn me into dust, because I prefer death to life. In this way free me and let me return to dust. It is better for me to die than to live, because these unjust reproaches have caused me great distress. Command that I be now released from trials, and let me enter my eternal dwelling place. Do not turn your face away from me.

Sara's misfortune

■ ⁷That same day, at Ecbatana in Media, Sara, the daughter of Ragouel, was insulted in a similar way by her father's young maidservants. ⁸Sara had had seven husbands, but the demon Asmodeus had killed each one of them before the marriage had been consummated. The maidservants said, "It was you who killed your husbands. You have had seven husbands and you have not enjoyed marital relationship with any of them. ⁹Why do you punish us? Since they are dead, go and join them. May we never see a son or daughter of yours!"

¹⁰That same day Sara was so distressed in mind that she went to the upper room in her father's house. She wished to hang herself. But she thought better of it and said: "If people ever reproached my father and said to him: 'You had an only daughter whom you cherished and she hanged herself because she was unhappy' I would cause my father in his old age to die of grief. It is better for me not to hang myself but

to ask the Lord that I may die and not live to hear any more insults."

¹¹At that moment she stretched forth her hands towards the window and prayed, saying, "You are blessed, O Lord my God, and blessed is your holy and glorious Name throughout the ages. May all your works praise you forever. ¹²Lord I have turned my eyes and my face towards you. ¹³Command that I be set free from the earth and that I may hear more insults. ¹⁴You know, O Lord, that I am pure of all contact with man; ¹⁵that I have not defiled my name, nor my father's name in the country of my captivity. I am my father's only daughter. He has no other son or daughter who can inherit from him, neither has he a close relative who can be given to me as a husband. So, after my seven husbands are dead, I have no one to live for. If it does not seem good to you, O Lord, that I should die, command that people will respect me and have pity on me and that I may hear no more insults."

¹⁶The Lord in His glory heard the prayer of Tobit and of Sara ¹⁷and he sent Raphael to heal them both – to give back his sight to Tobit and to give Sara, the daughter of Ragouel, to Tobit's son Tobias, as his wife. Also, Raphael would enchain the wicked demon Asmodeus so that Sara would be the wife of Tobias.

At the same time Tobit, who had gone for a short walk, returned to the house; and Sara, the daughter of Ragouel, came down from the upper room.

Tobit, now old, sends Tobias to a distant land

4 ¹The same day Tobit remembered the money which he had deposited with Gabael at Rages in Media, and he said to himself: ²"I have asked for death, had I better not call Tobias and tell him about this money before I die?"

³He called Tobias and said to him: "My son, when I die, see to my burial. Look after your mother. Honour her all the days of your life. Do what pleases her and do not cause her any pain. ⁴Remember, my son, that she suffered much pain on your account when you were in her womb. When she dies, bury her

11. Dn 6, 11

3. Sir 7, 27

■ When we find ourselves in Sarah's situation, we immediately blame God.

Sarah thinks about her problem and in thinking she sees that she must change her mind and must not ask for death. When we look at one isolated event in life we can despair, but if we look at the whole, we will always find some reason to keep on struggling.

Sarah's reason to keep on living is her love for her father and her desire to give him heirs.

Whenever there is despair it is because we look only at one aspect of life, as for example, the economic aspect. Oftentimes, a fighter or a ruler wants to give up everything because he is being criticized, without looking at all the good he would stop accomplishing.

next to me, in the same tomb. ⁵ Always remember the Lord our God. Do not consent to sin or go against his commandments. Act justly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the paths of wrongdoing, ⁶ for, if you act uprightly, you will be successful in all you do.

⁷ Give alms from what you have to those who act justly and do good. Do not be grudging when you give alms. Do not turn away your face from anyone who is poor so that God may not turn away his face from you. ⁸ Give alms in proportion to the amount you have; if you have little, do not be afraid to give alms according to the little you have.

⁹ In this way you are storing up treasure against the day of tribulation because ¹⁰ alms-giving, frees us from death and keeps us from wandering in the darkness. ¹¹ For, in fact, alms-giving is, for the man who practises it, a precious treasure in the eyes of God.

¹² Keep yourself, my son, from all unlawful sexual relations and above all, take a wife from the tribe of your fathers. Do not take a foreign woman, one who does not belong to the tribe of our fathers, because we are children of the prophets. Remember, my son, that in former times our fathers, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob took wives from among their relatives so that they might be blessed in their children and that their race might possess the land. ¹³ Love your relatives and do not despise the sons and daughters of your people to the point where you would take a foreign woman as your wife. Pride brings about ruin and your complete downfall; in laziness are found extreme humiliation and indigence; laziness is the mother of want, hunger, famine.

¹⁴ Do not keep back overnight the wages of any man who has worked for you but give them as soon as possible. If you serve God, you will be rewarded.

Take care in all your actions and behave correctly in your conduct. ¹⁵ Do not do to another what you would hate to be done to yourself. Do not drink wine to the point of drunkenness; do not let drunkenness be a life-long companion. ¹⁶ Give your bread to those who are hungry and your clothes to those who are naked; give alms of everything you have over. ¹⁷ Scatter your bread on the tombs of the just;

do not give it to those who are sinners. ¹⁸ Take counsel of those who are wise and do not despise any useful advice.

¹⁹ In all circumstances bless the Lord and ask him that your ways may be upright; that all your plans and projects may succeed because not every nation has true wisdom. It is the Lord who gives everything and he humiliates those whom he wishes. My son, remember my advice and do not let it be erased from your heart.

²⁰ I also wish to mention the ten talents of silver which I placed on deposit with Gabael, son of Gabria, at Rages in Media. ²¹ Do not fear my son, because we have become poor. If you fear God, if you abstain from all sin and if you do what is pleasing in God's sight – in this way you will have great wealth."

5 ¹ Tobias spoke to Tobit, "Father I shall do everything you have asked. ² But how can I get the money from this man. He does not know me and I do not know him. What proof of identity shall I give him to make him trust me and give me the money. Also, I do not know the way to Media."

³ Tobit gave Tobias a receipt and said to him, "My son, find a trustworthy man to go with you, and on your return I shall give him a salary until he dies. When you reach Rages, collect the money from the man Gabael."

He needs a companion and is given an angel

◆ ⁴ Tobias went to look for a man and he found Raphael. Raphael was an angel but Tobias did not know this. ⁵ Tobias said to Gabriel "Can you go with me to Rages in Media? Do you know the place?" ⁶ The angel said to Tobias, "I will go with you. I know the way and I have even spent a night with your kinsman, Gabael."

⁷ Tobias said to Raphael, "Wait for me. I am going to speak to my father. I want you to come with me to Media and I will pay you." ⁸ Raphael said to Tobias, "Go, but do not delay." ⁹ Tobias went in and said to his father. ¹⁰ "I have found the man who will go with me." His father said, "Bring this man to me. I want to know the name of his tribe. I want to know if I can trust him to go with you." Tobias went

7. Dt 15, 10; 2 Cor 9, 7; Pro 19, 17 9. Mt 6, 20; 1 Tim 6, 19 14. Lev 19, 13 15. Lk 6, 31

◆ Tobias' journey to Rages is also a spiritual journey. He meets an angel of God in human form; he also faces a demon who kills sensual men.

Tobias tries to remain faithful to the God he loves, and his friend, Azariah, helps him with his advices. The common search is necessary to

discover God's will, and so, Tobias is going to b God's instrument to free Sarah from the demon.

The angel teaches Tobias how to obtain God's blessings at the beginning of his marriage. There is, obviously, no sin in marital relations, and yet Tobias must reject the temptation to seek his own pleasure in order to achieve a union based on love and surrender.

only son and I fear that once I have entered the room I shall die, like all those before me, because a demon loves her, and he harms those who approach her. ¹⁵Well, I fear death. I also fear causing my father and mother to die of grief on my account, for they have no other son to bury them." ¹⁶The angel said to Tobias, "do you not remember your father's advice to you, telling you to marry a woman of your own tribe? Well, listen to me, my friend. She will be your wife. Do not worry about the demon as this very night she will become your wife."

¹⁷When you enter the wedding chamber you will take some glowing embers of incense, and you will put on top of them part of the heart and of the liver of the fish. ¹⁸As soon as the fire will begin to smoke, the demon will smell it and flee never to return. And when you go to Sara, stand up together and call on the all-merciful God. He will keep you safe because he has compassion. Do not be afraid because from all eternity Sara has been destined to be your wife. You will save her, and she will go with us. And I am sure that she will bear you children.

When Tobias heard Raphael's words, he loved Sara and his heart became strongly attached to her.

7 When they arrived in Ecbatana Tobias said to Raphael "Friend Azarias, take me straightaway to our friend Ragouel." So Raphael led Tobias to Ragouel's house and they found Ragouel sitting by the door of the courtyard.

²Ragouel said to his wife, Edna, "This young man is very like my cousin Tobit!"

³Edna questioned them, "Where have you come from, my friends?" They replied, "We are of the sons of Naphtali who live as deported in Nineveh." ⁴She asked them, "Do you know my kinsman, Tobit?" ⁵They said, "Yes we know him." She continued, "Is he in good health." Then Tobias said, "Tobit is my father."

⁶Ragouel ran towards him and covered him with kisses, then in tears he blessed Tobias and said to him, "Blessings on you, you are the son of a good and worthy man!" ⁷When he learned that Tobit had lost his sight he grieved and wept. "What a misfortune that a man who is so just and generous should become blind!"

⁸His wife Edna and his daughter Sara wept also and they received Tobias and Raphael with great kindness. ⁹They killed a sheep and served them numerous dishes.

How God's children marry

After they had bathed and washed, as they were relaxing before the meal, Tobias said to Raphael, "Friend Azarias, tell Ragouel to give me Sara my kinswoman. Talk about what you were saying during our journey that the matter may come about and be accomplished." ¹⁰Ragouel overheard the conversation and he said to Tobias, "Eat, drink and be merry tonight. You are the man who has most right to take Sara my daughter because you are my kinsman. Indeed it is impossible for me to give her to any other man but you, because you are my closest relative. But, my son, I must tell you the whole story. ¹¹I gave her to seven husbands from among our kinsmen. They each died on the wedding night. But, for the moment, my son, eat and drink and the Lord will arrange things for you."

Tobias said, "I shall eat nothing if you do not stop now and bring this matter to a conclusion." Ragouel said to Tobias, "Take her from now on; I give her to you according to the Law of Moses and you have to understand that God himself gives her to you. Receive your kinswoman, from now on you are her brother and she is your sister. She is yours from today and forever. Now God will bless you this night and may he give you both his mercy and peace."

¹²He called his daughter Sara and taking her by the hand he gave her to Tobias as his wife. He said, "According to Moses' Law, take her now and bring her to your father's house." And he blessed them. ¹³Ragouel then called Edna his wife; taking a sheet of parchment, he wrote down a matrimonial contract and they both affixed their seals. ¹⁴Then they all began to eat. ¹⁵Ragouel called his wife and said to her, "My sister, prepare the other room and take Sara there." ¹⁶Edna did as Ragouel told her and she took Sara to this room and Sara began to cry. Edna dried her daughter's tears and said, ¹⁷"Have courage, my child, the God of heaven and earth will change your sorrow into joy. Have confidence, my daughter!"

+ 8 When they had finished eating and drinking they wished to go to bed so they escorted Tobias to the bedroom where Sara was. ²Tobias remembered Raphael's words. He took the liver and the heart of the fish which he had in a basket and put them on the hot coals of incense. ³The smell of the fish made the devil flee to the upper regions of Egypt where Raphael chained him up.

6:18. Gen 24, 14

19. Gen 24, 67

7:3. Gen 29, 4

11. Gen 24, 35

+ In other biblical passages, we often find the evil spirit (demon) working with the authoriza-

tion and under the authority of God. God tests Tobit by sending him blindness and depriving

⁴When Sara's parents had left the room and closed the door, Tobias got up from the bed and said to Sara, "Get up, my sister, and let us ask the Lord to have mercy on us and save us."

⁵She got up and they began to pray, asking that they be given life. Tobias began like this,

"May you be blessed, O Lord God of our fathers, and may your holy and glorious Name be blessed forever. May the heavens and all creatures bless you. * You created Adam and you gave him Eve, his wife, as a helper and companion, so that from these two the human race might be born.

You said: 'It is not good that man should be alone, let us give him a companion who is like himself.' * Now Lord, I take my sister to myself in sincerity and love, not merely seeking pleasure. Have mercy on us and grant us a long life together." * Together they said, "Amen," and returned to bed for the night.

Ragouel got up early and called his servants and told them to dig a grave. ¹⁰For he said to himself, "What if this man should also die and we become an object of scorn and reproach." * Then Ragouel entered the house and said to his wife, ¹¹Edna, "Send one of the maidservants to see if Tobias is alive. If he has died, we will bury him without anyone knowing."

¹²The maidservant opened the door and saw them asleep. ¹⁴She then went to tell them that Tobias was alive. ¹⁵Ragouel blessed the Lord saying, "May you be blessed, O Lord, with all pure and holy blessings. May the saints and all your creatures bless you. May all the angels and the elect bless you forever. ¹⁶May you be blessed for having filled me with joy. What I feared, has not happened but you have treated us with great kindness ¹⁷and have had mercy on these two who are only children. Have mercy on them Lord, and give them your grace and protection so that they may be blessed with good health and great joy all their lives. May they live always in your grace."

¹⁸Then he sent his servants to fill in the grave before daybreak.

Ragouel organized for Tobias and Sara a wedding feast which was to last fourteen days. ¹⁹He told his wife to bake a batch of bread. He went to the stable, brought out two oxen and four sheep and ordered that they be killed and prepared. ²⁰He then called Tobias and said to him, "You will stay here for fourteen days, you

will eat and drink in my house and you will bring joy to my daughter, who has suffered so much." Ragouel swore an oath and told Tobias that he should not set out before the fourteen days of the wedding festivities were over. And he said, "You will go home to your father in safety. ²¹You will take with you half of my possessions; the other half will be yours when I and Edna die. Have confidence, my son, I am now your father and Edna is your mother. From now on we shall be close to you and your wife. Have confidence!"

9 ¹Tobias called Raphael and said to him, ²"Brother Azarias, please take with you a manservant and two camels and go to Rages in Media. ³Call on Gabael, give him the receipt and recover the money. Then invite Gabael to the wedding feast. You saw that Ragouel made me swear an oath, so I may not depart from this house without breaking the oath. ⁴Yet you know that my father is counting the days and if I delay longer than necessary he will be worried.

⁵Raphael set out for Rages in Media and stayed the night in Gabael's house. Raphael presented him with the receipt, and Gabael brought out the sealed bags of money and gave them to him. ⁶The next morning they arose early and set off to the wedding. When they entered Ragouel's house, they found Tobias at the table. Gabael went to him and embraced him. He wept and blessed Tobias saying, "Good and worthy man, son of a good and honest father, a man who is just and compassionate, may the Lord of Heaven bless you and your wife. May He also bless the father and mother of your wife. Blessed be God because I have seen Tobias, my cousin, who is so like his father."

10 ¹Each morning Tobit counted the days till Tobias should have returned from his journey. When the time was up and his son, Tobias, and his companion, Raphael, had not yet returned, ²he thought, "Maybe he has received a refusal, or perhaps Gabael is dead and there is no one to hand over the money." ³He became very sad. ⁴Anna, his wife, said, "My son is dead or he would not delay so long." She began to lament over him saying, ⁵"why did I let you go, light of my eyes!" ⁶Tobit said to her, "Calm yourself, my sister. Do not worry. He is well." ⁷She replied,

him of his possessions; and in the case of Sarah, allowing that a spirit should prevent her from marrying.

Marriage is not only a means of satisfying sexual instinct, but a way of cooperating with

God in his plan of creation and salvation of the world. Both Tobias and Sarah wish to have children so that they may pass on to them their faith and assure the continuity of God's people.

3. Mt 12, 43; 12, 29

6. Sir 36, 29; Gen 2, 18

19. Gen 18, 6



"Keep quiet, do not try to deceive me, my child is dead." Every day she went out along the road which her son had taken. By day, she took no food; by night, she never ceased crying, unable to sleep.

When the fourteen days of festivities were over during which Ragouel had sworn that Tobias should stay with him, Tobias went to Ragouel and said, "Let me return home because my parents will certainly be despairing that they will never see me again." Ragouel replied, "Stay with me and I will send messengers to your father to give him news of you." Tobias said, "No, let me go to them." Then Ragouel handed over to him his wife Sara and half of all his goods: servants, oxen, sheep, donkeys, camels, clothes, silver and various other things. Ragouel blessed them and allowed them to set out. "Bidding farewell to Tobias he said to him, 'Goodbye, my son, safe journey! May the Lord of Heaven bless you and make you fruitful and may I see your children before I die.'"

¹²To his daughter, Sara, he said, "Honour your parents-in-law, since from now on they are your parents just as we are who gave you life. Go in peace, my daughter and may we always hear good things of you." He embraced her and let them depart. ¹³Edna, in her turn, said to Tobias, "My dear son, may the Lord bring you back one day so that I may see your children and be happy before the Lord. I entrust my daughter to your care. Do not cause her any sadness."

¹⁴After that Tobias left Ragouel's house. He praised God who had brought his journey to such a happy conclusion, and he blessed Ragouel and his wife, Edna.

Tobias returns to his father's house

11 ¹When they arrived near Kaserin which faces the city of Nineveh, ²Raphael said to Tobias, "You know in what state your father, Tobit, was when we left him; ³let us go ahead to prepare the house before your wife Sara arrives. ⁴Bring with you the gall of the fish." The dog also went with them, walking behind them.

⁵Now Anna was sitting there, scanning the road along which her son should return. ⁶She saw Tobias and Raphael coming in the dis-

tance and said to the father of Tobias, "Your son is coming with the man who accompanied him."

⁷While Tobias and Raphael were still going along the road, Raphael said to Tobias, "I am sure that your father will regain his sight. ⁸Rub his eyes with the fish gall and when he feels his eyes itching, he will rub them and the film will come away like scales from his eyes. He will regain his sight and see the light."

⁹Anna ran to meet Tobias and threw her arms around his neck saying, "At last I have seen you again, my child. Now I can die!" And both of them began to cry. ¹⁰Tobit also got up and, stumbling, arrived at the door of the courtyard. Tobias ran to him ¹¹with the fish gall in his hand. He breathed on his father's eyes, embraced him and said, "Father, have confidence!" ¹²Then he spread the fish gall on Tobit's eyes. Tobias waited. ¹³When his eyes began to itch Tobit rubbed them and with both hands scaled off the film from the corners of his eyes. When Tobit saw his son he threw his arms around Tobias' neck ¹⁴and began to weep. He said, "Blessed be you, O God. Blessed be your Name forever. Blessed be your holy angels. ¹⁵You have punished me, but you have taken pity on me, and now I can see my son Tobias."

Tobias was very happy. After entering the house he told his father about the important things that had happened in Media. He told his father about the successful outcome of his journey, how he got the money, and how he married Sara, daughter of Ragouel, who just then was approaching the gates of Nineveh.

¹⁶Tobit, happy and praising God, went out to meet his daughter-in-law at the gates of Nineveh. All those who saw him, walking himself and unaided, were amazed that he could see. ¹⁷Tobit proclaimed to them that God had pity on him and cured him. Then he went to Sara and blessed her saying, "Welcome, daughter! May God be blessed for having brought you to us and may your father and mother also be blessed."

It was a day of great rejoicing for all Tobit's relatives who lived in Nineveh. ¹⁸Ahikar, Tobit's nephew and Nabad arrived (from Elymiade) and the wedding celebrations lasted for a week.

11:9, Gen 46, 30

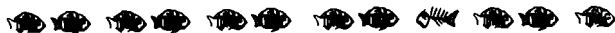
13, Lk 15, 20

■ We see that, many times, God gives a partial reward on earth to those who are faithful to his law: the beatitudes of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount say this clearly (Matthew 5:1-12).

There is something great in the angel's words: God takes into account all the little and seemingly unimportant things we do in life.

It is good to keep the secrets of kings but ... make known the glorious works of God. We must proclaim the favours God grants so that others may believe in God's love.

Almsgiving preserves from death; it purifies from all sin. The book of Tobit emphasizes this idea. Giving alms is one way of showing o-



It is fitting to discover and praise the works of God

12 When the wedding feast was over Tobit called Tobias, his son, and said to him, "Be sure you give the wages to the man who accompanied you, and we should add something extra." ²Tobias said, "What shall I give him? It would not be too much if I were to give him half of what I have brought back since ³he has brought me home again safe and sound. He has taken care of my wife and he helped me to get back the money. He has also cured your blindness." ⁴The old man said, "that amount would be well justified in his case."

⁵Then Tobias called the angel and said to him, "Please take half of all that you have brought." ⁶The angel took Tobit and Tobias on one side and said to them,

"Bless God, return thanks to him, proclaim his glory and render him thanks before all the living for all he has done for you. It is good to praise God and to exalt his Name, by making known in a worthy manner the story of God's deeds. Do not be slow in giving him thanks. ⁷It is good to hide the secrets of kings but to make known publicly the works of God. Do good, and evil will not harm you. ⁸It is a good thing to accompany prayer with fasting and almsgiving and justice. It is better to do a little with honour than much with injustice. It is better to give alms than to treasure up gold. ⁹Almsgiving preserves from death; it purifies from all sin. Those people who give alms and act justly will have a long life ¹⁰but sinners only harm themselves.

¹¹I will hide nothing from you. Yes, I have said that it is good to keep the secrets of kings but to make known publicly the glorious works of God. ¹²Tobit, when you and your daughter-in-law Sara prayed, I kept the remembrance of your prayer before the Holy One; when you, Tobit, buried the dead, ¹³I was with you in the same way; and when you did not hesitate to rise up and leave your meal in order to hide the dead man, your good deed did not go unnoticed because I was with you.

¹⁴Well, God sent me to cure you and to cure also Sara, your daughter-in-law. ¹⁵I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who pres-

ent the prayers of holy people and who stand before the glory of God."

¹⁶They both trembled with fear. They threw themselves face downwards on the ground because they were seized with terror. ¹⁷But Raphael said to them, "Do not be afraid; be at peace! Bless God always, ¹⁸because I did not come on my own account but because God willed it. Bless him forever. ¹⁹All the time that I was visible to you I neither ate nor drank anything. I only appeared to do so. ²⁰Now bless and give thanks to God, because I am returning to the One who sent me. Write down in a book all that has happened."

²¹Then he rose up and disappeared. Tobit and Tobias got up, but Raphael was no longer visible. ²²They made known the great and wonderful works of God and how an angel of the Lord had appeared to them.

The song of Tobit

13 Tobit, in an ecstasy of joy, composed a prayer: "Blessed be God living and reigning for all ages.

²It is he who punishes and he who has mercy; who makes people go down to hell and rise up again.

No one can escape his hand.

³Give him thanks, sons of Israel, before all the nations.

Though he has dispersed you among them ⁴he now shows you his greatness.

Exalt him before all the living, because he is our God and Lord, our Father forever.

⁵He punishes us for our wrongdoing but again he will forgive us.

He will bring us together again from amongst all the nations among whom we have been dispersed.

⁶If you turn back to him with all your heart and soul,

and live justly before him, then he will turn back to you and will no longer hide his face from you.

⁷See what he has done for you and return him thanks aloud.

Bless the Lord who alone is just and praise the King of ages.

9. Sir 3, 30; Dn 4, 24
6. Dn 30, 2

15. Lk 1, 19; Rev 8, 2; Mt 18, 10

20. Jdg 13, 20; Jn 20, 17; Acts 1, 9

love for our neighbour. However, remember this was written in a society very different from our own. In those days, men were not able to transform the economic laws for the good of all. All they could do was to share their resources

with those who had less. Now, our love for our neighbour will be revealed in our efforts to achieve a more efficient and more just society which gives what is needed to everyone.

⁸I, in the land of my captivity, will return him thanks
and show his strength and greatness to my sinful people.

Be converted you sinners and live justly before him,
certain that he will be pleased with you and show you mercy.

⁹I will praise my God the King of heaven;
my soul, radiant with happiness, will proclaim his greatness.

¹⁰May all in Jerusalem give thanks to him.

¹¹Jerusalem, holy city, God will punish you because of the sins of your children
but he will have pity once more on the children of the just.

Jerusalem, return thanks to the Lord in a worthy manner
and bless the King of the ages,
in order that his Temple may be rebuilt in your midst with joy;

¹²that, there, God will gladden your exiles and show love to the unfortunate.

¹³Many nations will come from afar to celebrate the Name of the Lord God.

They will carry gifts in their hands, gifts for the King of heaven.

Generations after generations will manifest their joy
and your name will be glorified forever.

¹⁴Jerusalem, cursed be all who hate you.
Blessed forever be those who love you.

¹⁵You will rejoice and be glad because the children of the just will be gathered again to praise the Lord of all ages.

¹⁶Blessed those who love you, Jerusalem, and rejoice in your peace.

Blessed also those who have sorrowed because of your calamities;

they will rejoice again on seeing your glory
and they will share your happiness forever.

May my soul bless God, the great King,
¹⁷because Jerusalem will be rebuilt.

Her gates will be built of sapphires and emeralds,

her walls of precious stones, her towers and ramparts of pure gold.

her squares will be paved with mosaics of beryl, of ruby, of stone of Ophir.

¹⁸All her streets will cry out with joy and her inhabitants shout, "Alleluia."

They will praise God saying, "Blessed be God who has glorified you forever."

Last words of Tobit

14 ¹In this way Tobit ended his song of thanksgiving. Tobit died peacefully at the age of one hundred and twelve years and was buried with honour in Nineveh. ²He was sixty-two years old when he became blind. Eight years later he regained his sight. He lived happily, practised almsgiving, and continued to praise God and to proclaim his great works. ³When he was very old he called Tobias and said to him, "My son, you see that I have become old and that I am near to death. Take your children ⁴and go to Media because I believe in the word of God which Nahum prophesied about Nineveh. Everything that the prophets, sent by God, pronounced about Assyria and Nineveh will happen. No word will be forgotten but it will all come to pass in due time. Nineveh will be destroyed. You will be safer in Media, where there will be peace for some time, because I am certain and I believe that all that God has said will be fulfilled.

Our brothers and sisters who live in the land of Israel will be dispersed and led away into captivity. As a result the whole of the land of Israel will be deserted. Jerusalem and Samaria will be desolate. The House of God will be burnt down and left in ruins for some time. ⁵But God will again take pity on his people and they will return to their land. They will rebuild the Temple, though it will not be like the first one until better times come. When that time comes they will all return from captivity. They will rebuild Jerusalem in all its magnificence. In it they will rebuild the House of God in all its glory for all generations to come, just as the prophets have foretold.

⁶People of all nations will be converted and know the true God. They will bury their idols which led them into error ⁷and they will praise the God of Justice. All the Israelites saved at that time will remember the Lord in all truth. They will come together and go to Jerusalem. They will live securely forever in the land of Abraham which will be given back to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice. But sinners and the unjust will disappear from the earth.

⁸My son, leave Nineveh. Do not remain here.

⁹Now, my children, I give you this advice: serve God and do what is pleasing in his sight. Teach your children how to exercise justice and how to give alms. Teach them also to remember God and to bless his name sincerely at all times, with all their strength.

¹⁰The very day that you bury your mother



here beside me, do not stay overnight in this place. I know that the people here commit many injustices and practice great treachery and no one is ashamed of doing so. You see what Nadab did to Ahikar my nephew who had brought him up. He buried him alive. But God punished Nadab by exposing his injustice. He brought Ahikar into the light and sent Nadab down into eternal darkness because he had tried to kill him. Because he gave alms, Ahikar was delivered from the death planned for him by Nadab. Instead, Nadab fell into the trap and perished. ¹¹See how almsgiving and uprightness can save you and how wrongdoing leads to death. But I feel I am breathing my last." They laid him on his bed and he died. He was given an honourable burial.

¹²When Anna, his mother, died, Tobias buried her next to his father. Then Tobias with his wife and family made their way to Media and settled in Ecbatana near Ragouel, his father-in-law. ¹³He took great care of his parents-in-law in their old age and he buried them with honour in Ecbatana in Media. Tobias inherited Ragouel's fortune as well as that of his father, Tobit. ¹⁴Tobias died at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years at Ecbatana in Media. ¹⁵But before he died he saw the downfall of Nineveh which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed. He saw the Ninevites and the Assyrians reduced to slavery and taken to Media. Thus, before he died, he was able to rejoice over the fate of Nineveh. He blessed the Lord God forever.



JUDITH

A power that destroys

1 ¹It was in the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, who ruled in the great city of Nineveh that, at the same time, Arphaxad, king of the Medes, ruled at Ecbatana. ²Arphaxad had built around Ecbatana ramparts of stone, with each stone cut to the size of one and a half metres wide and three metres long. The ramparts were thirty-five metres high and twenty-five metres wide. ³He built at the gates city towers which

were fifty metres high and rested on foundations twenty metres wide. ⁴The gates themselves were thirty-five metres high and twenty metres wide, wide enough for his valiant warriors and foot soldiers to march through them in battle array. ⁵In those days, King Nebuchadnezzar made war on King Arphaxad in the Great Plain, that is, the plain near the territory of the Ragae.

⁶All the people who lived on the mountains, those who lived along the banks of the

The book of Judith is a short novel (see introduction to Esther).

There was a promise made by God to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3); it is insisted upon more clearly in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. According to this promise, God would defend his people when they were faithful to the Law, but he would deliver them to their enemies when they did not follow the Law.

The book of Judith (*Judith* means the *Jewess*) attempts to demonstrate that God keeps his promise.

God's people had returned from exile a short while back. They had rebuilt the capital, Jerusalem, had restored the Temple and the worship of God, and were resettling the entire country. In short, they were living a period of faithfulness to God, and according to his promise, God was to protect them.



rivers Euphrates, Tigris and Hydaspes, those on the plains of Arioch, king of the Elamites, and many other peoples joined the ranks of the Chaldeans to fight against the sons of Cheleoud.

⁷Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, sent his messengers to all those living in Persia and in the West, to the inhabitants of Cilicia, Damascus, Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, to those along the seacoast, ⁸to the people of Carmel, Gilead, Upper Galilee and the Great Plain of Esdraelon, ⁹to those in Samaria and its towns, and beyond the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, Bethany, Chelous, Kadesh, the River of Egypt, Tahpanhes, Raameses, and all the country of Goshen ¹⁰as far as the region beyond Tanis and Memphis, and to all the inhabitants of Egypt as far as the country of Ethiopia.

¹¹But the inhabitants of all these regions took no notice of the order of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, and did not join him in waging war. They no longer feared him because they considered him just like any other man. They sent back his messengers empty-handed and shamefaced. ¹²Nebuchadnezzar was greatly enraged against all these regions and swore by his throne and by his kingdom to punish all the districts of Cilicia, Damascus and Syria, and to put to the sword all who were in the lands of Moab, Ammon, the whole of Judea, and all those in Egypt as far as the coasts between the two seas. ¹³In the seventeenth year, Nebuchadnezzar went to battle with his army against King Arphaxad, and conquered him in the campaign. He drove back the army of Arphaxad with all his cavalry and chariots. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar occupied all the cities. Finally, he reached Ecbatana where he demolished its towers, pillaged the streets of the city and reduced its splendour to ruins. ¹⁵He pursued Arphaxad into the mountains of the Ragae, pierced him through with arrows and utterly destroyed him. ¹⁶Then he returned to Nineveh with a great crowd of followers and a considerable multitude of soldiers. He and his entire army stayed there amusing themselves and feasting for one hundred and twenty days.

o2 ¹On the twenty-second day of the first month in the eighteenth year of his reign, there was talk in the House of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, of punishing all those who had disobeyed the king's commands. ²He called together his ministers and his noblemen, and told them his secret

plan. ³He proclaimed publicly the total destruction of the land and the punishment of all those who had disregarded his call.

⁴As soon as Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, had made this decision, he summoned Holofernes, the chief general of his army who was second in command, and said to him. ⁵"So says the Great King, Lord of all the earth, you will set out from my presence, taking with you men of true courage, about one hundred and twenty foot soldiers and a great number of horses with about twelve thousand cavalymen. ⁶You will go to all the countries in the West and punish all the peoples, because they disregarded my own words. ⁷Tell them to submit themselves to me on land and water, lest in my anger I myself march against them. I will cover all the face of the earth with the footprints of my army, and I will give them over to my men to be plundered by them. ⁸The ravines will be filled with their wounded, rivers and torrents will be full of their dead. ⁹I will lead away their prisoners as captives to the uttermost parts of the earth. ¹⁰Go, then, and occupy in my name all their territories; if they surrender to you, keep them for me that I may punish them. ¹¹Show no pity to those who resist you. Hand them over to be massacred and plundered throughout all their lands. ¹²For, as truly as I live and by the power of my kingdom, I will carry out with my own hands what I have said. ¹³And you, do not disobey the words of your lord nor fail to carry them out exactly as I have instructed you. Do not change any of them."

¹⁴Holofernes went out from the presence of his lord and called together all the chiefs of staff, the generals and commanders of the army of Assyria. ¹⁵He gathered about a hundred and twenty thousand specially chosen men for the army as his lord had ordered him, and twelve thousand archers. ¹⁶He arranged them in battle positions. ¹⁷He took along camels, donkeys and mules to carry the baggage, and a great number of sheep, oxen, goats and many others for their food. ¹⁸He took a sufficient quantity of provisions for each man, and an abundant supply of gold and silver from the king's treasury.

¹⁹Then Holofernes set out on the march with all his army, with their chariots, cavalry and picked foot soldiers going ahead of King Nebuchadnezzar to cover all the lands to the West. ²⁰They were accompanied by a great

o Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Nineveh, passes a law demanding to be acknowledged as the only God; people resist. The king sends his

armies to force people to comply; he conquers the king of the Medes; but then he faces the Jewish people.



crowd of people, so many were they that they were like locusts or the dust of the earth.

²¹ After marching for three days from Nineveh, Holofernes and his men reached the plain of Bectileth where they encamped before the city, near the mountains to the north of Upper Cilicia. ²² Then Holofernes took all his army, foot soldiers, cavalry and chariots, and marched into the mountain region. ²³ He utterly destroyed Put and Lud, and plundered all the land of Rassis and of Ishmael on the border of the desert to the south of the country of the Chaldeans. ²⁴ Then he followed the Euphrates, crossed Mesopotamia and destroyed all the cities high above the torrent of Abron until he reached the sea. ²⁵ He took possession of the land of Cilicia, and cut down all who opposed him, and arrived at the land of Japheth in the south toward Arabia. ²⁶ He surrounded all the children of Midian, burned their tents and destroyed their livestock. ²⁷ Then descending to the plain of Damascus at the time of the wheat harvest, he burned all their fields, scattered all their animals and killed the young ones, pillaged their villages, devastated their plains, and put all their young men to the sword.

²⁸ The fear and terror of him fell upon all the inhabitants of the seacoast, those in Tyre and Sidon, of Sur, Ocina and Jamnia. The people of Azotus and Ascalon also feared him.

3 ¹ They therefore sent messengers to Holofernes offering him terms of peace: ² "See, we consider ourselves as servants of Nebuchadnezzar, the great king, do with us as you will. ³ All our farms, our whole territory, all our wheatfields, our oxen and our sheepfolds lie before you – use them as you please. ⁴ See, our towns and all their inhabitants are yours, deal with them as you wish." ⁵ These men went to Holofernes and repeated these words.

⁶ Then Holofernes moved down to the seacoast with his army. He stationed garrisons in the hill cities and took from them men whom he chose as auxiliaries. ⁷ The people of these cities received him, as did all the people of the surrounding countryside, with garlands, singing and dancing to the music of tambourines. ⁸ Nevertheless, he still laid waste all their land, cut down their sacred woods and destroyed all their gods that all people of all languages and nations might worship Nebuchadnezzar alone and proclaim him as god.

⁹ Then he arrived opposite Esdraelion, near Dothan, facing the great chain of Judean hills. ¹⁰ He encamped between Geba Scythopolis, and remained there a month in order to reorganise the provisions of his army.

4 ¹ The children of Israel in Judea learned what had happened to the other nations at the hands of Holofernes, the chief general of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Assyrians, and how he had plundered the neighbouring villages and destroyed their sanctuaries. ² And they trembled with great fear because of him. They were anxious about Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord their God, ³ since they had only recently returned from exile. The people of Judea had just come together and the new furnishings of the Altar and the Sanctuary had just been consecrated after being profaned. ⁴ They sent messengers to warn all the inhabitants of the territory of Samaria, Kona, Beth-horon, Belmain, Jericho, Choba and Aesora, and the valley of Salem. ⁵ They occupied all the summits of the mountains, fortified the ramparts of the towns and prepared stores of foodstuff and provisions for the war, since their field had just been harvested.

⁶ Joakim, the high priest, who was in Jerusalem in those days, wrote to the inhabitants of Bethulia and Betomesthaim opposite Esdraelion, at the entrance to the plain of Dothan. ⁷ He told them to seize and fortify the mountain passes because it was by them that Holofernes would enter Judea. It would be easy to stop there those who were advancing since the narrow passes allowed no more than two men to go forward at a time.

⁸ The children of Israel obeyed the orders of Joakim and of the Council of the Elders which assembled in Jerusalem. ⁹ All the people of Israel called upon God with great fervour and humbled themselves before him. ¹⁰ Men, women and children, including the animals, all the foreigners who resided among them, their labourers and slaves, all clothed themselves in sackcloth. ¹¹ All the men of Israel in Jerusalem, with their wives and children, bowed before the Temple, sprinkled ashes on their heads and held out their hands in supplication before the Lord. ¹² They covered the Altar in sackcloth, and with one voice earnestly begged the God of Israel not to let their children be massacred, their wives raped, their towns destroyed and their Sanctuary be profaned, that they might not become the laughingstock of other nations.

¹³ The Lord heard their prayer and looked upon their anguish. The people throughout the whole of Judea fasted for many days, and those in Jerusalem fasted before the Sanctuary of the Lord Almighty. ¹⁴ The high priest Joakim, with all the priests and ministers, stood before the Lord dressed in sackcloth, and offered contin-

ual sacrifice, prayers and the voluntary gifts of the people. ¹⁵They put ashes on their turbans and cried out with all their strength to the Lord, asking him to watch over the whole house of Israel.

5 ¹It was reported to Holofernes that the people of Israel were prepared for war, that they had closed the mountain passes, fortified the ramparts on the summits of all the high mountains and placed blockades in the plains. ²Seething with anger, Holofernes called the leaders of the Moabites, the generals of Ammon and all the governors of the Seacoast, ³and said to them, "Tell me, sons of Canaan, who are these people living in the mountain region? Which towns do they inhabit? What is the strength of their army? In what does their power and strength consist? Who has been placed at their head as commander of their army? ⁴Why have they not appeared before me like everyone else in the West?"

⁵Achior, commander of the Ammonites, said to him, "May my Lord listen to the word spoken by your servant, for I will tell you the truth about these people from the mountain region whom you now encounter. ⁶These people descend from the Chaldeans. ⁷They settled first in Mesopotamia, for they did not wish to worship any longer the gods of their fathers who lived in Chaldea. ⁸They abandoned the religion of their ancestors, and worshipped the God of Heaven, a God whom they had come to recognize. Because of this their fathers drove them out and they fled to Mesopotamia where they dwelt for a long time. ⁹Then their God told them to leave the country where they had settled and go to the land of Canaan. They went to live there, and acquired an abundance of gold and silver and numerous herds of cattle.

¹⁰There was famine throughout the land of Canaan, so they went down into Egypt where they remained as long as there was food. Then they became so numerous that their race could not be counted. ¹¹But the king of Egypt rose up against them and tricked them into making bricks, and they were humiliated and made into slaves. ¹²They called upon their God who punished the whole of Egypt with such incurable plagues that the Egyptians drove them out. ¹³Then God dried up the Red Sea in front of them ¹⁴and he led them along the route of Sinai and Kadesh Barnea. The Israelites drove all the inhabitants into the desert; ¹⁵they inhabited the country of the Amorites and wiped out the Heshbonites. Then, having crossed the Jordan, they took possession of all the hill

country, ¹⁶driving out the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Shechemites, and the Gergesites, and they lived there for a long time.

¹⁷As long as they did not offend God, they prospered, because their God who hates wrongdoing was on their side. ¹⁸But when they strayed from the path he had set for them, they were completely annihilated in many battles, and they were led off into captivity in a country not their own. The temple of their God was leveled to the ground and their cities were occupied by their enemies. ¹⁹Now that they have turned again to their God, they have returned from their exile from the various places in which they had been scattered. They have retaken Jerusalem where their Sanctuary is and they have settled in the mountain region because it has remained deserted. ²⁰And now, Sovereign Lord, we must find out if there is any wrongdoing in this people. ²¹If they are sinning against their God, then we shall march against them and we shall conquer. But if there is no sinfulness in their nation, then, my Lord, turn aside from them for fear that their Lord and God will cover them with his shield and the whole world will witness our downfall."

²²Now it happened that when Achior had finished speaking, all the people standing in a circle around the tent began criticizing and protesting. The officers of Holofernes and all the inhabitants of the seacoast and of Moab wanted to beat him black and blue. They said, ²³"We are not afraid of the children of Israel. Look, they are a people with no strength or energy to sustain a violent conflict. ²⁴Let us go forth, and they will be like bread for your whole army, O Lord Holofernes!"

6 ¹When the tumult among the men standing around the tent had died down, Holofernes, general in chief of the Assyrian army, said to Achior in the presence of all the foreigners and all the people of Moab, ²"Who are you, Achior, you and all the people bribed by Israel to prophesy against us as you have done today? Why do you counsel us not to make war on the race of Israel because their God will cover them with a shield? Who is God, if not Nebuchadnezzar. He will send out his army and wipe them off the face of the earth and their God will not save them. ³But we, the king's servants, will crush them as though they were just one man. They will not withstand the onslaught of our horses. ⁴We will burn the whole lot of them in their own homes. Their mountains will be soaked with their blood, their plains will be full of their dead. They will



not be able to hold their ground before us. Most surely they will perish, as King Nebuchadnezzar, lord of all the earth, had foretold. He said it and the words he has uttered will not be in vain.

⁵ But you, Achior, an Ammonite mercenary who has today uttered these words to your shame, from now on you will not see my face until I avenge myself on this race who came from Egypt. ⁶ The sword of my soldiers and the lance of my officers will pierce your sides. When I return from battle, your body will be with all the dead of Israel. ⁷ My servants will lead you into the mountain region and will deposit you in one of the towns which are on the slopes, ⁸ so that you will share the same fate as the rest of them. ⁹ But if you believe that they will not be taken, then do not put on such a long face. I have spoken and not one of my words will be without effect."

¹⁰ Holofernes ordered his guards who were standing in the tent to seize Achior, take him to Bethulia and hand him over into the hands of the Israelites. ¹¹ The servants seized him and took him outside the camp onto the plain; from the middle of the plain they took him towards the mountain country and reached the springs which were at the foot of Bethulia. ¹² When the men of the town at the top of the mountain saw them coming, they took their weapons, went out of the town to the summit of the mountain, and those who were armed with catapults tried to stop their ascent by slinging stones at them. ¹³ The guards took shelter, tied up Achior and left him lying on the ground at the foot of the mountain. They then returned to their lord.

¹⁴ The sons of Israel descended from the town and went up to Achior, and having untied him, they led him to Bethulia, and took him to the rulers of the town ¹⁵ who in those days were Uziah the son of Micah of the tribe of Simeon, Chabris the son of Gothoniell, and Charmis the son of Melchiel. ¹⁶ As they called for a meeting of all the elders of the town: the young people and the women also joined the assembly. They placed Achior in the midst of the assembled people and Uziah asked him what had happened. ¹⁷ In reply he told them about the council meeting of Holofernes and all that he himself had said to the leaders of the Assyrians. He also told them of the threatening words of Holofernes against Israel.

¹⁸ The people threw themselves down on the ground, worshipped God and called upon his help saying, ¹⁹ "Lord God of Heaven, take into consideration the insolence of the Assyrians and have pity on your humiliated people.

Look this day upon those who are consecrated to you." ²⁰ They encouraged Achior and congratulated him warmly. ²¹ Then Uziah led him from the assembly into his own house and gave a meal for the elders. All through the night the people called upon the God of Israel, begging him to come to their aid.

7 ¹ The next day Holofernes gave an order to the whole of his army and to those people who had come to his help to move camp in the direction of Bethulia, to occupy the mountain slopes and to wage war against the Israelites. ² All his valiant warriors moved that day; the forces of fighting men numbered one hundred and seventy thousand foot soldiers and twelve thousand cavalry, without counting the baggage and the men who looked after it as well as the crowd of people who accompanied them – a considerable crowd. ³ They camped in the valley near Bethulia, near the spring; they stretched out as wide as from Dothan to Belbain, and in length from Bethulia to Cyamon which faces Esdraclon.

⁴ When the Israelites saw how numerous they were, they were extremely afraid and said to one another, "Without doubt this crowd is going to devour all the country, neither the high mountains nor the ravines nor the hills will be able to put a stop to their progress." ⁵ Nonetheless each one seized his fighting equipment; they lighted fires on the tops of the towers and kept watch all that night.

⁶ The second day, Holofernes lined up all his cavalry in front of the Israelites in Bethulia. ⁷ He observed the approaches to their town, discovered the sources of the water supplies, seized them and stationed guards over them, then he returned to his army. ⁸ The leaders of the Edomites, the commanders of the Moabites and the generals of the Seacoast approached Holofernes and said, ⁹ "Let our Master listen to us, and your army will not suffer loss. ¹⁰ This people of Israel really do not put their trust in javelins but in the height of the mountains which they inhabit, for it is not easy to reach the summit of their mountains. ¹¹ Master, if you wish to save the lives of your men, do not fight against them in battle formation. ¹² Remain in your camp and keep safe all the men in your army but let us take possession of the spring which flows at the foot of the mountain, ¹³ because it is from there that the people of Bethulia draw all their water. They will be dying of thirst and so they will hand over their town. We and our people will scale the summits of the neighbouring mountains and set up outposts to prevent anyone from



leaving the town. ¹⁴ The famine will destroy them; men, women and children will be lying dead in the streets of their town before ever the sword is raised against them. ¹⁵ So you will have punished them severely for having rebelled and for not having come out to meet you with offers of peace."

¹⁶ This advice pleased Holofernes and all his officers, and he agreed to do what they said. ¹⁷ The Moabites with five thousand Assyrians moved camp; they encamped in the valley and cut off the springs and the water supply from the Israelites. ¹⁸ The Edomites and the Ammonites climbed up and camped on the mountain near Dothan; they sent some of their men to the south and to the east facing Eggebel, near Chusi, which is on the torrent of Mochmur. The rest of the Assyrian army encamped in the plain, covering the whole countryside. The camp site covered by their tents and their baggage spread out wide for they were an enormous crowd.

The discouragement of the people

+ ¹⁹ Disheartened, the people of Israel called upon the Lord their God because their enemies had encircled them and had cut off all means of escape. ²⁰ All the Assyrian army, its foot soldiers, its chariots and horsemen surrounded them for thirty-four days. ²¹ The inhabitants of Bethulia saw the water jars becoming empty and the wells running dry so that drinking water had to be rationed every day. ²² The small children became weak with thirst; the women and the young collapsed in the streets and gateways of the town. ²³ Then everyone – men, women, young people and children – gathered and accused Uzziah and the leaders of the town.

They called out with loud cries and said before all the elders, ²⁴ "May God judge between you and us, for you are the cause of this misfortune by not engaging in peaceful negotiations with the Assyrians. ²⁵ And now there is no one who can bring us any help; God has delivered us into the hands of these pagans in such a way that we lie dying before them from great thirst and misery. ²⁶ You must call on the Assyrians and let the whole army of Holofernes pillage us. ²⁷ It is better for us to become their booty, for then we shall become slaves, but at least we shall live and not have to see our women, our older children and the little ones die before our eyes. ²⁸ We urge you by heaven and earth and by our God, the Lord of our fathers, who punishes us according to our sins and the sins of our fathers: make this decision this very day."

²⁹ Altogether they raised a great lamentation in the midst of the assembly, and they cried out with a loud voice to the Lord God.

³⁰ Then Uzziah said to them, "Have confidence, my brothers: hold out for five days more, during which time the Lord our God will show us his mercy for he will not abandon us forever. ³¹ If these days pass without his coming to our help, then we shall do what you say." ³² Then he dismissed the men, each to his post, and they went towards the ramparts and the towers of the town, and he sent back to their

27. Ex 14, 12

28. Ex 20, 5

+ When a community starts to look only at what is evil, its bad luck, it begins to lose faith in the future and forgets it has means for getting out of the situation.

God has delivered us into the hands of the Assyrians. The people of Bethulia declare their defeat beforehand because they only see the human side of the situation what is unpleasant and they do not remember God's promise (Lv 26 and Dt 28). They have prayed and done penance, and in spite of all that, God is deaf to their pleas. The conclusion is obvious: "We are lost."

In their discouragement, they only see their need and they do not measure the consequences of what they are doing. They do not think that to surrender to Holofernes is to disown God and to acknowledge Nebuchadnezzar as God. All they see is that it is better to live as slaves than to die.

"I do not get anything by asking: God will not listen to me," is what we usually hear disheartened people say as the people of Bethulia did. This discouragement is especially contagious when it comes from the father of the family.



homes the women and children. Now there was a great depression throughout the town.

8 ¹The news of what had happened came in those days to Judith, daughter of Merari, son of Joseph, of Oziel, of Eliah, of Ananias, of Gideon, of Raphain, of Ahitub, of Elijah, of Hilkiah, of Eliab, of Nathanael, of Salamiel, of Sarasadai, of Israel. ²Her husband was Manasseh, of the same tribe and family. He had died during the harvesting of the barley, ³as he was supervising the reapers who were binding the sheaves on the plain; he suffered sunstroke, took to his bed and died in Bethulia, his town. He was buried with his ancestors in the field which lies between Dothan and Balamon.

Judith: the Jewess who never wavered in her faith

■ ⁴As a widow, Judith remained in her house for three years and four months. ⁵She had built a room on the rooftop of the house where she lived. ⁶She covered herself in sackcloth, put on widow's garments and fasted all the days of her widowhood with the exception of the eves of the Sabbath, the Sabbath day, the eves of the new moons, the days of the new moons, and all the celebration of the people of Israel. ⁷She was exceedingly beautiful and very pleasing to look at. Manasseh, her husband, had left her gold, silver, servants, cattle and fields and she remained the owner of all this estate. ⁸No one could say anything evil of her because she greatly feared God.

⁹She heard of the threatening

words which the people had addressed to their leaders because they were downcast, suffering from the lack of water. Judith heard also all that Uziah had promised in reply, how he had sworn to hand over their city to the Assyrians at the end of five days. ¹⁰So she sent the maidservant who looked after her affairs, to call Charbis and Charmis, two elders of the town, to come and see her. ¹¹They came to her house and she said to them, "Listen to me, you elders of Bethulia, for the words which you have spoken in front of the people today are not right. You did wrong to take an oath between God and yourselves, and to say that you would hand over the town to our enemies if, within a certain number of days, the Lord does not come to your help. ¹²Who are you to put God to the test and take God's place when you answered the people? ¹³That is not the way to call for his mercy, but rather, one that leads to his wrath. ¹⁴For if you cannot probe the depths of the human heart nor know what a man is thinking, how can you understand the God who has made all things? Do you know his mind or understand his thoughts? No, my brothers, do not annoy the Lord our God. ¹⁵For if he does not wish to come to our help within these five days, he has the power to protect us for as many days as he wishes or else to annihilate us in front of our enemies.

3. 2 K 4, 18. 6. 2 K 4, 1; 1 K 21, 2. 7. Est 2, 7. 8. Dn 13, 2. 14. Is 40, 19. 15. Dn 3, 17.

■ The Lord achieves his plans through the humble; he reveals his plans to the little ones and the humble (Matthew 11:25-30). We can observe the Lord's way of doing things throughout the Bible: for example, his choosing David (1 Sam 16) and something similar in 1 Mac 3:18-22. In spite of her wealth, Judith is an insignificant woman before Holofernes' military power.

Who are you to put God to the test? The attitude of faithfulness to God stands out in Judith's speech to the leaders of the city. She reproaches them for wanting to put time limits on God to

fulfill their human plans. Today many Christians do the same with their gifts when they wish to force God to grant them a specific favor.

If the enemies capture us... whole Judea will be taken. Those with problems must not only think of their own interest but also of other people's interests. Judith forces them to think about the rest of the nation and not only about their city, Bethulia. National solidarity compels them to resist. What would Judith say to so many people who never think of being in solidarity with the world of farmers and workers?

¹⁶As for yourselves, do not challenge the designs of the Lord our God, for God cannot give in to threats as a man does, nor can any decision be imposed upon him as it can on the sons of men. ¹⁷That is why, while waiting patiently for him to save us, let us beg him to come to our help. He will listen to our plea, if it pleases him. ¹⁸For it has not happened in our generation nor is there among us today any tribe or family or people or city that worships gods made by human hands, as happened in days past. ¹⁹It was for that reason that our fathers were handed over to be slain by the sword and pillaged, and that they suffered great disaster at the hands of their enemies. ²⁰But we do not recognize any other god than the One God, therefore let us hope that he will not look with contempt on us or on any of our race.

²¹If the enemies capture us, so in the same way, the whole of Judea will be taken; our Sanctuary will be pillaged and we will answer for its profanation with our blood. ²²God will make fall on our heads the murder of our brothers, the bondage of our country and the devastation of our heritage. Wherever among the nations we shall be slaves, we shall be maltreated by those to whom we shall belong. ²³Our enslavement will not be changed in our favour, but the Lord our God will turn it into dishonour. ²⁴Now, my brothers, let us show our fellow countrymen that their lives depend on ours: that the safety of the Sanctuary, the Temple and the Altar rests with us.

²⁵Much more, let us thank the Lord our God who is putting us to the test as he did our fathers. ²⁶Remember what he did with Abraham, all the trials to which he subjected Isaac and all those

that happened to Jacob in Mesopotamia of Syria where he looked after the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother. ²⁷Is not God making us pass through the fire as he did the others to prove their hearts? The Lord is not punishing us, but he scourges those who draw near to him in order to admonish them."

²⁸Uzziah said to her, "All that you have said has been said with wisdom and no one can contradict your words. ²⁹In fact it is not just today that your wisdom is evident, but ever since your early days all the people have recognized your intelligence and the natural goodness of your heart. ³⁰But the people were suffering great thirst so they forced us to carry out what we have said, and they have charged us with an oath which we cannot break. ³¹Since you are a devout woman, pray for us that the Lord will send rain to fill our reservoirs and we shall no longer be exhausted."

³²Judith said to them, "Listen to me, I will do something which will be handed down from generation to generation of the children of our race. ³³Tonight you will stand at the gate of the town and I will go out with my maidservant and, by the end of the time which has been fixed for you to hand over the town to our enemies, the Lord will visit Israel through my hand. ³⁴But do not try to find out what I shall do for I will not tell you, until I have fulfilled what I will do."

³⁵Then Uzziah and the leaders said to her, "Go in peace and may the Lord our God go before you so that you may take vengeance upon our enemies." ³⁶Then, leaving Judith's room, they went back to their posts.

9 ¹Judith knelt and bowed her head to the ground, put ashes on her head and uncovered the sackcloth with which she was clothed. At precisely the same moment as incense was being offered in the House of God at Jerusalem, Judith invoked aloud the Lord God, she said, "Lord, God of my father Simeon, you placed a sword in his hand to punish the foreigners who did violence to a young girl. For they had abused her, uncovering her body to shame her and violating her womb to dishonour her. They did this though you said: This shall not be done. ²Because of this you handed over their leaders to be slain and their bed, reddened because of their deceit, was left red with their blood. You struck down the

slaves with their leaders and the leaders themselves with their servants. ⁴You handed over their women to rape, their daughters to slavery and all their possessions to be shared among your favoured sons who were filled with horror at this defilement of their blood and invoked your help.

⁵O God, my God, listen to me, a widow! It is you who made all things past, what is present and what is yet to come. It is you who consider things present and to come. Those things which you decided have been realized. ⁶The things you have planned have presented themselves saying: Here we are. In truth, all your ways are prepared and your decision is known from the beginning of time.

⁷Therefore see what a great multitude these Assyrians make with their army, how they pride themselves on their horses and their cavalymen. They have placed great pride in the strength of their foot soldiers and their trust in their shields, javelins, and bows and arrows. ⁸But, they do not recognize that you, Lord, decide the outcome of wars. Lord is your name; wipe out their force with your power, and in your anger overthrow their superiority; for they intend to profane your Sanctuary, to defile your Tabernacle where your glorious Name resides, to overturn by force the horn of your Altar.

⁹Consider their pride, let your anger fall on their heads and give to my hands, the hands of a widow, the strength necessary for what I have decided. ¹⁰By my lying lips punish the slave with his master and the master with his servant; put an end to their arrogance by the hand of a woman.

¹¹Truly your strength is not in number nor your power in strong men for you are a God of the humble, the defender of the little ones, the support of the weak, the protector of the abandoned, the saviour of those in despair.

¹²Yes, God of my fathers and God of the heritage of Israel, Ruler of the heavens and the earth, Creator of the waters, King of all creation, listen to my prayer.

¹³Give me tempting words to wound and kill those who have conceived cruel designs against your Covenant, your consecrated House, Mount Zion and the House which belongs to your sons.

¹⁴Make the nation and all the tribes know that you are God, all-powerful and strong, and that, apart from you, there is no other protector for the people of Israel."

The exploit of Judith

10 ¹When Judith had finished her prayer to the God of Israel, ²she rose from the ground, and after calling her maidservant, she went down into the house where she usually spent the sabbath days and the feasts. ³She took off the sackcloth and her widow's clothes in which she was dressed. She washed her whole body with water, anointed it with rich perfume, combed her hair and placed a jewelled band around it. She dressed herself in the beautiful garments she had been accustomed to wear when her husband, Manasseh, was living. ⁴She put sandals on her feet, put on her anklets, bracelets and rings, her earrings and all her jewels. She made herself extremely beautiful in order to attract the attention of the men who would see her.

⁵She gave the servant a skin of wine and a jar of oil, she filled a bag with flour made from barley and some small cakes made from dried figs and fine flour. She wrapped up all these things and put the maid in charge of them. ⁶Then they set out in the direction of the gate of the town of Bethulia where they found stationed Uzziah and the elders of the town, Chabris and Charmis.

⁷As soon as the men saw her, her face so transformed and her clothes so different, they were full of admiration for her beauty and said to her. ⁸"May the God of our fathers grant that you may find favour and that your undertakings may be successful for the glory of the sons of Israel and the exaltation of Jerusalem."

She adored God and said to them. ⁹"Command that the gate of the town be opened for me and I will go forth in order to accomplish what you have just said." They ordered the young men to open the gate as she had asked. ¹⁰They carried out the command and Judith went out with her maidservant.

The townsmen watched her until she reached the foot of the mountain and crossed the valley, then they lost sight of her. ¹¹Judith and the maid walked straight through the valley and a sentry for the Assyrians came to meet them. ¹²He stopped them and asked, "Who are you? Where have you come from? Where are you going?" She replied, "I am a daughter of the Hebrews; I am fleeing far from them because they are on the point of handing themselves over to be despoiled by you. ¹³I have come to present myself to Holofernes, the general-in-chief of your army, to speak to him in all sincerity. I will show him a way by which he can advance and become master of the



whole mountain without losing a single man either from injury or loss of life."

¹⁴As soon as the men had heard her words and noticed her face (for she was strikingly beautiful) they said to her, ¹⁵"You have saved your life by hurrying to present yourself before our lord. Approach his tent; certain men from among us will accompany you until they have handed you over safely into his hands. ¹⁶When you stand before him, do not have any fear in your heart, but tell him what you have to say and he will treat you well."

¹⁷They chose one hundred men from their number: these men accompanied Judith and the maid and led them to the tent of Holofernes. ¹⁸In the whole camp the news of her arrival spread from tent to tent, and throughout the whole camp men came running. They made a circle round her as she stood waiting outside Holofernes' tent while someone informed him of her arrival. ¹⁹They were captivated by her beauty and, on seeing her, they praised the sons of Israel and said to one another, "Who can look down on the people who have such women. It would be a mistake to leave one man alive; they would be able to deceive the whole world."

²⁰Those who were sleeping near Holofernes and all his officers came out and led her into the tent. ²¹Holofernes was lying on his bed under hangings of purple and gold set with emerald and precious stones. ²²Having been warned about her, he moved towards the entrance of the tent, preceded by his silver lamps. ²³As Judith came before him and his officers, they all admired the beauty of her face. Throwing herself face downwards to the ground she bowed before him; the servants of Holofernes raised her up.

11 ¹Holofernes said to Judith, "Have confidence, woman, have no fear in your heart. I do not harm any person who has chosen to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of all the earth. ²And, if those of your people who dwell on the mountain had not ignored me, I should not have raised my sword against them; but they have brought this upon themselves. ³Now, tell me why you have fled from their midst and have come to us. Are you doing this to save yourself? Have confidence, your life is safe tonight and also in the future. ⁴No one will harm you, you will be well-treated as are all the servants of my lord, King Nebuchadnezzar.

⁵Judith replied, "Listen to the words of your servant, so that I may speak freely in your presence and I will not lie to my lord tonight.

⁶And, if you follow the advice of your servant,

everything will be accomplished by the hand of God and my lord will not fail in his undertakings. ⁷For just as truly as Nebuchadnezzar is king of all the earth and his presence is felt, and he has sent you for the correction of others, it is thanks to your power that not only do men serve him but also wild beasts, animals and the birds of the air live for Nebuchadnezzar and all his house.

⁸We have heard of your wisdom and of your prudence of mind and it is said throughout the world that you alone are the bravest man in the kingdom, powerful because of your knowledge and outstanding in military strategy. ⁹We have heard about the discourse delivered in your council by Achior, and of its terms, because the men of Bethulia took him in and he reported to them all that he had said in your presence. ¹⁰Now all-powerful lord, do not dismiss what he said but keep it in mind because it is true. Our nation will never be punished nor the sword used against it unless its people sin against their God. ¹¹Yet my lord will not be driven back and fail. Death will overtake them, for they have fallen into the sin that arouses the anger of God every time they commit it. ¹²As a result of the shortage of food and water, they have decided to lay hands on their animals. They have resolved to eat those things which God in his laws forbade them to eat, including the first fruits of the harvest and the tithes of wine and oil which, after their consecration, had been put aside for the priests who minister before the face of our God in Jerusalem. ¹³They have decided to consume these things completely, although it is not lawful for any of the people even to touch them with their hands. ¹⁴They have sent messengers to Jerusalem – for those who dwell there have also done this – and they have charged these men to bring back this permission from the Council of the Elders. ¹⁵Now it will come to pass that when this permission arrives and the people will have acted upon it, on that same day they will be delivered over to you for their destruction. ¹⁶That is why I, your servant, having understood all this, have fled far from them. God has sent me to bring about along with you deeds that will strike terror throughout the whole world and cause those who hear them to talk. ¹⁷For your servant is a pious woman who serves God night and day. From now on I will remain near you, my lord. Each evening I will go out towards the ravine and I will pray to God and he will tell me when they have fallen into sin. ¹⁸Then I will report this to you, so that you will go forth with your whole



army and there will be no man able to withstand you. ¹⁹Then I will lead you through Judaea until I arrive in Jerusalem where I will set up your tent. You will lead them like sheep without a shepherd and not one dog will growl at you. I have been given a premonition of these things. It has been revealed to me, and I have been sent to make it known to you."

²⁰Her people pleased Holofernes and all his officers. They admired her wisdom and said, ²¹"From one end of the earth to the other there is no woman like her for the beauty of her face and the wisdom of her words." ²²Holofernes said to her, "God has done well to send you ahead of this people to show them that the power is in my hands and that destruction is the fate of those who despised my lord. ²³You are beautiful to look at and prudent in your words: if you do as you have said, your God shall be my God and you will live in the house of King Nebuchadnezzar, and be famous throughout all the world."

12 ¹Then Holofernes had her brought into the place where his silver dishes were laid out and commanded them to serve her from his food and to give her his wine to drink. ²But Judith said, "I will not eat it for fear that it might be the occasion of my downfall. What I have brought with me is sufficient." ³Holofernes said to her, "When you have finished the things that you have brought, where will we be able to get the same kind of food to give you, for there is no one of your race here." ⁴Judith said to him, "As your soul lives my lord, your servant will not have finished what I have brought with me before the Lord will have carried out by my hand what he has decided to do."

⁵Then the officers of Holofernes led her to the tent and she slept until midnight. She arose at the morning watch ⁶and sent a message to Holofernes, "Will my lord command that his servant be allowed to go out to pray?" ⁷Holofernes ordered his bodyguards not to prevent her from doing so.

She remained in the camp three days. Each night she went to the ravine of Bethulia and bathed herself in the spring which was in the camp. ⁸When she returned to the tent she prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, that he

would guide her steps in the right path to bring about the release of her people; ⁹and now purified, once she had returned, she remained in the tent until she took her food towards evening.

In the tent of Holofernes

◆ ¹⁰Then on the fourth day, Holofernes gave a banquet for his personal servants without sending invitations to any of his officers. ¹¹He said to the eunuch Bagoas who looked after his affairs, "Go and persuade this Hebrew woman who is under your care to come and to eat and drink with us, ¹²for it would be a disgrace if we allowed such a woman to depart without having enjoyed her company. If we are not able to allure her, she will laugh at us."

¹³So Bagoas left Holofernes and entered Judith's tent, and said to her, "Will this beautiful slave not hesitate to come to my lord's tent to be honoured in his presence, merrily to drink wine with us and to become this very day like an Assyrian woman who dwells in the house of Nebuchadnezzar?" ¹⁴Judith said to him, "Who am I to go against the wishes of my Lord? All that pleases him I will hasten to do and that will be for me a joy until the day of my death."

¹⁵Then she arose; she dressed in her beautiful garments and all the finery of a woman. Her servant went and laid out on the ground, in front of Holofernes, the fleece which Judith had received from Bagoas for her daily use so that she could recline on it while she ate.

¹⁶So Judith entered the tent and

19. Num 27, 17; 1 K 22, 17

23. Rut 1, 16

1. Dn 1, 8

5. Ex 14, 24

15. Est 5, 1

◆ Holofernes' attitude before Judith reveals a male-centered mentality which is frequently found among today's people. "One must take advantage of the situation and he who does not use the opportunity is not a man." "People are going to think I am not man enough" is what is said now. Holofernes says: *she will laugh at us.*

Our lifestyle must follow moral principles

rather than making moral principles agree with our lifestyle.

The book praises Judith's shrewdness and courage. However, what the book wants to make clear is that the Lord never abandons his people if they are faithful to his law, even though they may be severely tested. Judith is a model of the true Jewish woman.

took her place. The heart of Holofernes was ravished by her beauty, his whole being was captivated and he had a passionate desire to possess her. Ever since the first day he had seen her he had been waiting for an occasion to seduce her. ¹⁷Holofernes said to her: "Drink and share our happiness." ¹⁸Judith said, "I will drink then, my lord, because today my life has become more precious to me than on any other day since my birth." ¹⁹She took what her servant had prepared for her and ate and drank in front of him. ²⁰Holofernes was bewitched by her and he drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk on any single day since his birth.

God works marvels

13 ¹When it was late, the servants hurried away quickly. Bagoas dismissed from the presence of his master those who were standing around, and closed the tent from the outside. All the men hurried to bed for they were tired from having drunk too much. ²So Judith was left alone in the tent with Holofernes who, sodden with wine, had collapsed onto the bed. ³Judith told her servant to stand outside the room and watch for her coming out because she would go out to pray, as she did each day. She also spoke to Bagoas in much the same way.

⁴Everyone left the tent of Holofernes, not one – small or great – remained in the room. Judith, then, stood by Holofernes' bed and prayed in her heart, "Lord God all-powerful,

help me at this time in what I will do for the glory of Jerusalem." ⁵For now is the time to support the cause of your people and to ensure that my undertaking brings about the ruin of the enemies who are drawn up against us."

⁶Then she moved towards the bedpost which was near Holofernes' head and took down the sword and, ⁷approaching the bed, she seized the hair of his head saying, "O Lord God of Israel, give me strength, this very moment!" ⁸Then with all her strength she struck his neck twice and cut off his head. ⁹She then rolled his body from the bed and took off the hangings from the columns. Then she went out at once and gave the head of Holofernes to her servant ¹⁰who put it in the bag in which she carried the food. Then they went out together as they used to do for prayer. After they had crossed the camp, they passed round the edge of the ravine, climbed the mountain to Bethulia and reached the gates of the town.

¹¹Judith called from a distance to those who were keeping guard at the gates, "Open, open the gates! God, our God, is with us! He has once again done a miracle in Israel and exerted his power against our enemies, as he has done today." ¹²As soon as the townsfolk heard her voice, they called the elders and hurried down to the gates of the town. ¹³They all ran together, from the smallest to the greatest, for they were waiting for her return. They opened the gates and welcomed the two women; then, having lighted a fire so as to see them,

14. Ps 66, 20

15. 2 Mac 15, 32; Jdg 4, 9

18. Gen 14, 19; Jdg 5, 24; Lk 1, 42

20. Mt 26, 13;

Lk 1, 48; 1 Mac 13, 5

• Love of neighbour can never lead us to do something immoral even though we may wish to do it for our own people. Judith makes clear to the people that she did not do anything evil.

Praise God! Today, Judith's action would have been published in all newspapers praising

Judith, but she would not have accepted the praise. Judith shows the people that it was the Lord, the Saviour and they thank him, praising Judith.

To convince the people that the Lord was the one at work, Judith's insignificance is pointed



they gathered around the two. ¹⁴She said to them in a loud voice, "Praise God, praise him! Praise God who has not withheld his mercy from the House of Israel. This very night he has crushed our enemies by my hand."

¹⁵And, taking out the head of Holofernes from the bag, she showed it to them saying, "Here is the head of Holofernes, general-in-chief of the Assyrian army, and here are the hangings under which he was lying in his drunkenness. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. ¹⁶As truly as the Lord lives, it was my face that seduced him to his undoing, but the Lord has protected me. This man could not sin with me to disgrace or dishonour me." ¹⁷All the people were greatly amazed, so they bowed down and worshipped God, saying with one voice, "Blessed are you, our God, who today have crushed the enemies of your people."

Blessed are you among all women

+ ¹⁸Uzziah said to her,

"My daughter, may the Most High God bless you more than all women on earth.

And blessed be the Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has led you to behead the leader of our enemies.

¹⁹Never will people forget the confidence you have shown; they will always remember the power of God.

²⁰May God ensure your everlasting glory, and may he reward and

bless you for you have risked your life when your race was humiliated.

You chose instead to do the best before God in order to prevent our downfall."

And all the people said, "Amen! Amen!"

14 ¹Judith said to them, "Listen, my brothers, take this head and hang it from the battlements of our rampart, ² then when dawn breaks and the sun rises over the earth, let each of you take his weapons and let all those able to fight go outside the town. And under the command of a captain, proceed as if you were about to go down into the plain in the direction of the Assyrian outposts, but you will not descend. ³ The Assyrian guards will seize their arms, and go towards their camp to awaken the generals of the Assyrian army. These officers will run to the tent of Holofernes but will not find him; fear will then come upon them and they will flee from you. ⁴ Then, you and all those who dwell in the land of Israel will follow them and strike them down as they go. ⁵ But, before you do this, call Achior the Ammonite so that he may see and recognize the one who despised the people of Israel, the man who sent him to you as to his death."

⁶ Achior was brought from the house of Uzziah. As soon as he arrived and saw the head of Holofernes in the hand of one of the people, he fainted and fell face down on the ground. ⁷ When they had lifted him up, he threw himself at the feet of Judith, bowed before her and said, "May you be blessed throughout Judea and among all the nations, who on hearing your name will be amazed. ⁸ But now, tell me all that you did during these days."

Standing in the midst of the people, Judith told him all that she had done from the day she set out until the moment in which she was now speaking to them. ⁹ When she had finished talking, the people cried out with great joy, and this was heard throughout the town. ¹⁰ When Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he immediately believed in him. He was cir-

1. 2 Mac 15, 33

3. Ex 15, 16

out: with only the help of a slave, she has destroyed and defeated the greatest army in the world at that time.

Every deed done for the benefit of others involves risking something. Judith risks her life. Today, many complain that nothing goes right, but very few are willing to take risks as Judith did.

+ *May the Most High God bless you more*

than all women. Luke will remember these words and he will adapt them for Mary (Lk 1:42). With Luke we easily see in Judith's victory the image of another victory in which Mary, "crushed the head of the serpent" in perfectly welcoming the Son of God, as the Bible had announced (Gen 3:15). The hymn we refer to: *You are the glory of Israel* speaks more truly of Mary than of Judith.

cumcised and became a member of the community of Israel down to this day.

¹¹When the sun had risen and they had hung Holofernes' head on the rampart, all the men took their arms and went out in groups to the mountain slopes. ¹²As soon as the Assyrians saw them, they warned their commanders. These men, in turn, went to inform the generals, the captains and all their officers. ¹³Then, they all went to the tent of Holofernes and said to the steward in charge of his affairs, "Waken our Lord, for the slaves plan to come down and fight against us to their utter destruction." ¹⁴So Bagoas drew back the curtain and knocked, thinking that Holofernes was sleeping with Judith. ¹⁵As no one answered, he entered the room, and found Holofernes lying across the wooden footstool dead with his head cut off. ¹⁶He cried out with a loud voice and tore his clothes. ¹⁷He entered the tent where Judith had stayed but did not find her. Then he rushed out to the troops, shouting, ¹⁸"The slaves have deceived us! Only one Hebrew woman has put to shame the army of King Nebuchadnezzar, for Holofernes lies dead on the ground. ¹⁹When the officers of the Assyrian army heard these words, they were greatly distressed. They tore their garments and cried out with a loud voice in their camp.

15 ¹When those who were in the camp heard the cries, they were astounded. ²Terror and fear fell on them, they no longer controlled themselves but at the same moment they all broke rank and fled by way of the roads across the plain and the mountain. ³Those who were encamped in the mountains around Bethulia also began to flee. Then the men of Israel, all among them who were capable of fighting, fell on them. ⁴Uzziah sent messengers to Betomasthaim, Choba, Kona, and throughout the land of Israel, to announce what had happened and to invite them all to fall upon the enemy and destroy them. ⁵When the men of Israel heard this, they threw themselves on the enemy and pursued them as far as Choba. Even those from Jerusalem came, as well as those from all the mountainous region, because they were told what had happened in the camp of their enemies. Those from Gilead and from Galilee caught them on the flank and struck great blows against them until they reached Damascus and its surrounding territory. ⁶As for the inhabitants of Bethulia who remained behind, they rushed into the Assyrian camp, pillaged it and thereby greatly enriched themselves. ⁷Once they returned from the carnage, the Israelite men took pos-

session of what remained. Also the people from the villages and farms in the mountains and on the plains seized great booty because there was plenty that they could get.

⁸Then the high priest Joakin and the council of the Elders of Israel in Jerusalem came to find out about all the good things which the Lord had done for Israel, and to see Judith and congratulate her. ⁹As soon as they had approached her they blessed her altogether and said,

"You are the pride and joy of Jerusalem! You are the glory of Israel. You are the honour of our people.

¹⁰You alone have accomplished all this. You have done great things for Israel and God has blessed your work. May the almighty Lord bless you forever."

And all the people said, "Amen!"

¹¹All the people pillaged the camp for thirty days. They gave Holofernes' tent to Judith, with all his silver, his beds, his drinking vessels and all his furniture. She took them, and after harnessing her mule, she prepared her chariots and piled up all these goods in them.

¹²All the Israelite women also ran out to see her, they blessed her and a number of them formed a choir in her honour. She took olive branches in her hand and gave some to the women who accompanied her. ¹³She and the women with her made crowns of olive leaves. Then she went ahead of the people, leading the women in dance. All the Israelite men followed, clad in their armour, carrying crowns and loudly chanting hymns. ¹⁴Then Judith intoned this hymn of thanksgiving and the entire people of Israel echoed this praise.

The song of Judith

16 ¹Judith said, "Sing a song to my God with tambourines.

sing in honour of God with cymbals.
Compose for him a psalm of praise.
Exalt and bless his Name!

²The Lord is truly a God who crushes war,
who encamps in the midst of his people
to snatch me from the hand of those
who pursue me.

⁴The Assyrian came from the mountains of the north.

He came with the myriads of his army,
his soldiers have filled the torrents

⁴He wanted to burn my land,
to kill the young men by the sword,
to destroy my children at the breast,
to hand over my little ones to slaughter
and to rape my young maidens.

⁵The Lord Almighty had driven them back by the hand of a woman.

⁶Their hero has not been overcome by young warriors:

he was not struck down by the sons of the Titans,

or laid low by any great giants.

But it is Judith, the daughter of Merari,
who by the beauty of her face has defeated him.

For the relief of the oppressed in Israel

⁷she took off her widow's robes,

anointed her face with perfume.

⁸put a jewelled band around her hair,
and put on a linen dress in order to seduce him.

⁹Her sandals delighted his eyes,
her beauty captivated his soul,
and the scimitar cut through his neck.

¹⁰The Persians trembled with fear at her boldness,

and the Medes were upset by her daring.

¹¹Then my oppressed people shouted for joy:

my weak ones cried out,

the enemy was terrified;

they raised their voices; the enemy took to flight.

¹²The children of young women pierced them through and struck them down like fugitives,

and so the enemy perished in a battle arranged by God.

¹³I will sing to my God a new song:

Lord, you are great and glorious,
wonderfully strong, invincible!

¹⁴May the whole of your creation serve you,

for you spoke and all things were,

you sent forth your spirit and all things came into being:

No one can resist your voice.

¹⁵For the mountains with the waters will be shaken to their foundations,
the rocks will melt like wax before you,
but to those who fear you
you will always show mercy.

¹⁶The fragrance of any sacrifice is little to please you

and the holocausts of fatted animals are as nothing before you,

but he who fears the Lord is forever great.

¹⁷Woe to the nations which rise up against my people:

The Lord Almighty will punish them

in the day of judgment,

with fire and worms under their skin,

and they will keep on weeping, suffering forever."

¹⁸When they had arrived in Jerusalem, they worshipped God and, when the people had been purified, they presented their holocausts, free will offerings and gifts. ¹⁹Then Judith offered all of Holofernes' belongings which the people had given her and she dedicated to the Lord the hangings from his room which she herself had taken. ²⁰So the people remained in Jerusalem, rejoicing before the Sanctuary for three months and Judith stayed with them.

²¹After these days were over each one returned to his own house. Judith returned to Bethulia and devoted herself to her household. During her lifetime she was famous throughout the land. ²²Though many desired to marry her, she had had no relation with any man since the death and burial of Manasseh, her husband.

²³She spent her old age in the house of her husband. And she set her maidservant free. She died in Bethulia at the age of a hundred and five and was buried in the grave of Manasseh, her husband. ²⁴All Israel mourned for her for seven days. Before her death she had divided her property among the relatives of her husband, Manasseh, and those of her own family.

²⁵No one again threatened the people of Israel while Judith lived, nor for a very long time after her death.

BARUCH



The prayer of exiles

1 These are the words of the book written by Baruch, the son of Neriah, descended from Massiah, from Sedekiah, from Hasadiah, from Hilkiah. ²They were written in the fifth year, on the seventh day of the month, at the time when the Chaldeans had taken Jerusalem and burnt it.

³Baruch read the words of this book to Jeconiah, the son of Joachim, the king of Judah in the presence of all the people who had come together to hear it read. ⁴He read it in the hearing of the nobles and the king's sons, of the elders and all the people, from the smallest to the greatest – that is, all those who were living in Babylon near the River Sudi.

⁵Then the people wept and fasted and prayed before the Lord. ⁶They also collected money according to what each one could afford ⁷and this they sent to Jerusalem, to the priest Jehoiakim, son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, and to the other priests and people who dwelt in Jerusalem with him. ⁸This same Baruch had undertaken to carry back to Judea, on the tenth day of the month of Sivan, the sacred vessels which had been taken away from the Temple of the Lord. These were the silver vessels made by Zedekiah, son of Josiah, king of Judah, ⁹after Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried off Jeconiah,

the artisans, the nobles and the people of the land and had taken them captive to Babylon.

¹⁰The letter said: Look, we are sending you money; buy with it victims for the holocaust and for sin offerings and incense; prepare oblations and offer them on the Altar of the Lord our God. ¹¹Pray for the life of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and of Balthasar, his son, so that they may be successful in all that they do. ¹²Thus the Lord will give strength and light to our eyes. We will live under the protection of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and of his son, Balthasar. We shall have a long life serving them and we shall find favour before them.

¹³Pray to the Lord our God for us also, for we have sinned against the Lord our God, even to this day the anger of the Lord and his fury have not been turned away from us. ¹⁴Finally, read this book which we are sending to you, so that you can read it publicly in the House of the Lord on the day of the Feast and on other suitable days.

¹⁵You will say: May everyone recognize the justice of our God but, on this day, shame and confusion befit the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem – ¹⁶our kings and princes, our priests, our prophets, and our fathers, ¹⁷because we have sinned before the Lord. ¹⁸We have disobeyed him and have not listened to the voice of the Lord our God, nor

3. 2 K 23, 2

10. Jer 17, 26

15. Dn 9, 7; Ezr 9, 7

20. Lev 26, 1

The book of Baruch was among the last books of the Bible to be written. It was written during the last century before Christ, in one of the Jewish communities outside of Palestine.

It includes several texts which could be helpful to the dispersed Jews:

- a "prayer of the exiles" which intensified their longing for the Holy Land;
- a beautiful poem about wisdom (3:9-4:4);
- several texts inspired from the prophets of the exile;
- a "letter from Jeremiah," which is a controversial text against idols (Bar 6).

Because it included some paragraphs written in Jeremiah's style, it was attributed to Baruch, the prophet's secretary (see Jer 36).

have we followed the commandments which the Lord had put before us. ¹⁹ From the day that the Lord brought our fathers out of the land of Egypt until this day, we have disobeyed the Lord our God and we have rebelled against him instead of listening to his voice.

²⁰ Because of this, from the day on which the Lord brought our fathers out of the land of Egypt, so as to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, the evils and the curse which the Lord pronounced by Moses, his servant, have dogged our footsteps right down to the present day. ²¹ We did not listen to the voice of the Lord our God speaking through the words of the prophets whom he sent to us, but each one of us followed his perverted heart, serving false gods and doing what displeases the Lord our God.

2 ¹ That is why the Lord our God has carried out the word which he spoke against us, against the judges who have governed Israel, against our kings, our princes and the men of Israel and Judah.

² No one under the sky has ever seen the like of what happened in Jerusalem, according to what is written in the book of Moses. ³ For people among us came to eat their son's and daughter's flesh. ⁴ And he handed them over into the power of all the surrounding kingdoms, so that they were cursed and humiliated among the neighbouring peoples among whom the Lord had scattered them. ⁵ Submission and not command has been our lot, because we have sinned against the Lord our God and have not listened to his voice.

⁶ Just is the Lord our God, whereas shame and confusion befit us and our fathers right down to this day. ⁷ All those evils which the Lord prophesied concerning us have fallen upon us. ⁸ And we have not begged the Lord to make each of us turn away from the thoughts of our evil hearts. ⁹ Then the Lord kept watch over the evils and allowed them to come upon us, for the Lord is just in all that he has commanded us to do. ¹⁰ We have not listened to his voice nor followed the commands which the Lord has ordered us to keep.

¹¹ And now, Lord God of Israel, you who brought your people out of Egypt with a strong hand, with miracles and wonders and great power, you who stretched out your arm and made for yourself a name such as you have today, ¹² we have sinned. We have been godless and unjust, Lord, careless about all your commands. ¹³ May your fury be turned away from us, for there are very few of us left among the nations in which you have scattered us.

¹⁴ Hear our supplication and our prayer, O Lord, deliver us for your own honour and let us find favour with those who deported us.

¹⁵ Let all the earth know that you are the Lord our God, because Israel and its people bear your name. ¹⁶ Lord, look down from your holy dwelling place and think of us; Lord incline your ear and listen; ¹⁷ Lord open your eyes and consider: that it is not the dead, lying in the nether world, who will praise your glory and justice, ¹⁸ since their spirit has been taken from their breast. Grieving under his burden, and walking bowed down and exhausted, the man with eyes sore from weeping and who is hungry – these are they, who can give you glory and justice, O Lord.

¹⁹ For it is not on account of the credit of our fathers and of our kings that we pour out our cry for pity before you, O Lord our God.

²⁰ You have sent down on us your fury and your anger as you announced through your servants, the prophets, saying, ²¹ "Thus says the Lord: Bend your shoulders and serve the King of Babylon and you will dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers. ²² But if you do not listen to the voice of the Lord your God and serve the King of Babylon, ²³ I will bring to an end in the towns of Judah and in Jerusalem the song of joy and gladness, the song of the bridegroom and the bride, and the whole country will become a desert without inhabitants.

²⁴ We did not listen to your invitation to serve the King of Babylon and so you carried out what you had foretold by your servants, the prophets, that the bones of our kings and our fathers would be taken from their graves.

²⁵ See, they have been exposed to the heat of the day and the cold of the night; they died in cruel sufferings, by famine, by the sword and by plagues. ²⁶ And you have reduced the nation which bears your name to the state in which it is today because of the wickedness of the people of Judah.

²⁷ However, you have acted towards us, O Lord our God, indulgently and with great tenderness, ²⁸ as you foretold by your servant Moses, the day you ordered him to write down your Law in the presence of the children of Israel saying: ²⁹ If you do not listen to my voice, this great and vast multitude will be reduced to a small remnant among the nations where I shall scatter them; ³⁰ for I know well that they will not listen to me because they are a stiff-necked people. But in the land of their exile their hearts will be converted ³¹ and they will know that I am the Lord their God. ³² And I will give them a heart and listening ears, that they

may praise me in the land of their exile and remember my name.³³ They will repent of their stiff-necked obstinacy and their evil deeds because they will remember what happened to their fathers who had sinned before the Lord.³⁴ And I will lead them into the land which I have promised by oath to their fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and they will take possession of it. I will increase their number and they will no longer diminish.³⁵ I will make with them an everlasting covenant; I will be their God and they shall be my people. I will no longer drive my people Israel from the land which I have given to them.

3 ¹ Almighty Lord, God of Israel, a soul in anguish and a discouraged spirit cries out to you. ² Listen Lord, and have pity for we have sinned against you; ³ for you reign for ever while we perish for ever. ⁴ Lord, all-powerful God of Israel, listen then to the prayers of the dead of Israel. We are the sons of those who sinned against you, who did not listen to the voice of their God, and this is why disgrace has come upon us. ⁵ Do not remember any longer the wrongdoing of our fathers but remember, at this time, your power and your name; ⁶ for you are the Lord, our God and we will praise you, Lord. ⁷ That is why you have put your fear into our hearts and we call upon your name. And we will praise you in our exile for we have removed from our hearts all the wrong of our fathers who sinned against you. ⁸ We are here today in our exile where you have scattered us to be insulted, cursed and condemned for the wrongdoing of our fathers, who separated themselves from the Lord our God.

Who has found wisdom?

◆ ⁹ Listen, Israel, to the commands of life, give ear so as to learn prudence,
¹⁰ Why, Israel! Why are you in the land of your foes? Why are you growing old in a foreign country, contaminated by pagans,
¹¹ counted among those who go to the pit?
¹² You have abandoned the source of Wisdom.
¹³ If you had walked in the way of God, peace would be your dwelling place forever.

¹⁴ Learn where is Wisdom, where is Strength and Understanding,
 that you may know, at the same time, where are length of days and life,
 light of the eyes and Peace.

¹⁵ Who will find Wisdom's dwelling?
 Who will enter her storage rooms?
¹⁶ Where are the leaders of the nations,
 those who commanded the beasts of the earth,
¹⁷ who played with the birds of the heavens,
 who piled up silver and gold – in which men put their trust –
 and who never tired of collecting it?

¹⁸ Amassing money was their only concern,
 their business beyond measure.
¹⁹ But they have disappeared,
 they went down to the dead
 and others have risen in their place.
²⁰ A younger generation is there
 on the earth and enjoys the light,
 but they have not known the ways of knowledge;

they have not seen his tracks nor have they met him,
²¹ and their sons after them did not leave their paths.

²² No one in Canaan has heard of Wisdom,
 no one has seen her in Teman.

²³ The sons of Agar, who seek knowledge of the earth,
 the traders of Madian and Teman,
 the tellers of fables and philosophers,
 they have not known the path of Wisdom,
 they have not discovered her ways.

²⁴ O Israel, how great is the house of God
 how vast his dominion!

²⁵ It is great and has no limits.
 It is lofty, wide and immeasurable.

²⁶ There were born the ancient and famous:
 giants
 of high stature and skillful in war.

²⁷ God did not choose them,
 he did not teach them the ways of Wisdom.

²⁸ and they perished because of their folly,
 because they lacked knowledge.

²⁹ Who has ascended to Heaven
 that he may lay hold of her
 and bring her down from the clouds?

34. Dt 30, 5	35. Jer 31, 31	11. Hos 9, 4	14. Pro 2, 1; Dt 4, 6	15. Job 28; Sir 1, 6
16. Dn 2, 38	22. Jer 49, 7	29. Dt 30, 11	30. Sir 24, 4	

◆ This poem is inspired by chapter 28 of Job. The author addresses believers who are very impressed by the culture and material wealth of the pagans among whom they live. He reminds them that man's authentic wisdom is not mere technical knowledge, nor is it the art of making money or pure human reflection. Wisdom con-

sists in knowing what is God's plan in creating: this world? What does God ask of man?

For Jewish believers, true wisdom was found in God's words, in their "Law." In their turn, Christians know that the wisdom ruling the universe is none other than the one known in the words and the person of Jesus.

³⁰ Who has crossed seas and found her, and bought her with the purest of gold?

³¹ There is no one who knows her path, no one who thinks of her way.

³² But he who knows everything recognizes her.

He has found her in his own intellect.

He who created the earth, for all time, and has filled it with four-footed beings.

³³ He who sends the light, and it goes, who recalls it, and trembling it obeys.

³⁴ The stars have shone, full of joy, to keep their night watches.

He calls them and they answer, "Here we are."

They shine with joy for their Creator.

³⁵ It is He who is our God, no other can be compared with him.

³⁶ He has found the way of understanding and has given her to Jacob his servant and to Israel his well-beloved.

³⁷ Then Wisdom was seen on earth and lived among men.

4 ¹ She, herself, is the book of the commands of God, the law which endures forever.

All who hold fast to her will have life but those who abandon her will die.

² Come back, Jacob, and embrace her, walk towards brightness under her light.

³ Do not give up what is your glory or sell your privileges to any strange nation.

⁴ We are fortunate, O Israel, for we know what pleases the Lord!

Consolation for Jerusalem

⁵ Take courage, my people, you who maintain the memory of Israel. ⁶ You have been sold to the nations but not for your destruction; because you had aroused the anger of God, you were delivered to your enemies. ⁷ For you displeased your Creator in sacrificing to demons and not to God. ⁸ You have forgotten the Eternal God, the one who nourished you. You have filled Jerusalem with sadness, she who brought you up. ⁹ For she saw the anger of God fall on you and she said, "Listen, you neighbouring cities of Zion, God has sent me a great sorrow. ¹⁰ I have seen the captivity of my sons and daughters, which the Eternal one brought on them. ¹¹ I had nurtured them in joy; with tears and sadness I saw them leave. ¹² Let no one rejoice on seeing me a widow and abandoned by all. Because of the sins of my children, I am now alone because they have turned away from the law of God.

¹³ They have not remembered its precepts; nor have they walked in the ways of his commandments, and followed the discipline which leads to uprightness.

¹⁴ Let them come, the neighbours of Sion, and remember the captivity which the Eternal One laid on my sons and daughters.

¹⁵ For he caused a distant nation to come against them, a ruthless nation with an unknown language.

They had no respect for the old, and no pity for the infant; ¹⁶ they took away the only son of the widow, as well as her daughter, and left her alone.

¹⁷ But, as for myself, how can I help you?

¹⁸ He who caused these evils to come upon you will deliver you from the hands of your enemies.

¹⁹ Well, my children go on your way; as for me, I am left alone.

²⁰ I have taken off the garment of peace and put on again the sackcloth of penance and prayer. I will cry out to the Eternal One all the rest of my days.

²¹ Come, take courage, my children, cry out to God. He will deliver you from the violence of the enemy.

²² Because I hoped for your salvation from the Eternal One, joy has come to me from the Holy One, because of the mercy that will come to you soon from the Eternal One, our Saviour.

²³ In tears and mourning, I saw you leave, but in joy and gladness God will bring you back to me forever.

²⁴ As the neighbours of Sion have seen your captivity so they will soon see your salvation from God, when he manifests to you the great glory and the splendour of the Eternal God.

²⁵ Children, bear patiently this punishment which came on you from God. The enemy has persecuted you, but you will soon see his downfall and you will trample him underfoot.

²⁶ My well-beloved children have walked by difficult paths, carried off like a herd stolen by enemies. ²⁷ Take courage, my children, cry out to God, for he who sent you into exile will remember you.

²⁸ Thus, as you distanced yourself from God, return to him and seek him ten times more earnestly. ²⁹ For he who caused these evils to fall on you will bring you salvation and eternal joy.

³⁰ Take courage, Jerusalem. He who has named you will console you.

³¹ Cursed be those who did evil to you and rejoiced in your downfall. ³² Cursed be those

32. Job 28, 23.

34. Sir 43, 9.

35. Ps 147, 4.

37. Pro 8, 31.

38. Jn 1, 14.

1. Sir 24, 23;

Sir 45, 5.

7. Sir 10, 20.

12. Is 49, 21.

15. Jer 5, 15.

25. Ps 110, 1; Job 10, 24.

30. Is 40, 1.

cities in which your children were slaves, cursed the nation in which they had to live.

³³ Just as that nation rejoiced in your downfall and took pleasure in your destruction so will she be afflicted and destroyed.

³⁴ I will take from her the joy of being a numerous people; her pride will be turned into mourning.

■ ³⁵ A fire will descend on her from the Eternal One and burn for many days. She will be inhabited by demons for a long time.

³⁶ Jerusalem, look towards the East, and see the joy which is coming to you from God.

³⁷ Look, your sons who were scattered, are returning. They are assembling, coming together, from the East and from the West, at the voice of the Holy One, rejoicing in the glory of God.

5 ¹ Jerusalem, put off your garment of mourning and unhappiness, put on the splendour and glory of God forever.

² Wrap yourself in the mantle of holiness that comes from God, put on your head the crown of glory of the Eternal One.

³ For God will show your splendour to every being under Heaven.

⁴ He will call your name forever, "Peace in Justice" and "Glory in the Fear of the Lord".

⁵ Rise up, Jerusalem, stand on the heights. Look towards the East and see your children gathered together, from the setting of the sun to its rising, by the voice of the Holy One, rejoicing because God has remembered them.

⁶ They left you on foot, taken away by the enemy. God will lead them back, carried gloriously like royal princes.

⁷ For God has resolved to bring low every high mountain and the everlasting hills, to fill up the valleys and level out the ground, in order that Israel may walk in safety under the Glory of God.

⁸ Even the forests and the sweet-smelling trees will give shade to Israel at God's command. ⁹ For God will lead Israel with joy by the light of his Glory, escorting them with his mercy and justice.

The Letter of Jeremiah

o6 *A copy of the letter which Jeremiah sent to those who were to be taken captive to Babylon by the king of the Babylo-*

nians, to let them know what God had ordered him.

¹ "Because of the sins you have committed against God, you will be led captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians. ² After your arrival in Babylon you will remain there for a number of years – a long time, for seven generations; but after that I shall bring you home in peace.

³ In Babylon you will see gods of silver, gold and wood, carried on men's shoulders and filling the people with fear. ⁴ Take care not to copy what foreigners do and let yourselves be terrified by them ⁵ when you see the crowds pressing in front and behind to adore them. Say rather to yourselves: 'Master, it is you we are to adore.' My angel is with you to take care of your lives.

⁷ Their tongues have been polished by a craftsman and even if they are of gold and silver, they are falsehood being unable to speak. ⁸ As for a maiden conscious of her appearance, these pagans make golden crowns for these gods. ⁹ Yet at times the priests steal that gold and silver from their gods for their own use and for the prostitutes in their temples.

¹⁰ They give clothes to these gods as if they were men, but they are only things of gold, silver and wood, which cannot defend themselves from rust or woodworm. ¹¹ So, after clothing them in purple, they wipe their faces because of the thick dust of the temple that covers them.

¹² The god has a sceptre like a governor of a province, but he cannot destroy the person who has wronged him. ¹³ He carries sword and axe in his right hand, but he is helpless both in war and against thieves. ¹⁴ This clearly proves they are not gods; have no fear of them.

¹⁵ A broken pot is useless for anyone. So are those gods enshrined in their temples. ¹⁶ Their eyes are full of the dust raised by those who enter. ¹⁷ Just as doors are carefully closed on a man who has offended the king or on a convict sentenced to death, in the same way the priests lock and bolt the doors of the temple for fear of thieves. ¹⁸ They light lamps, far more numerous than what they need for themselves, and yet, the god sees no one. ¹⁹ He is no more than any of the beams of the temple and some whisper that the inner part is gnawed by ter-

37. Is 43, 5 3. Is 62, 1 7. Is 40, 4 6. Ex 23, 20 7. Is 40, 19; Jer 10, 4

■ Following the laments of verses 5-35, note the ending filled with hope and joy (4:36-5:9) which resembles chapters 60-62 of Isaiah.

o This discourse also serves as a warning for us against exaggerated devotion to the saints

and too much interest in religious images.

In the midst of so many considerations which may seem very long to us, note the judgment expressed in verses 27 and 37: a religion which shows no concern for orphans and widows is a false religion.

mites; worms out of the ground devour both the god and his clothes, but he feels nothing.²⁰ Their faces have become black because of the smoke of the temple.²¹ Owls alight on their heads and shoulders, swallows and other birds perch on them and cats prowl around them.²² This tells you they are no gods, so do not have fear of them.

²³If the rust on the gold that adorns them is not removed, they cannot shine. Yet, what does it matter? Even when they were cast they felt nothing.²⁴ They may be bought at a high price but there is not a breath of life in them.²⁵ As they are without feet, they are carried on men's shoulders, showing publicly their shame. What a confusion for their worshippers if the god falls! They must lift him up.²⁶ Once he has been stood up, he does not move. If tilted, he is helpless to straighten up. So you make offerings to these gods as you make to dead men.

²⁷The priests collect what has been offered for sacrifice, selling it, while the wives salt some of it but give nothing to the poor and helpless. Do you think these are true offerings? Even women giving birth or who are ritually unclean touch them.²⁸ See that they are not gods and do not have fear of them.

²⁹How can they be called gods? Women carry offerings to things made of silver, wood and gold.³⁰ The priests remain seated in the temple, their garments torn, head and beard shaved, and no covering on their heads.³¹ They roar and cry in the presence of their gods as do certain people during funeral meals.³² With the garments taken from the gods the priests clothe their wives and their children.³³ Whether they are treated well or shabbily, the gods can make no return, neither can they make or unmake a king.³⁴ They are incapable of bestowing riches or money. If someone fails to keep a vow, he is not called to account.³⁵ They can neither save a man from death nor rescue a helpless person from the clutch of the powerful.³⁶ They cannot restore sight to the blind or save someone in distress.³⁷ They will show no compassion to the widow nor do good to the orphan.

³⁸These pieces of wood plated with gold and silver are not more worthy than rocks hewn out of a mountain and their worshippers shall be humiliated.³⁹ How then can anyone believe they are gods? How can they be called gods?

⁴⁰The Chaldeans themselves have them put to shame. If they see someone who is dumb, unable to speak, they bring him before

Bel, entreating him to make him speak, as if the god could hear them!⁴¹ And yet these thinking people are unable to abandon gods that are completely devoid of sense.⁴² Women with cord round their waists sit in the street burning bran.⁴³ When one of them has been picked up by a passerby and has slept with him, she taunts her companion for not having been so highly regarded as herself and for failing to have her cord broken.⁴⁴ All that goes on anywhere near these gods is false. How can they be considered or declared to be gods?

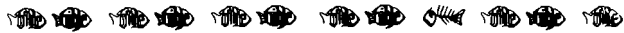
⁴⁵They have been fashioned by craftsmen and goldsmiths; they are nothing more than what the artisans decided they were to be.⁴⁶ Those who made them haven't long to live; so how could the work of their hands be gods?⁴⁷ What they leave to their descendants is nothing more than illusion and shame.

⁴⁸For when war or other disasters come upon them, they discuss among themselves where they, with their gods, will hide.⁴⁹ How could anyone fail to be convinced that what cannot save from war and disaster is not a god?⁵⁰ Later on these pieces of wood plated with silver and gold will be known to be false. It will be plain to all kings and nations that they are not gods, but merely the handicraft of men and God does nothing through them.⁵¹ Is there anyone unconvinced that these are not gods?

⁵²They are incapable of establishing a king in a country or of sending rain to people.⁵³ They are unable to discern what is just or to rescue a person who has been wronged. They are as helpless as crows between the sky and the ground.⁵⁴ When fire breaks out in the temple of these wooden gods plated with silver and gold, the priests flee to safety but they are burnt with the beams in the midst of the flames.⁵⁵ They can neither resist a king or a hostile army.⁵⁶ How can it be admitted or believed that that they are gods?

⁵⁷These gods cannot escape either from thieves or brigands. These are more powerful and despoil them of their gold, their silver and their robes. Such gods are unable to defend themselves.

⁵⁸Better to be a king with a show of power, or even a household pot that is of some use to its owner than to be a false god; better even to be the door of a house that guards what is within, or a wooden column in a royal palace than to be a false god.⁵⁹ The sun, moon and stars that shine and serve us are obedient to God;⁶⁰ likewise the lightning that is beautiful to see, and the wind that blows over the country⁶¹ and the clouds passing over the earth at



God's command, fire sent from on high to consume mountain and forest – all do what is commanded. ⁶² But these wooden objects can in no way compare with them ⁶³ that is why it must not be either believed or said that these are gods, since they are powerless to administer justice or benefit mankind in any way. ⁶⁴ Since you know they are not gods, do not have fear of them.

⁶⁵ They can neither curse ⁶⁶ nor bless kings nor bring about signs in the heavens for the nations to see. They can neither shine like the sun nor give light like the moon. ⁶⁷ Animals are of more worth, since by taking cover they can

look after themselves. ⁶⁸ So in no way whatever is it evident to us that these are gods; for that reason do not have fear of them.

⁶⁹ For like a scarecrow in a field of melons, these gods plated with silver and gold protect nothing. ⁷⁰ Again these wooden gods may be compared to a thorn bush in a garden where any bird can perch, or to corpse thrown into a dark place. ⁷¹ You know by the purple and scarlet robes rotting on them that they are not gods. They end up by being eaten away and become a disgrace to the country. ⁷² Better then a just man who has no idols, he will not be dishonoured.



INTRODUCTION

In the last centuries before Christ, Greek culture, spread by Alexander, had penetrated into the countries of the Middle East (see introduction to Maccabees). The Greeks had a new way of viewing the freedom of the individual, the nobility of spirit, the interest in scientific research, the meaning of physical beauty, etc.

The Jews' culture had been developing alongside the words of God and basically thanks to them. Nevertheless, they had to open up to another way of thinking: when a people sticks only to its national culture, without seeing anything beyond, within a short time, it suffocates. God's revelation to the Jews was not over, but it was necessary to present it in a new way to all people who neither thought nor spoke like the Jews.

The book of Wisdom is the first important effort to express the faith and wisdom of Israel, not only in Greek, but also in a form adapted to Greek culture.



Seek life; know God

1 Love justice, you who rule over the world. Be sincere with the Lord and seek him in simplicity of heart, ² for he reveals himself to those who do not challenge him and is found by those who do not distrust him.

³ Crooked thinking distances you from God, and his Omnipotence, put to the test, confounds the foolish.

⁴ Wisdom does not enter the wicked nor remain in a body that is slave to sin. ⁵ The Holy Spirit who instructs us shuns deceit; it keeps aloof from foolishness and is ill at ease when injustice is done.

⁶ Wisdom is a spirit, a friend to man, and will not leave the blasphemous unpunished, because God knows his innermost feelings, truly sees his thoughts and hears what he says.

⁷ For God's spirit has filled the whole world and he who holds together all things, knows each word that is spoken. ⁸ So whoever speaks unjustly will not escape; the irrefutable sentence will reach him. ⁹ The

intentions of the unholy will be examined; what he has said will reach the Lord and his wickedness will be confounded.

¹⁰ Remember that a jealous ear hears everything; even whispers are recorded.

¹¹ Beware then, of empty complaints and keep your tongue from fault-finding, since your most secret word will have consequences; a lying tongue brings death to the soul. ¹² Do not bring about your own death and do not let the work of your hands destroy you.

¹³ God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. ¹⁴ Since he has created everything, all creatures of the universe are for good; there is no deadly poison in them and the netherworld has no dominion over the earth, ¹⁵ because justice is not submitted to death.

The godless say there is no other life

+ ¹⁶ It is the godless that consider death as a friend and call for it in every

1. Mt 6, 33

2. Is 55, 6; 65, 1; Jer 29, 13; Pro 8, 17

4. Rom 7, 24

6. Pro 8, 31; Tit 3, 4

7. Jer 23, 24; Ps 139, 7

11. Ex 15, 24; Ps 78, 19

14. Eek 18, 23

16. Is 28, 15; Pro 8, 36

o God is more present to us than we are to ourselves. We need not look very far for authentic wisdom: it appears as spirit coming from God that becomes present to us interiorly. But it is only revealed to the just.

How can we express the nearness of the inaccessible and holy God? Here, the author speaks of Providence, Wisdom, Justice, the Spirit of God. He speaks of them as if they were persons sent by God to look after us. In fact, it is a way of presenting God himself who, though he preserves his mystery, is close to people and to events.

God did not make death nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. He is a God who is a friend of humans and he wants them to live. His creation is good and at the service of man. Death does not come from God as is explained in 2:33. And so, we are asked to look confidently to the Lord: to think well of him is to deny all these false questions: Why does God allow evil, death, earthquakes and tragedies? God only wants life.

+ *We were born by chance.* The godless, that is, the wicked are the friends of death. They

It gives an answer to the anguishing question of evil, pain and death; it sketches a proof of the existence of God that will inspire Paul; it shows that God's mercy extends to all beings without exception.

The book of Wisdom was written in Egypt between 80 and 50 before Christ by one of the many Jews who were living in the Greek world.

Note especially the magnificent chapters 3-5 concerning the death of the just and the hope in eternal life and also the hymn to wisdom in chapter 7.

way. They have made a pact with it and they shall justly belong to it.

2 ¹ Led by mistaken reasons they think, "Life is short and sad and there is no cure for death. It was never heard that someone had come back from the netherworld.

² By chance we were born; when life is over, it will be as if we never existed. The breath in our nostrils is like a puff of smoke, and thought is no more than a spark resulting from the movement of the heart. ³ Put this out and the body turns to ashes and the spirit disperses like idle air.

⁴ In time our name will be forgotten, no one will remember what we did. ⁵ Life passes like the shadow of a cloud, disappearing like a mist chased by the sun and conquered by its heat. The duration of life resembles the passing of a shadow; from death there is no turning back, the seal is set: no one returns.

⁶ Come then and enjoy the good things; let us use creation with the zest of youth, ⁷ making the most of the choicest wines and perfumes without passing by any flower of spring. ⁸ Crown ourselves with rosebuds before they fade.

1. Job 14, 1	2. Ps 102, 4	5. Ecl 6, 12	6. Is 22, 13; 1 Cor 15, 32	10. Ex 22, 21
12. Jer 11, 19; 20, 10; Jn 5, 16; Mt 26, 3		13. Mt 11, 27; Lk 22, 70	16. Mt 5, 11; Jn 5, 18	
18. Ps 22, 9; Mt 27, 43				

forget that God, in making us in his own image, did not create us to die. They think that everything ends with the grave and their only wisdom is to enjoy this life: *let us enjoy the good things and use creation with the zest of youth.*

Let us see the truth of what he says. Because the godless are the friends of death they, necessarily, come to persecute and even kill the good. For them, it is like a game to see to what point the righteous will remain firm, since they themselves believe in no ideal: they need to destroy others to convince themselves that they, alone, benefit from life.

If the righteous is the son of God, God will defend him. The words in 2:16-20 reveal the situation of Jesus on the cross. Matthew, in particular, will recall them in 27:43.

This is also verified in the lives of real believers, a scandal to a materialist who will enjoy in-

⁹ Let everyone take part in our orgy; let us post everywhere the signs of our joy, for that is our due, the lot assigned to us.

¹⁰ Let us oppress the upright man who is poor, and have no thought for the widow, or respect for the hair of old age whitened by years.

¹¹ Let our strength be our right, since it is proved that weakness is useless. ¹² Let us set a trap for the righteous for he annoys us and opposes our way of life; he reproaches us for our breaches of the Law and accuses us of being false to our up-bringing.

¹³ He claims knowledge of God and calls himself son of the Lord. ¹⁴ He has become a reproach to our way of thinking; even to meet him is burdensome to us. ¹⁵ He does not live like the rest and behaves strangely.

¹⁶ According to him we have low standards and he keeps aloof from us as if we were unclean. He emphasizes the happy end of the righteous and boasts of having God as father.

¹⁷ Let us see the truth of what he says and find out what his end will be. ¹⁸ If the righteous is a son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from his adversaries.

flitting suffering on those who make sacrifices for others. We have even seen comfortable "Christians" rejoicing over the death of those who speak of justice and who, by their own involvement, disturb the conscience of the satisfied.

The mentality of the godless who does not believe in the hereafter is, in some way, very much like that of the society in which we live. *Let us set a trap for the righteous since he opposes our way of life.* Secretly, we all admire the up-right, but in any institution, his presence disturbs us – in the unions just as in the factories – because we cannot buy his conscience.

He does not live like the rest and behaves strangely. When this was written the Jews were not well thought of by the pagans because of all the details of their lives that were different from the pagan customs. The same is true now as well, even though believers try not to be distinct,



¹⁹ Let us humble and torture him to prove his self control and test his patience. ²⁰ When we have condemned him to a shameful death, we may test his words."

²¹ This is the way they reason, but they are mistaken, blinded by their malice. ²² They do not know the mysteries of God or do they hope for the reward of a holy life; they do not believe that the blameless will be recompensed.

²³ Indeed God has created man to be immortal in the likeness of his own nature. ²⁴ but the envy of the devil has brought death to the world, and those who stand with him shall experience death.

The just will live with God

■ 3 ¹ The souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch them.

² In the eyes of the unwise they are dead. Their going is held as a disaster; ³ it seems that they lose everything by departing from us, but they are in peace.

⁴ Though seemingly they have been punished, immortality was the soul of their hope. ⁵ After slight affliction come great blessings, for God has tried them and found them worthy to be with him; ⁶ after testing them as gold in the furnace, he has accepted them as a holocaust.

⁷ At the time of his coming they will shine like sparks that run in the stubble. ⁸ They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will be their king forever.

⁹ Those who trust in him will penetrate the truth, those who are faithful will live with him in love, for his grace and mercy are for his chosen ones.

¹⁰ The godless, instead, who have ignored the upright and deserted the Lord will be punished according to their purposes.

¹¹ Unhappy are those who put no value on wisdom and instruction, their hope is vain, their efforts useless, their work without profit; ¹² their wives are foolish, their children evil, their posterity cursed.

19. Is 53, 7; Mt 26, 67	23. Gen 1, 26; 2 Pet 1, 4	24. Rom 5, 12	1. Dn 3, 3; Is 51, 16;
Jn 10, 28	5. Rom 8, 18; 2 Cor 4, 17	6. Ps 17, 3; Pro 17, 3	7. Dn 12, 5; Mt 13, 43
8. Dn 7, 27; Ps 49, 15; 1 Cor 6, 2; Rev 5, 10; 10, 4		9. 1 Cor 13, 12; 1 Jn 3, 2	12. Sir 41, 5

their integrity and their enthusiasm make them "strange."

Those who stand with death experience death. Those who do evil begin to experience death. There is a physical wearing down caused by vice (alcoholism, licentiousness), but there is an even greater deterioration of enthusiasm, happiness and trust. "He who sows in the flesh will reap from it corruption and death" (Gal 6:8). see also Rom. 6:21.

Those who stand with death. The serpent mentioned here is not any image of "evil" but rather it represents the enemy. We may speak of evil but we must also speak of the *Evil One*. And so, these verses prepare for what the Gospel will say. Jesus will come to personally confront the Enemy: from this will come the liberation of humanity over which death ruled (see Heb 2:14-15).

■ The souls of the just are in the hand of God. This is the great revelation of this book. In the previous books of the Bible, the *soul* only means the breath of man, that is to say, the life

in him which disappears at death. Now, the soul means the person who does not die when the body does.

Their going is held as a disaster. Whether the just die at the hands of violent people, or they die as we all do, the end of their lives seems to contradict God's goodness: it is a scandal that death could overcome the just. (We know that the just are those who fulfil the hopes that God placed in them.) But it is only the body which dies. They are alive before God as Jesus will also state (Luke 20:38).

But they are in peace. They will forever enjoy what they have hoped for here on earth. That is to say, we only see one side of death, the companion or the relative who leaves us. The other side is their entrance into God's world.

At the time of judgment we will see that the just are the only ones who have been alive. The death of the friends of God brings peace to those who were at their side. Through their death the martyrs bring the triumph of the cause for which they lived.



A truly fruitful life

◆¹³ Happy the childless wife if she is blameless and has not been guilty of adultery; she will be found fruitful on the day of judgment.

¹⁴ And happy the impotent man who has done no evil or harboured resentful thoughts against the Lord. His fidelity will be richly rewarded with a special place in the Lord's heavenly sanctuary.

¹⁵ The toil of the righteous bears the choicest fruit; right discernment is a tree that does not wither.

¹⁶ But the children born of adultery die young and the offspring of an unlawful union disappear.

¹⁷ If they live long, they count for nothing and are finally despised in their old age. ¹⁸ If they die young, it is without hope, and they cannot comfort themselves with thinking of the Judgment.

¹⁹ Cruel is the fate of an evil race.

13. Is 56, 1 14. Is 56, 3 19. Sir 16, 4
10. Gen 5, 24; Heb 11, 5

◆ *Happy is the childless woman if she is blameless.* In the Bible we always find praise of the fruitful life, of a couple having several children and raising them to be fully human (see Psalms 127 and 128). Here the question is renewed: what is a fruitful life? In Israel, being without children was seen as God's punishment and the Law excluded eunuchs (or castrated men) from religious worship. Yet, one of the prophets had taken an opposite view (see Is 56:4).

Better to be without child and to be virtuous. Here we have the revelation of another way of being fruitful: seeking perfection. We know of childless couples and of single women who channeled their capacity for love and surrender toward others and they succeeded in getting spiritual children and family. A fruitful life is one spent for others or for God. When these lines were written, there were Jews going to the desert to form religious communities of single men, in order to pray and to hurry the coming of the Saviour. Years later, Mary will dedicate her virginity to God and so, for Christians, she is the model of a virginity consecrated to God and with its own form of fruitfulness.

○ "Why did God take him? My husband was such a good man." This passage gives an opportune answer in a moving way. God gave some of us the grace to grow more quickly and to reach

4 ¹ Better to have no children and to be virtuous. People like this are highly considered by God and men. The memory of their life cannot end.

² When virtue is present we imitate it; when it is absent we long for it; it is crowned in the everlasting world for having triumphed in the blameless struggle.

³ The numerous race of the wicked is useless. Offspring of doubtful plants, they have no deep roots and cannot lay solid foundations.

⁴ For a time they produce, but their weak branches shaken by the wind are uprooted by the storm. ⁵ Their branches torn before it has grown, their fruit useless, unripe for eating and good for nothing. ⁶ Children born of unlawful intercourse witness, when God examines them, to the wrong-doing of their parents.

○ ⁷ The upright, even if he dies before his time, will be at rest. ⁸ Honourable age does not depend on the length of days, nor is the number of years a true measure of life.

⁹ A man's gray hair is understanding, ripe old age is a spotless life.

¹⁰ The upright was pleasing to God, who loved him and, since he was

1. Sir 16, 3 3. Sir 23, 25 4. Ps 58, 10

in a few years the perfection that others only achieved after many years.

The just one was pleasing to God who loved him. The wife or the son whom God took did not belong to us. A strong bond of love between them and us had developed with countless circumstances and memories, but a stronger love united them to the Lord who had reserved them for himself.

Since he was living among sinners, God took him. (see Gen 5:24). This is another answer to the premature death of our children: Who knows what they would have done with their lives? God knows best what suits every one.

+ The prophets spoke of God's judgment on on many occasions, referring to a judgment on earth, in which God should repay the sinner nations and groups, and redress human history.

But now we learn of an individual judgment after death. This page does not stress on those who were proved in time of peace through their good or evil deeds. It underscores rather those who were faithful in times of persecution.

These words move us in the present years when so many believers cannot speak of justice without risking their work and even their life. Meanwhile the world calls happy those who can afford the drinks, drugs and false lights of consumerism.



living among sinners, he was taken up. ¹¹God removed him lest evil impair his understanding and treachery seduce his soul. ¹²For the fascination of evil darkens true values and restless desire undermines a simple heart.

¹³Though his life soon ended, he travelled far. ¹⁴Because his soul was precious to the Lord, he was quickly removed from the wickedness around him.

¹⁵People have seen but did not understand, and it does not occur to them that God's grace and mercy are with his chosen ones, his protection is for the holy.

¹⁶The just man who dies condemns the wicked man who survives.

The young life fulfilled early condemns the endless days of the wicked.

¹⁷They may see the death of the wise, but they will not understand God's design for him and why he has taken him to safety. ¹⁸They may see and sneer at him, but the Lord also will laugh at them when ¹⁹they have become a useless corpse, a loathsome and dead thing forever.

The Lord will dash them to the ground, voiceless, shaking them from their foundations; they will wither and suffer anguish; even their memory will fade.

²⁰They will come trembling to the reckoning of their sins and they will be confounded when confronted with their wickedness.

Judgment on the just and the godless

+5

¹ Then the just will stand confident
facing those who oppressed him,
making light of his labours.

² Seeing him they will be seized with a terrible fear,
amazed to find him unexpectedly saved.

Stricken with remorse
and distressed, ³ they will groan and say,

⁴ "He is the one we mocked,
the one we reproached, fools that we were!

We considered his life foolishness,
and his death, the supreme humiliation,

⁵ but see: he is counted among the sons of God
and is given his lot with the holy angels!

⁶ How far have we wandered from the truth!
The light of the upright has not enlightened us
nor has its sun risen for us.

⁷ We have trodden the paths of injustice and death
travelling, more than enough,

15. Is 57, 1	18. Ps 37, 13; Pro 1, 26	1. Mt 13, 43	5. Ps 89, 6; Col 1, 12	6. Is 58, 8
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On that day, we will not wear the mask we all have on earth, a mask which hides our hypocrisy and meanness. We will see ourselves in our nakedness and God the Father, the Lord and Knower of all, will reward or punish us. Then, the wicked will clearly see that their lives were empty: *scarcely born, we have disappeared. Before God convicts them, they will judge themselves: their own sins will accuse them (4:20).*

On the contrary, *the upright will live forever; the Most High has them in his care.* We could compare this with the judgment parable in Matthew 25:31, with this difference that Jesus distinguishes between those who looked after their neighbours and those who did not, whereas here, the persecutors and the persecuted face each other. All of them meet again after the time when the wicked triumphed over the just.



through the trackless deserts,
but we were unable to know the Lord's ways.

⁸ What good has been our pride?

What profit in the wealth we boasted about?

⁹ All that has passed away like a shadow,
like a fleeting rumour.

¹⁰ Like a ship cutting the sea,
leaving no trace of its course,
and the mark of its keel – not seen in its wake;

¹¹ like a bird flying across the sky

leaving no trace of its flight;

it beats the light air with its pinions,
cleaving a way by the force of its wings
but without a sign of its passing;

¹² or like an arrow shot to its target,
with the displaced air closing in on itself
and no one knowing what way it passed.

¹³ It is the same for us: scarcely born we have disappeared.
What sign of virtue are we able to show,
spent as we are in our own wickedness?"

¹⁴ The hope of the godless is like chaff blown in the wind,
like a thin frost melted in the storm,
like smoke dispersed by the wind;
it fades like the memory of a one-day guest.

¹⁵ But the upright live forever,
their reward is with the Lord

and the Most High has them in his care.

¹⁶ This is why they receive, from the hands of the Lord,
the kingdom of glory and the splendid diadem.
He will shelter them with his hand
and his arm will be their shield.

¹⁷ God's zealous love will display his weapons

¹⁸ He will put on justice as his breastplate
and right judgment as his helmet,

¹⁹ invincible holiness will be his shield,

²⁰ implacable anger will serve as his sword,
and the universe will march with him against the foolish.

²¹ Well aimed bolts of lightning will strike
the target; the clouds will be a curved bow
shooting arrows.

²² The hailstones of his fury will rain on
them, the ocean will rage against them and the

rivers engulf them without mercy. ²³ A powerful wind will rise against them and blow them away like straw. In this way lawlessness will bring the whole earth to ruin and evil-doing topple the thrones of the mighty.

9. Job 9, 25

23. Is 30, 27; Is 54, 1

14. Ps 1, 4; Is 29, 5

15. Is 62, 11

16. Is 28, 5

17. Is 59, 17

■ Here begins the "discourse to the kings about wisdom." As we said in the introduction of Ecclesiastes, it was common to attribute the books of wisdom to Solomon. This can also be

seen in this book: the author pretends to be Solomon and he puts the words about wisdom on Solomon's lips.



NO TRUE WISDOM WITHOUT RELIGIOUS TRUTH

6 ¹Listen, O kings, and understand; rulers of the most distant lands, take warning. ²Pay attention, you who rule the multitudes and boast of the numerous subjects of your pagan nations.

³For authority was given you by the Lord, your kingship is from the Most High who will examine your works and scrutinize your intentions.

⁴If as officials of his kingdom you have not judged justly or observed his law or walked the way God pointed out, ⁵he will oppose you swiftly and terribly; his sentence strikes the mighty suddenly.

⁶For the lowly there may be excuses and pardon, but the great will be severely punished.

⁷For the Lord of all makes no distinction, nor does he take account of greatness. Both great and lowly are his work and he watches over all ⁸but the powerful are to be judged more strictly.

⁹It is to you then, sovereigns, that I speak, that you may learn Wisdom and not stumble.

¹⁰For those who keep the holy laws in a holy way will be acknowledged holy, and those who accept the teaching will find in it their defense.

¹¹Welcome my words, desire them and they will instruct you.

¹²Wisdom is luminous and never tarnished; she willingly lets herself be seen by those who love her, and known by those who look for her. ¹³She comes first to meet those who long for her. ¹⁴Seek her in the morning and you will not be disappointed; you will find her sitting at your door.

¹⁵Meditating on Wisdom is the perfection of intelligence; whoever is on the watch for her will be free of any anxiety. ¹⁶She goes in search of those who are worthy of her, graciously meets them on the way and is present in their every thought.

¹⁷The beginning of Wisdom is a sincere desire for discipline; concern for discipline is love of her. ¹⁸and loving her means keeping her laws; ¹⁹the observance of her laws ensures

incorruptibility, and incorruptibility brings us close to God.

²⁰In this way the desire for Wisdom leads to kingship.

²¹So then, sovereigns of nations, you who are fond of thrones and sceptres, honour Wisdom if you wish to reign forever.

²²What Wisdom is and how she came to be, I will tell you. I shall hide nothing from you but trace her from the beginning and clearly make her known.

²³I will not mislead you and hide the truth, for I am free of gnawing envy which has nothing in common with Wisdom.

²⁴A great number of wise men could bring about the salvation of the world and a sensible king makes for the stability of his people; ²⁵so learn from what I say and profit from it.

7 ¹I too am a mortal man like the rest, a descendant of the first human being formed from clay. My flesh was moulded in a mother's womb; ²her blood formed me for ten months from the seed of man, given in pleasure, the companion of sleep.

³Once born, I breathed the air common to everyone; I fell on the earth, the same for all; my first cry was like that of other infants.

⁴I was nourished, cared for and wrapped in swaddling clothes; ⁵indeed, no other king began life differently. ⁶For there is but one way into life for all and one way out of it.

I prayed and wisdom was given to me

◆ ⁷I prayed and understanding was given to me; I asked earnestly and the spirit of Wisdom came to me.

⁸I preferred her to sceptres and thrones and I considered wealth as nothing compared with her.

⁹I preferred her to any jewel of inestimable value since gold beside her is nothing but a few grains of sand, and silver but mud. ¹⁰I loved her more than wealth and beauty and even preferred her to light because her radiance never dies.

¹¹She brought with her all other good

2. Ps 2, 10; Sir 33, 19

14. Sir 4, 12; Pro 1, 21

7. 1 K 3, 4; Sir 47, 12

3. Dn 2, 21; Rom 13, 1; Jn 19, 11

16. 1 Jn 4, 10

24. Pro 29, 4

7. Job 34, 17

2. Ps 139, 15; Job 10, 11

12. Pro 8, 17

◆ *I shall hide nothing from you.* Christians see their union with God as being more precious than their own lives. They try to share this wisdom with people around, and they help their neighbours and their families to grow more and more in friendship. It is not people who know

more who are wiser, but rather those who best know how to share their knowledge with others, especially when what they share is God's friendship.

I preferred her to any jewel of value. See Matthew 13:44-45.

things, untold riches in her hands. ¹² I rejoiced at all that came with Wisdom without knowing she was their mother.

¹³ What I learned without self-interest I share freely and with no desire to conceal her value; ¹⁴ for she is an inexhaustible treasure for man and those who possess her have gained the friendship of God, commended to him by the fruits of her discipline.

¹⁵ May God grant me to speak with discernment and reflect in a way worthy of the gifts I have received for he is the guide of Wisdom and directs wise men. ¹⁶ For we are in God's hands, we ourselves, our words, our understanding and technical knowledge.

¹⁷ He in fact has given me true knowledge of what is, of the world and the properties of the elements, ¹⁸ the beginning, the end and the times in between, the alternation of the solstices and the succession of the seasons, ¹⁹ the revolution of the years and the position of the stars, ²⁰ the animal species and the ways of wild beasts, the power of spirits, human reasoning, the variety of plants and the medicinal properties of roots.

The reflection of eternal light

o ²¹ I have known everything we see and everything hidden, ²² because Wisdom, author of all, taught me.

²² In her is a spirit that is intelligent, unique, subtle, active, concise, pure and lucid. It cannot corrupt and loves what is good. Nothing can restrain it; ²³ it is beneficent, loving humankind, steadfast, dependable, calm, though almighty. It sees everything and penetrates all spirits, however intelligent, subtle and pure they may be.

²⁴ Wisdom, in fact, surpasses in mobility all that moves, and being so

pure pervades and permeates all things.

²⁵ She is a breath of the power of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; nothing impure can enter her. ²⁶ She is the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of God's action and the image of his goodness.

²⁷ For being one, Wisdom can do all things, and remaining in herself unchanged, she enters holy souls, making them prophets and friends of God. ²⁸ for God only loves those who live with Wisdom.

²⁹ She is indeed more beautiful than the sun and surpasses all the constellations; she outrivals light, ³⁰ for light gives way to night, but evil cannot prevail against Wisdom.

8 ¹ Wisdom displays her strength from one end of the earth to the other, ordering all things rightly.

² I loved her and sought her from my youth; I strove to have her as my bride for I had fallen in love with her beauty.

³ Her nearness to God tells of her noble birth. Because the Lord of all has loved her, ⁴ she is instructed in God's knowledge and chooses his works.

⁵ If we desire riches in life, how much more shall we desire Wisdom who works everything? If the intellect is efficient, still more is she who makes everything. ⁶ If you admire justice, every virtue is the fruit of her labour, for she teaches temperance, prudence, justice, fortitude – all that serves man most in life.

⁷ If someone is eager for experience, she knows what took place in the past and forecasts the future. ⁸ She has the art of interpreta-

14. Lk 12, 33 16. Ps 31, 16 17. 1 K 5, 12
Jn 1, 9; Col 1, 15 27. Ps 102, 27; 104, 30

22. James 3, 17 25. Sir 24, 3 26. Heb 1, 3;
30. Jn 3, 5; 16, 33 2. Sir 15, 2

o Prv 8:22: what was said there can apply here as well. The true wisdom enabling man to lead his life comes from God: it is something from God himself. God, mysteriously present by our side, or better still, within us, gives us life and wisdom.

Nothing impure can enter it. Note the optimism found in this description. Because she is 'holy and pure' the wisdom of God penetrates everything, even what is impure and imperfect, enlightening our slow and limited spirit. The Jews of the time were learning from the Law that they had to remain "clean" and stay away from

all that is "unclean": for example, when two people touched each other, the unclean person contaminated the other (see Lv 11:1; and Hg 2:11). Here, it is the wisdom of God that overcomes darkness and stupidity (see Eph 5:13).

Evil cannot prevail against wisdom. The Christian, rooted in God's word, brings light where darkness ruled: he must be present and active where problems of his country, work, his daily life are decided, without fear of becoming and renew the face of the world.

She transforms men into friends of God. It



tion and knows how to solve riddles; she foresees signs and wonders, the end of ages and of eras.

⁹ This is why I decided to have her as companion for life, knowing she would be a wise counsellor and encourage me in times of worry and distress.

¹⁰ I thought, "With her I shall have glory among the nations and, although young, honour among the elderly; ¹¹ I shall be found penetrating in judgment and be admired by the powerful.

¹² If I am silent they will wait to hear me; if I speak, they will pay attention; though I speak at length they will put their hand on their lips.

¹³ Thanks to her I shall win immortality and to those who come after me I shall leave an everlasting memory.

¹⁴ I shall govern peoples, and nations will be subject to me. ¹⁵ Terrible sovereigns will cower when they hear of my name, but to my people I shall show myself kind; in battle courageous.

¹⁶ When I return home I shall take my rest with her, for there is nothing bitter in her company and no suffering in sharing life with her, only pleasure and joy."

¹⁷ Pondering over that, I understood that I would achieve immortality by being united to Wisdom; ¹⁸ I would have pure delight through friendship with her, inexhaustible riches in what she does, understanding by being familiar with her and renown in sharing her conversation. Then I set out to seek and possess her.

¹⁹ I had a pleasant personality even as a child and ²⁰ was good-natured or rather, being good, I had entered an undefiled body.

²¹ But knowing that I could only possess Wisdom if she were given me by God – it was a mark of intelligence to know who was the donor – I turned to the Lord and implored him, saying with all my heart:

Give me your wisdom

+ 9

¹ God of our fathers and Lord of mercy, whose word has

created everything and ² who in Wisdom formed man to govern your creation, ³ to rule the world in holiness and justice, passing sentence with right judgment,

⁴ give me Wisdom that sits beside your throne and do not reject me from among your children.

⁵ For I am your servant, son of your handmaid, a weak and mortal man with little understanding of judgment and laws. ⁶ Even the most perfect among the sons of men counts for nothing, unless he has received Wisdom that comes from you.

⁷ You have chosen me as king for your people, as judge for your sons and daughters.

⁸ You have ordered me to build a temple on your holy mountain and an altar in the city where you live, in imitation of the holy Tent that was yours from the beginning.

⁹ With you is Wisdom that knows your works, that was present when you made the world and is aware of what is pleasing in your eyes and what is right according to your commandments.

¹⁰ Send her from the holy heavens, dispatch her from your holy throne to work beside me so that I may know what is pleasing to you.

¹¹ For she knows and understands everything; she will direct my undertakings with prudence and protect me with her power.

¹² Then my deeds will please you, I

10. 1 K 3, 7 11. 1 K 3, 16 13. Sir 39, 6 1. 1 K 3, 6 2. Sir 42, 15; Gen 1, 26 5. Ps 116, 16 8. 2 S 7, 13

was said in 2:24 that the devil had corrupted creation by introducing death. Now, the Wisdom of God is correcting the ravage of death:

She is a pure emanation of the glory of God. Christians will see that these words refer to Christ present in the world. Wisdom, "the image of God's excellence, a reflection of his activity" is Christ, as Paul tells us in Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; and also John who calls Christ "the Word" of God (see John 1:1). Also see the introduction to Ephesians.

This prayer refers to the event related in 1 Kings 3:6: the dream in which Solomon asked God for wisdom.

+ The necessary condition to acquire wisdom consists in having a humble and simple heart. To those who cooperate with him, God grants uprightness, prudence and even the authority to lead God's people. Abraham and Moses were called to do great things.

shall judge your people in justice and be worthy of the throne of my father.

¹³ Indeed, what man could know the intentions of God? Who could divine the will of the Lord?

¹⁴ For human reasoning is timid, our notions misleading; ¹⁵ a perishable body is a burden for the soul and our tent of clay weighs down the active mind.

¹⁶ We are barely able to know

about the things of earth and it is a struggle to understand what is close to us; who then may hope to understand heavenly things?

¹⁷ Who has ever known your will unless you had first given him Wisdom and sent down your holy spirit to him? ¹⁸ In this way you directed the human race on the right path; they learned who pleases you and were saved by Wisdom.

THE WISDOM OF GOD WORKS IN HISTORY

10 ¹ Wisdom protected the father of the world, the first man to be formed, who was created alone. ² She delivered him from his fault and gave him power to govern all things.

³ When a violent man turning in anger strayed from Wisdom, he perished in his fratricidal fury. ⁴ Because of him the earth was submerged by the flood, but Wisdom again saved it by guiding an upright man on a common wooden plank.

⁵ Again when the nations, united in evil, had been thrown into confusion, it was Wisdom who singled out a righteous man, keeping him blameless before God and steadfast despite his pity for his child.

⁶ It was she who, when the godless perished, saved the righteous man

and let him flee from the fire pouring down on the Five Cities. ⁷ To this day the arid land covered in smoke witnesses to their perversity with plants bearing unripe fruit and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving woman.

⁸ For having ignored Wisdom, not only were they kept from knowing what was good, but their ruins were left as a monument to their own foolishness so that failure may never be forgotten.

⁹ But Wisdom rescued her servants from their trials. ¹⁰ Along straight paths she led the upright man fleeing from his brother's anger. She showed him God's kingdom and let him know the holy anger; she made him prosperous and successful in his

13. Rom 11, 34; 1 Cor 2, 12

16. Is 55, 9; Jn 3, 12

17. Mt 11, 27

3. Gen 4, 8

4. Gen 7-8

5. Gen 12; Gen 22

7. Gen 19; 2 Pet 2, 6; Gen 19, 26

10. Gen 28, 10

■ The Wisdom of God is at work in world history. When an event takes place, we do not, usually, judge its global value: it is history which enables us to appreciate it. When we look at the history of a people, like the Israelites, we see that God had a plan which developed step by step, even though the people were free and sometimes God. Many elements are involved in the realization of God's plan: sin, punishment, penance and forgiveness.

She made them prosperous in their toil. Divine Wisdom taught them the works which were to give fruits and be lasting; she showed the thousand ways which waste time. She taught

them to live in the now and to discover in the present moment the resources and joys that God wanted to give them. In spite of the fact that, many times, they did not see beyond the path to be traveled that day, and their daily struggle against their own lies seemed useless, beforehand, wisdom had prepared their lives and one day they will understand how their labors were joined with the labours of many other brothers to build the Future City.

In verse 3, the reference is to Cain: in v 4 to Noah; in v 5 to Abraham; in v 6 to Lot; in v 10 to Jacob; in v 13 to Joseph and in v 16 to Moses.

toil. ¹¹ Wisdom stood by him against the greed of oppressors and made him rich.

¹² She protected him against his enemies and saved him from the traps they set for him; with Wisdom he triumphed in an arduous struggle, learning in this way that nothing is as strong as piety.

¹³ She did not abandon the righteous man when he was sold; still more she kept him free from sin. ¹⁴ She went down into the cistern with him; she did not leave him in his chains, but made him the ruler of a kingdom, giving him authority over his oppressors. She denounced as liars those who accused him falsely and gave him everlasting honour.

¹⁵ It was she who rescued an innocent and holy people from a nation of oppressors.

¹⁶ She entered the soul of God's servant and through him withstood terrible kings with signs and wonders.

¹⁷ To the holy people she gave the wages of their labour, leading them in a wonderful way, giving them shade during the day and the light of the stars at night.

¹⁸ She made them cross the Red Sea, but drowned their enemies ¹⁹ and later washed them ashore from the depth of the abyss.

²⁰ So the righteous looted the godless, singing hymns, Lord, to your holy Name, and one in heart they gave thanks for your saving hand. ²¹ Wisdom gives speech to the dumb and makes infants speak clearly.

◆11 ¹ Wisdom gave success to their actions through a holy prophet; ² they crossed an uninhabited wilderness and pitched camp in inaccessible places.

³ They stood up to their enemies and fought off the hostile. ⁴ When they were thirsty they called on you and you gave them water from the hard stone of a rocky cliff, a welcome relief for the parched.

⁵ The same creatures which you used to punish their enemies were of benefit to them in their trouble.

⁶ The first had an ever-flowing source of river water polluted with blood – ⁷ a stern response to the decree ordering the slaughtering of infants. Instead, against all hope, you gave your people water in abundance, ⁸ showing them by the thirst they suffered, how you had punished their enemies. ⁹ Their trials were no more than merciful reproofs. Through them, your own people learned how severely the wicked were judged and punished.

¹⁰ You tested them as does a father while you examined their enemies like a stern king.

¹¹ The enemies suffered at the time but they also suffered later. ¹² When they remembered the past, theirs was a double grief and groaning. ¹³ They came to see that it was the work of the Lord when they realized that their punishment benefited the others.

¹⁴ Long before, they had exposed Moses; they had rejected him in derision; but now they admired him because of what had happened and after they had suffered a thirst far different from that of the righteous.

¹⁵ Their wickedness and foolish ideas led them astray, even to worshipping snakes and other repugnant animals; this is why you sent them hordes of similar creatures, ¹⁶ teaching them that punishment takes the same form as the sin.

¹⁷ In fact, your almighty power that created the world from formless matter had no difficulty in sending them bears and savage lions, ¹⁸ or monsters freshly created, unknown and full of fury, breathing fire or noisily spitting smoke or flashing fearful sparks from their eyes, ¹⁹ creatures not only capable of destroying them at a single blow but whose mere appearance could make them die of fright.

11. Gen 31, 32 12. Gen 32, 35 13. Gen 37, 39
21. Ps 8, 3; Mt 21, 16 4. Ex 17, 1 7. Ex 1, 15

17. Ex 13, 21 18. Ex 14, 21 20. Ex 15
9. Dt 8, 2 15. Rom 1, 21 18. Job 41, 10

◆God's love for his people reveals itself in that the very forces of nature serve to punish the Egyptians and to save the Hebrews. This is shown with seven examples: animals, locusts and snakes, hail and manna, darkness and light, the firstborn, the sea (16-19).

The creature which you used to punish

their enemies were of benefit to them in their trouble. This can be a lesson concerning the forces ruling our world today. Organization, speed, technology, science, emancipation: all this is instrumental in the liberation of man if used with wisdom. But all this can turn against man when it is used without considering the goal God established for the world.



How God corrects his children

²⁰ Even without this, they could have dropped dead at a single breath if pursued by your justice, or been dispersed by the breath of your might; but you ordered all with measure, number and weight.

²¹ You are able to show your power at any time and who could resist the strength of your arm? ²² For the entire world lies before you, just enough to tip the scales, a drop of morning dew on the ground.

²³ But because you are almighty, you are merciful to all; you overlook sins and give your children time to repent. ²⁴ You love everything that exists and hate nothing that you have made; had you hated anything you would not have formed it.

²⁵ How could anything endure if you did not will it? And how could anything last that you had not willed? ²⁶ You have compassion on all because all is yours, O Lord, lover of life.

12 ¹ In fact your immortal spirit is in all.

² And so by degrees you correct those who sin, you admonish them, reminding them how they have strayed, so that turning away from evil they may trust in you, Lord.

³ So it happened with those who once lived in your holy land. ⁴ You hated them because of their detestable practices, their sorcery and unholy worship. ⁵ They were used to the pitiless murder of children, the feasts at which they ate human flesh and blood and even bowels, while they fulfilled secret rituals.

⁶ Because these parents murdered their defenceless children you wished our ancestors

to destroy them, ⁷ and the land dearest to you became the home of God's children who were worthy of it.

⁸ But you even showed mercy to these sinners because they were human beings. You sent hornets ahead of your army to gradually destroy them.

⁹ You could have given over the wicked to the righteous in battle, or destroyed them in one blow by means of savage beasts or with a harsh command; ¹⁰ but in punishing them gradually you gave them time to repent. Nevertheless you were aware of their evil nature, their innate malice and how fixed they were in their ways, ¹¹ for it was a cursed race from the beginning.

In any case, it was not through fear of anyone that you left their sins unpunished.

¹² For who dares say to you, "What have you done?" Who would reject your sentence? Who would reproach you for destroying the nations you formed? Who will rise against you in defense of the guilty?

¹³ For there is no God other than you who care for everyone and who may ask you to justify your judgments; ¹⁴ there is no other king or sovereign who could confront you and support those you punish.

¹⁵ You are just and you rule all with justice; had you condemned those who should not be punished, you would have denied your power.

¹⁶ Your strength is the source of your justice and because you are the Lord of all, you can be merciful to everyone.

¹⁷ To those who doubt your sovereign power you show your strength and you confound the insolence of those who ignore it.

¹⁸ But you, the Lord of strength, you judge with prudence and govern us with great patience because you are able to do anything at the time you want.

¹⁹ In this way you have taught your people that a righteous person must love his human fellows; you have also given your people cause for hope by prompting them to repent of their sin.

²⁰ For if you have been careful and patient in punishing the enemies of your people when they deserved to die, and have given them a time and a place to turn from their wickedness.

20. Is 40, 12; Job 28, 25	22. Is 40, 15	23. Sir 18, 12	24. Ps 145, 9	6. Dr 20, 16
8. Ps 78, 39	11. Gen 9, 25	12. Job 9, 12; Rom 9, 19	13. Dr 32, 39	

o You ordered all with measure, number and weight. Because God's power is absolute, it is not a manifestation of violence: beauty, harmony and goodness are never lacking in all that comes from God.

The passage from 11:5 to 15:19 is a long

parenthesis contrasting God's ways, as a friend and master of man with the foolishness of the worship of idols.

+ The materialist ignores God. The proud believe they can achieve anything on their own.



²¹ with what strict attention have you not judged your people, you who bound yourself to our fathers with oaths and covenants full of magnificent promise.

²² Yes, you punish us, but you punish our enemies far more severely to teach us when we judge others, to remember your kindness, and when we are judged to count on your mercy.

²³ Those who lived foolishly and wickedly, you tormented with their own abominations.

²⁴ For they had strayed on the way of error to the point of choosing vile and disgusting animals as gods, allowing themselves to be deceived like infants.

²⁵ And as to children with no sense you sent them a punishment to mock them; ²⁶ but if they took no warning from these corrections, they were soon to receive a punishment worthy of God. ²⁷ In their suffering they became indignant against those animals they had taken as gods and who were now used to punish them. Then they saw clearly, and acknowledged as God him whom before they had refused to know. That is why they suffered the supreme punishment.

Against those who worship images

+13 ¹ The natural helplessness of men is seen in their ignorance of God. The experience of good things did not lead them to the knowledge of Him who is. They were interested in his works, but they did not recognize the author of them.

² Fire, wind, air, the sphere of the stars, rushing water and the lights in the sky were held as the rulers of the world.

³ If, charmed by such beauty, they have taken them for gods, let them know how far superior is their sovereign. ⁴ And if they have been impressed by their power and activity, let them understand from this how much mightier is he who formed

them. ⁵ For the grandeur and beauty of creatures lets us ponder on their Author, greater and more magnificent.

⁶ No doubt these men are not to be blamed severely, for they have possibly strayed when they searched for God and desired to find him.

⁷ They pondered over the created things that surrounded them and were captivated by the sight of such beauty.

⁸ Even so they are not to be excused, ⁹ for if they have been able to explore the world, why did they not discover first the world's Sovereign?

¹⁰ But unhappy, indeed, are those people who give to man-made artifacts the title of gods! Cursed is their hope in dead things, objects worked in gold and silver, likenesses of animals, and even useless stones carved long ago!

¹¹ Take a woodcutter – he fells a tree that is easy to move, expertly strips off all the bark and with the wood makes a utensil needed in daily life; ¹² he uses the bits left over as fuel for cooking his food and he has a good meal. ¹³ Then he picks up an utterly useless left-over piece all gnarled and knotted and carves it in his leisure time, using his professional skill to give it the shape of a man or ¹⁴ maybe of a worthless animal. He covers it with ochre and paints the surface red, covering all its blemishes.

¹⁵ He then makes a suitable niche for it in the wall and fastens it in place with iron nails.

¹⁶ The craftsman is careful to keep it from falling, knowing that it is unable to help itself. It needs help because it is no more than an image.

¹⁷ Even so, when it is a matter of his marriage, his children and his household, the man is not ashamed to pray to his lifeless object. He prays for his health to something without strength; ¹⁸ for life he prays to what is dead, for help he implores something insensitive, for a successful journey he has recourse to what cannot walk, ¹⁹ for his profit, his concerns and success in his craft he asks help of something that has no skill whatever in its hands.

22. Mt 5, 7	1. Ex 3, 14	2. Rom 1, 19; Sir 17, 8	10. 1 Cr 4, 28	11. Is 40, 20
16. Bar 6, 25	17. Jer 2, 17	18. Ps 115, 4		

They use things as their own, without giving them a deeper meaning and without seeing them as gifts from God.

Simple and humble people see the hand of God in everything. The water, the wind, the mountains remind them of the Perfect Being

who created them; even more so in the case of the riches they discover in their loved ones. human intelligence is meant to discover God who fills everything and is the end of everything. Paul will say something very similar in Rom 1:19.

14¹ Imagine someone who is about to set sail and cross the raging sea. He calls upon a piece of wood far more fragile than the boat that carries him.

² In fact this boat has been built with grain in mind and proceeds from the wisdom of the shipwright. ³ But it is your providence, Father, that guides it for you are the one who prepares a path over the sea and a safe way over the waves. ⁴ By this we understand that you are able to save us from any danger, and even the unskilled are able to sail.

⁵ People are the work of your wisdom and you do not want them to remain idle. So they trust their lives to a small plank of wood and cross the sea safe and sound on a raft.

⁶ At the beginning of time when proud giants perished, the hope of the world took refuge on a raft and led by your hand left to the world the seed of a new race. ⁷ Blessed be the wood by which salvation was carried out!

⁸ But cursed be the idol and its maker, the idol made by human hands, this corruptible thing that is called god, and the craftsman for having fashioned it.

⁹ They are hateful to God, both the godless and the fruit of his godlessness; ¹⁰ the maker will be punished together with his work.

¹¹ Therefore the idols of the nations will also be judged. They have come to be the most abominable among the creatures of God. They are a stumbling block to the spirit of man, and the feet of the foolish are caught in the snare.

¹² The invention of idols was the origin of licentiousness; when they were invented, life became corrupted. ¹³ For in the beginning they did not exist and they will not exist forever.

¹⁴ Human vanity introduced them into the world, and God has set a term to them.

¹⁵ Suppose a father overwhelmed by grief for a child so swiftly taken from him, has an image made of him. From that time on a dead creature will be honoured as a god, because the father handed on to his dependents secret rites and celebrations. ¹⁶ Time will consolidate this unholy practice and eventually it will be observed by law.

It has also happened that sculptured images were venerated by order of sovereigns. ¹⁷ Those who lived far away and were unable to honour them personally had copies made that they might honour them as if present by means of their image.

¹⁸ The ambition of the artist helped the veneration grow among those who did not even know the sovereign. ¹⁹ As he wished to

please his master, he made the portrait more attractive than reality, ²⁰ and the people seduced by the perfection of art work began to worship someone previously honoured as a man.

²¹ In this way the image became a pitfall for the living, for people bent down either by misfortune or tyranny gave to stones and wood the incommunicable Name.

²² But it was not enough for them to err in their knowledge of God; in the great trouble to which ignorance condemned them, they have called peace such an evil situation.

²³ With the sacrificial murder of children in their initiations, with secret mysteries and wild ceremonial orgies, ²⁴ they no longer keep their lives and marriages pure; they treacherously murder one another or wound others through adultery.

²⁵ Everywhere it is a welter of blood, murder, fraud and theft, corruption, treachery, riots, perjury; ²⁶ on all sides harassment of good people, forgetfulness of favours, the pollution of souls and sins against nature; widespread is the disorder in marriage, adultery, debauchery.

²⁷ Indeed the worship of gods which does not even deserve a name, is the beginning, cause and effect of every evil.

²⁸ Others delight in raving or uttering false prophecies; they live wickedly and casually perjure themselves. ²⁹ As they deal with lifeless images, they do not fear any punishment for their false oaths, ³⁰ but a double punishment awaits them: as idolators for their base concept of God, as frauds for taking false oaths in defiance of all that is holy.

³¹ Though the idols by which they swore are powerless, justice that pursues sinners always overtakes the sin of the wicked.

15¹ But you, our God, are kind and true: you bear evil patiently and order everything with mercy. ² Even when we sin we belong to you and acknowledge your power; but aware that we belong to you, we shall not sin.

³ To know you is perfect righteousness and to acknowledge your power is the root of immortality.

⁴ So we have not been led astray by a deceptive invention of men – the sterile labour of painters – these idols daubed with colours, ⁵ the sight of which stirs yearning in fools attached to the lifeless face of a dead image.

⁶ Really idol makers and those who serve

5. Ps 107, 29

6. Gen 6, 1; Bar 3, 13

11. Is 2, 18

12. Ex 34, 16

20. Dn 3, 1

21. Ex 3, 14

22. Rom 1, 21

1. Ex 34, 6

3. Jn 17, 3



and worship them are looking for disgrace and deserve their false hope.

⁷ The potter, labouriously working the soft clay, fashions each object for our use, and from the same clay he shapes vessels, some for food, and others for what is thrown away. ⁸ The potter makes both the clean and the unclean vessels and decides to what purpose each one is shaped. The same way and from the same clay he fashions a helpless god: cursed labour of a man recently formed from clay, who will shortly return to clay when he is called to give up his soul.

⁹ He has no thought of dying soon, no thought of the short duration of life. Not at all; he competes with those who work on silver and gold and like the smith he feels proud to make a counterfeit of God.

¹⁰ Ashes, that is what his heart is; his hope cheaper than dust: ¹¹ his life worth as much as clay, for he has not acknowledged his Maker, who has breathed into him an active soul, a living spirit. ¹² He looks on life as a game and its duration a market full of bargains, for as he says, "a man must make the most of life whether by fair means or foul."

¹³ This man, more than others, knows that he sins in fashioning with the same clay vessels and sculptured gods.

¹⁴ But utterly foolish and more pitiable than the soul of a new-born infant were the enemies that oppressed your people. ¹⁵ They received as gods all the idols of the nations – idols that have no eyes to see, no nostrils to breathe the air, or ears to hear, no fingers to feel with, or feet that are able to walk. For these gods are the work of a man, a creature of borrowed breath has made them.

¹⁶ Man cannot even make a god that resembles himself; ¹⁷ a mortal's unholy hands produce a dead god. He is, in fact superior to what he worships, since he at least lives, but they will never live.

¹⁸ People worship the most repulsive animals, the most stupid of all who, unlike other animals, are devoid of beauty; ¹⁹ these are unattractive creatures who have missed the blessing of God and are not fit to give him praise.

How God treats differently his people and the Egyptians

16

¹ That is why this people received the punishment they deserved through similar animals and hordes of tormenting insects. ² But in contrast to this punishment it

was kindness you showed to your people by providing quails – a delicious food – for them.

³ As for the Egyptians, in spite of their fierce hunger, they were restrained by disgust from eating because of the repulsive sight of the creatures sent against them. But the Israelites after being deprived for a time were then given the finest food.

⁴ It was necessary for their oppressors to suffer severe want but enough for your people to know how the enemy was punished. ⁵ Indeed when they experienced the fury of wild animals and the bites of writhing snakes your anger did not endure.

⁶ Their temporary affliction served as a warning; then they were given a sign of salvation to remind them of the prescriptions of your law. ⁷ For whoever turned towards it was saved, not by the image he saw, but by you, Lord, the Saviour of all.

⁸ In that way you taught our enemies that it was you who deliver us from every evil. ⁹ They were, in fact, killed by the stings of insects and flies for which there was no cure since they deserved punishment from these creatures. ¹⁰ Your children instead were not overcome even by the fangs of venomous serpents for your mercy intervened and healed them.

¹¹ Bites quickly healed reminded them of your commands lest they fall into deep oblivion and forget your kindness. ¹² No herb, no ointment healed them but your word, Lord, that heals all.

¹³ You are Lord of life and death; you bring down to the gate of the netherworld and bring back again. ¹⁴ Man in his wickedness is able to kill but he cannot bring back the departed spirit or rescue the snatched soul. ¹⁵ It is impossible to escape your hand.

¹⁶ The goddess, refusing to acknowledge you, were scourged by the strength of your arm, lashed by relentless downpours, hail, pitiless storms, and consumed by fire.

¹⁷ But this was the most astounding: water, powerful to quench, made fire burn more fiercely. For the elements fight on the side of the righteous.

¹⁸ At times the flame abated to spare the insects thrust against the wicked that they might know they were pursued by God's sentence.

¹⁹ At other times in the midst of water the flame rose more fiercely than fire to destroy the harvest of an unholy land.

■ ²⁰ But to your people you gave the food of angels and from heaven sent bread already

8. Gen 3, 19

11. Gen 2, 7

15. Ps 115, 4

16. Ps 104, 29

2. Ex 16, 9

5. Num 21, 4

6. Num 21, 9; Jn 3, 14

9. Ex 8, 16

12. Ps 107, 20

16. Ex 9, 24

20. Ex 16;

Ps 78, 25; 105, 40

prepared and suiting all tastes, having every flavour.²¹ In this way you revealed your loving kindness to your children.²² Satisfying all needs, this bread provided what each one wanted.

That food having the appearance of snow and ice resisted fire and did not melt; thus they understood how their enemy's harvest was destroyed by fire in the midst of hail, while lightning burned under the rain.²³ This same fire seemed to forget its own nature in order to spare the food of the righteous.

²⁴ The creature is at your service for you are its Author. It works to punish the wicked and withdraws for the benefit of those who put their trust in you.

²⁵ In the service of your bounty which attends to everything, creation made itself multi-form and adjusted to the wish of everyone.

²⁶ Then the children you love learned that it is not crops of whatever kind which nourish mankind but your word that sustains those who trust you.

²⁷ That food which resisted fire simply melted in the warmth of a fleeting sunbeam,²⁸ teaching us that we must rise before the sun to give thanks and pray to you at dawn.²⁹ The hope of the ungrateful will melt like winter frost and flow away like water that is not being used.

17 ¹ How great are your purposes and how difficult to explain! People who have not learned about them have gone astray.

² While the godless thought they had the holy nation in their power, they themselves were prisoners, captives of a long night, shut in under their own roofs, banished from eternal providence.

³ Although they counted on remaining hidden with their own sins under the veil of forgetfulness, they were scattered and at the same time dismayed and terrified by visions.

⁴ The dark places where they sheltered could not protect them from fear; they heard horrific noises and were confronted with ghastly and mournful apparitions.⁵ No fire could give them light while the sparkling radiance of the stars dared not shine on that horrible night.⁶ All that shone for them was an inextinguishable and terrifying fire and, in their terror, when this vision ended, they imagined their situation worse than what it was.

⁷ The magic arts were helpless and the pretence of intelligence utterly confounded;⁸ those who claimed to eliminate the fear and

disturbance of the sick mind were themselves afflicted with a ridiculous fear.

⁹ Although there was nothing to cause this fear they were terrified by the buzz of insects and the hiss of snakes;¹⁰ they died convulsed with fear refusing to look at the air from which no one may escape.¹¹ Wickedness is cowardly and is condemned by itself; pursued by conscience it always assumes the worst.¹² For fear is no more than giving up the help reason is able to give.¹³ Inasmuch as this help is lacking interiorly, the unknown cause of one's torments seems greater.

¹⁴ So all that night, a night issued from the powerless netherworld that took hold of them while they slept and made everyone powerless,¹⁵ they were either pursued by monstrous ghosts or paralysed by a sudden, unexpected fear.¹⁶ Whoever had fallen lay there, shut in a prison not made of iron.

¹⁷ Whether ploughman or shepherd or someone working by himself, he had to submit to an inevitable fate;¹⁸ all were bound by the same chain of darkness.

Everything held them paralyzed by fear: the sighing of the wind or the tuneful song of the birds in spreading branches, the continuous noise of rushing water¹⁹ or the terrible crash of falling rocks, the swift, invisible bounding of animals or the terrifying roar of wild beasts, the echo rebounding from the mountains – all was a cause of fear.

²⁰ The whole world shone in brilliant light and continued its work without hindrance;²¹ they alone were covered in the darkness of night, the image of night that would be their lot. But even heavier than the darkness was the burden they were for themselves.

18 ¹ Meanwhile, for your holy ones there was great light. The Egyptians heard their voice without seeing them; they called them fortunate because they had not suffered;² they also thanked them, for in spite of the injustice done to them, they had not retaliated, and asked their pardon for previous wrongs.

³ In contrast to this darkness, you gave your holy people a pillar of fire as a guide in their unmapped journey, as a mild sun during their glorious migration.⁴ The enemy deserved to be without light and imprisoned in darkness for having imprisoned your sons, the people through whom the imperishable light of your laws would be given to the world.

⁵ They had intended to kill the infants of

your holy people – and of those exposed only one child was saved. Because of that you retaliated by doing away with a multitude of their sons who perished together in the raging sea.

⁶That night had been foretold to our fathers, and knowing in what promise they trusted, they could rejoice in all surety.

⁷Your people waited for both the salvation of the just and the downfall of their enemies, ⁸for the very punishment of our enemies brought glory to the people you have called – that is, to us.

⁹The holy race secretly offered the Pass-over sacrifice and readily agreed on this worthy pact: that they would share alike both blessings and dangers. And forthwith they began to sing the hymns of their fathers.

¹⁰Then came discordant echoes from their enemies: a plaintive voice mourning for their children.

¹¹The same sentence struck slave and master alike; the common man and the king endured equal suffering. ¹²They mourned together innumerable victims, all stricken with the same kind of death.

The living were not enough to bury them, for the flower of their race had perished in an instant.

¹³Although the sorcery had turned them into unbelievers, after the death of their first-born they acknowledged that your people were the children of God.

¹⁴While all was in quiet silence and the night in the middle of its course, ¹⁵your almighty Word leapt down from the Royal Throne – a stern warrior to a doomed world.

¹⁶Carrying your fearful command like a sharpened sword and stretching from heaven to earth, he filled the universe with death.

¹⁷Immediately they were overwhelmed with terrible dreams and hallucinations and assailed by sudden fears. ¹⁸Thrown half-dead, some here and some there, they made known why they were dying. ¹⁹For the dreams that had troubled them had also instructed them, lest they perish without knowing the reason for their misfortune.

²⁰Indeed the righteous, too, experienced death when a scourge struck a great number of them in the desert, but God's anger was short-lived.

²¹A blameless man hastened to their defense. Using the weapons of his sacred office

– prayer and atonement incense – he confronted the divine Wrath, putting an end to their affliction, and was thus recognized as your servant.

²²He vanquished your Wrath, but not by physical strength or by the force of arms. He won over the Punisher by reminding him of the sworn promises and covenants made with our fathers.

²³The dead were already piled up one on top of the other when he interposed, beating back Wrath and cutting it off from the living.

²⁴For the whole world was represented on his flowing robe, the glorious names of the fathers on the four rows of stones, and your majesty engraved on the diadem on his head.

²⁵The Destroyer, afraid of these, recoiled; a mere taste of Wrath had been sufficient.

19

¹Instead, a pitiless fury raged against the wicked to the very end, for God knew beforehand what they would do: ²that after allowing them to leave and hastening their departure, they would then pursue them.

³While the Egyptians were still mourning at the graves of their dead, they had the mad idea of pursuing them as fugitives.

⁴A well-deserved fate drove them to this extreme, making them forget what had happened and having them complete their punishment with further torment. ⁵While your people would experience a miraculous journey, their oppressors would suffer an extraordinary death.

⁶All creation in its different forms was fashioned anew at your command, in order to protect your people. ⁷The cloud covered the camp with its shadow, dry land emerged where water had been. A safe passage was opened through the Red Sea, the tempestuous flood became a ⁸green plain where the whole nation of those protected by your hand passed across, witnessing your astounding deeds.

⁹They jumped like horses led to pasture, or like frolicking lambs, praising you, their Lord, who had delivered them. ¹⁰For they still remembered what they had seen in their exile: how earth, in place of animals, had produced mosquitoes, and rivers, instead of providing fish, produced frogs.

¹¹Later your people were to see a new way for birds to appear, for when they hungered for food, ¹²quails came out of the sea to satisfy their need.

¹³Punishment befell the sinners after they

had been warned by violent thunder; deservedly they suffered for their own wickedness, for they had given proof of a most cruel hatred towards strangers.

¹⁴Others had not welcomed unknown strangers, but the Egyptians enslaved guests who had been good to them. ¹⁵The former will be condemned for dealing badly with strangers; ¹⁶worse still, the Egyptians had welcomed them with celebrations and treated them as equals, but later made them suffer cruelly.

¹⁷For this they were afflicted with blindness like the men of Sodom who came to the door of the righteous man Lot and found themselves in utter darkness, each one groping around to find his own door.

¹⁸The elements interchanged their qualities as in a harp when the notes change their tones while retaining their own pitch. Clearly this is what happened as is shown by a scrutiny of events:

¹⁹Creatures living on the land became aquatic and those that swam emerged on dry land. ²⁰Fire burned more fiercely in water when water ceased to quench. ²¹On another occasion flames did not burn frail animals that passed through them nor did they melt the heavenly food that normally would have melted like frost.

◆ ²²For in every way, Lord, you have exalted and glorified your people, never disdaining them, but standing by them always and everywhere.

16. Gen 45, 17

17. Gen 19, 11

22. Is 45, 17



INTRODUCTION

Two centuries before Christ, Jesus, son of Sirach, wrote this book which is a synthesis of the traditions and teachings of the "sages."

He was well-off and well educated. He appears to have been the head of an important household with servants. He dealt with a lot of people, he was involved with works and business which turned out well. In the end, this sage confesses that it was the sacred books which taught him the secret of success. In writing this book, he intended to share with others what he had learned in the sacred books, and had verified in his own experience.

He wrote a few years before the religious crisis related in the book of Maccabees. Many of his contemporaries to whom the Jewish religion seemed antiquated allowed themselves to be attracted by Greek culture. The author tried to offer a new presentation of the faith of Israel. In no other nation do we find a wisdom superior to that of God's people, because it is there, by divine decree, that Wisdom had come to dwell. This book shows us how the Law of God leads people to a more human, more intelligent and more responsible personal and social life.

This book consists of two main parts:

- Chapters 1-42 include seven series of maxims. Each one starts with the praise of wisdom. The poem on wisdom in chapter 24 is particularly interesting.
- Chapters 43-51 begin by praising God whose wisdom shines in the order of the universe and continue with the description of God's wise activity through the great people of the Old Testament.

Foreword by the translator from Hebrew to Greek

o The Law the Prophets and the other writings which came later have transmitted to us so many and such great lessons that it seems fitting to praise Israel for its reputation in knowledge and wisdom. But it would not be enough to keep these truths for our own instruction: those who love wisdom want to be helpful in what they say and write to those who are not so familiar with her teachings.

My grandfather, Jesus, who devoted himself constantly to the reading of the Law, the Prophets and the later writings of our fathers and had acquired a thorough familiarity with them, began himself to write something about their teachings and wisdom, in order that those people desiring to gain knowledge might take advantage of his writings and make even greater progress in living according to the Law.

You are therefore invited to read this book with kind consideration and attention, and to show indulgence where, in spite of my painstaking efforts in interpretation, I may appear to have badly conveyed the meaning. Those things, which in this book are written in Hebrew, lose their force when they are translated into another language. In fact, not only this

book but the Law itself, the Prophets and the other writings differ considerably from the original text.

When I went to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of King Euergetes and settled there, I found an example of this important teaching and I judged it very necessary to exercise great care and make serious efforts in translating this book.

I have therefore, during this time, devoted many sleepless nights and much study in order to finish this book and to publish it for the use of those who, though they live outside Palestine, wish to become lovers of wisdom and to conform their manner of living to the Law.

Wisdom comes from God

[+1] ¹All wisdom comes from the Lord and endure with him for ever.

²The grains of sand, the drops of rain and the days of eternity, who can count them?

³The height of heaven, the extent of the earth and the depths of the abyss who can measure them?

⁴Wisdom was created before all things and the prudent intellect before the beginning of time.

⁶To whom was the source of Wisdom revealed? Who has known her secret designs?

3. 24, 8; Pro 8, 22

o The Jews do not use the word "Bible." They refer to it this way: "The Law, the Prophets and the Writings," these being the three major headings of the sacred book. See a similar expression in Luke 24:24.

+ In this poem, the author professes his faith. To those who think they are more modern because they seek human wisdom and doctrines, he simply declares that true wisdom consists in trusting God and fearing him.

He often speaks of *fearing the Lord* just as the Psalms do. We must not think that it is the

fear of pagans who imagine a resentful God.

Those who fear the Lord are afraid of leaving him because in him is Life. They are afraid of offending him because they know his love. As we said in the commentary on Proverbs 1, to fear the Lord means to respect him with obedience and affection.

Fearing the Lord is the opposite of fearing what others will say, the fear of being made fun of, the fear of failure. Those who fear the Lord give more importance to what God says, what he promises when he invites us to seek him and to save others.

⁸ One alone is wise and greatly to be feared. The One who is seated upon his throne.

It is the Lord himself who created Wisdom. He has looked on her and estimated her value. He poured her out over all his works; ¹⁰ upon all mortal beings in accordance with his goodness. He has lavished her on those who love him.

¹¹ The fear of the Lord is glory and we can justly take pride in it; it is joy and a triumphant crown.

¹² The fear of the Lord gladdens the heart; it gives joy, gaiety and long life.

¹³ For the one who fears the Lord all will go well at the end of his life and he will be blessed on the day of his death.

¹⁴ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; he has put wisdom into the hearts of his faithful ones before their birth.

¹⁵ Founded from eternity she has made her home among men and she will remain faithful to their descendants.

¹⁶ The fear of the Lord is the fulness of wisdom. It will fill you with its fruits.

¹⁷ It will fill your whole house with desirable things.

It will fill your houses with its riches.

¹⁸ The fear of the Lord is the crown of wisdom.

¹⁹ Where it is, peace and good health flourish; knowledge and prudence will rain down. Wisdom cannot be hidden by those who possess her.

²⁰ The fear of the Lord is the root of wisdom. It branches are a long life.

²¹ Unjust violence cannot be justified, it will destroy itself by its own excesses.

²² The patient man will hold out until the appointed time; but finally joy will be given to him.

²⁴ He will guard his words until the appointed time but in the end many will recognize his worth.

²⁵ Wisdom keeps among her treasures proverbs rich in content but the sinner does not want to know about God.

²⁶ Do you desire wisdom? Keep the commandments and the Lord will give her to you unstintingly; ²⁷ for fear of the Lord is wisdom and learning; what pleases him is faithfulness and gentleness.

²⁸ Do not put aside fear of the Lord; approach him with a sincere heart. ²⁹ Do not be a

hypocrite before men; watch well your words.

³⁰ Do not praise yourself lest you fall and bring dishonour on yourself. For the Lord will reveal your secrets and throw you to one side in the midst of the assembly if you have no fear of the Lord and your heart is full of deceit.

Fear God in time of trials

2 ¹ My son, if you have decided to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. ² Keep your hear upright and remain resolute; do not be upset in the time of adversity.

³ Hold fast to the Lord, do not separate yourself from him so that you may be successful to the end of your days. ⁴ Accept all that happens to you be patient when you are humbled, ⁵ for as gold is tested in the fire so those acceptable to God are tested in the crucible of humiliation. ⁶ Have confidence in him and he will take care of you; follow the right path and hope in him.

⁷ You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy and do not turn away lest you fall. ⁸ You who fear the Lord, trust him and you will not lose your reward. ⁹ You who fear the Lord, hope for all good things; hope for eternal joy and mercy.

¹⁰ Remember what happened to your ancestors. Who has trusted in the Lord and been confounded? Who has persevered in fear and been abandoned? Who has called upon him and not been heard?

¹¹ For the Lord is compassion and loving kindness; he forgives our sin and saves us in the time of distress.

¹² Woe to faint hearts and weak hands, to the sinner who wavers between two paths.

¹³ Woe to the faint-hearted who

2. Rev 2, 3; James 1, 2; Rev 3, 21

5. 1 Pet 1, 7

10. Ps 22, 5

11. Ex 34, 6

■ Those who want to serve God must be ready to face trials and contradictions. Authentic trust in God is demonstrated when things do not turn out well. Along with faith and perseverance, trust is the basic quality of the believer.

◆ This is the best commentary on Moses' commandment concerning children's responsibilities toward their parents. To honour our parents means: respect, understanding and material assistance in their difficulties.

lack confidence, because of this they will not be protected. ¹⁴Woe to you who have lost patience! What will you do when the Lord calls you to account?

¹⁵Those who fear the Lord do not disobey his commandments; those who love him faithfully keep his laws.

¹⁶Those who fear the Lord seek to please him; those who love him are filled with his law.

¹⁷Those who fear the Lord keep their hearts prepared and humble themselves in his presence saying, ¹⁸"Let us fall into the hands of the Lord and not into the hands of men, for his mercy is as great as his power."

Duties towards parents

3 ¹My children, it is your father who speaks, listen to me and follow my advice and so be saved. ²For the Lord established that children should respect their father; he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons.

³Whoever honours his father atones for his sins; ⁴he who gives glory to his mother prepares a treasure for himself.

⁵Whoever honours his father will receive joy from his own children and he will be heard when he prays.

⁶Whoever glorifies his father will have a long life. Whoever obeys the Lord gives comfort to his mother. ⁷He serves those who brought him to birth as he would serve the Lord.

⁸Act thus and honour your father in word and deed so that his blessing may come on you. ⁹For a father's blessing secures the future of a family but a mother's curse destroys it at its roots.

¹⁰Do not rejoice at the humiliation

of your father because his dishonour is no glory for you. ¹¹For a man's glory comes from his father's reputation; a mother who is not respected is a dishonour for her children.

¹²My son, take care of your father in his old age, do not cause him sorrow as long as he lives.

¹³Even if he has lost his mind, have patience; do not be disrespectful to him while you are in full health.

¹⁴For a kindness done to one's father will never be forgotten, it will serve as reparation for your sins.

¹⁵In the day of adversity the Lord will remember it to your advantage; for just as ice melts in the heat, so will your sins melt away. ¹⁶The man who abandons his father is like a blasphemer; he who annoys his mother is cursed by the Lord.

Humility

¹⁷My son, conduct your affairs with discretion and you will be loved by those who are acceptable to God.

¹⁸The greater you are, the more you should humble yourself and thus you will find favour with God. ¹⁹For great is the power of the Lord and it is the humble who give him glory.

²¹Do not seek what is beyond your powers nor search into what is beyond your ability. ²²Reflect on what you are commanded to do; there is no need for you to know things that are hidden.

²³Do not tire yourself in resolving useless questions since the knowledge you already have goes beyond human understanding.

²⁴For many have been led astray by their personal theories and a false pretension has misled the reason.

²⁶The obstinate man will at the end fall into evil, and he who loves danger will perish therein. ²⁷The obstinate man will be weighed down with sufferings; the sinner heaps up sin upon sin.

²⁸For the sufferings of the proud man there is no remedy, the roots of evil are implanted in him. ²⁹The wise man reflects on the proverbs. What the wise man desires is an attentive ear.

Almsgiving

³⁰ As water extinguishes the burning flames, almsgiving obtains pardon for sins. ³¹ The man who responds by doing good prepares for the future, at the moment of his downfall he will find support.

4 ¹ My son, do not deny the poor his food and do not make the man who looks at you with pleading eyes wait.

² Do not sadden the hungry person nor annoy anyone who is in need. ³ Do not exasperate an angry man nor withhold alms from the beggar.

⁴ Do not drive away the beggar who is weighed down with afflictions nor turn away your face from the poor; ⁵ do not turn away your face from the needy nor give anyone a reason to curse you.

⁶ If someone curses you in the bitterness of his heart, the Creator will hear his prayer.

⁷ Make yourself acceptable to the community; bow your head before the one in authority.

⁸ Listen to the poor man and reply to him with kind words and with peace. ⁹ Deliver the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor. Do not be weak when you administer justice. ¹⁰ Be like a father towards orphans and like a husband towards their mothers. Then you will be like a son of the Most High and he will love you more than your own mother.

¹¹ Wisdom brings up her children and takes care of those who look for her. ¹² Whoever loves her loves life. Those who rise in the early morning in search of her will be filled with joy.

¹³ Whoever possesses her will have glory at last; wherever he goes the Lord will give a blessing. ¹⁴ Those who serve her are ministers of the Holy One; those who love her are loved of the Lord. ¹⁵ He who listens to her will have

good judgment. He who obeys her will rest in safety.

¹⁶ Whoever trusts in her will possess her and his children after him will inherit her.

¹⁷ For in the beginning she will lead him by rough paths, causing him to fear and be terrified; she will plague him with her discipline until she can count on him; and she will put him to the test by her demands.

¹⁸ Then she will lead him on a level path, give him joy and reveal her secrets to him.

¹⁹ But, if he wanders from the paths, she will abandon him and allow him to be lost.

²⁰ In every situation weigh up the pros and cons and avoid evil. A wrong kind of shame could harm you. ²¹ There is a shame which leads to sin and there is a shame which merits praise and respect. ²² Do not act against your better self to win favour from others. Do not let this kind of shame lead you into sin.

²³ Do not remain silent when it is necessary to speak. Do not, through pride, hide your wisdom. ²⁴ It is in speech that wisdom is recognized and learning in the spoken discourse.

²⁵ Do not contradict the truth; rather confess your lack of knowledge.

²⁶ Have no shame in confessing your sins, do not swim against the tide.

²⁷ Do not cringe before a foolish man; do not be influenced by the powerful.

²⁸ Fight for the truth till death and the Lord will fight for you.

²⁹ Do not be daring in your speech, but lazy and negligent in your works.

³⁰ Do not be like a lion in your household, pulling down your servants and oppressing those under you.

³¹ Do not open your hand to receive and keep it closed when you should give.

Do not rely on wealth

o5 ¹ Do not rely on your wealth. Do not say, "I am self-sufficient." Do not let yourself be carried away by greed and violence, they would make you their slave.

³ Do not say, "Who can stop me?" For the Lord has power to punish you. ⁴ Do not say, "I have sinned and nothing has happened!" For the Lord bides his time.

⁵ Do not be so sure of pardon when you are heaping sin upon sin. ⁶ Do not say "His compassion is great! He will forgive the vast number of my sins!" For with him is mercy but also anger; his fury will be poured out on sinners.

30. 29, 8-13; Dt 17, 1-11

10. Lk 6, 35; Jn 14, 21

1. Lk 12, 15

31. Tob 12, 9; 1 Pet 4, 8

18. Mt 7, 14

4. Rom 2, 4

6. Ex 22, 22

5. Num 5, 7

6. Ex 20, 5

9. Job 29, 15

29. 1 Jn 3, 18

31. Acts 20, 35

⁷ Do not delay your return to the Lord, do not put it off from day to day. For suddenly the anger of the Lord will blaze forth and you will perish on the day of reckoning.

⁸ Do not rely on riches wrongfully acquired for they will be of no use to you on the day of wrath.

⁹ Do not be swayed by every wind nor try to walk by every path as does the sinner who is accustomed to lie. ¹⁰ Remain firm in your convictions, and be consistent in your speech. ¹¹ Be ready to listen, know how to wait before giving your reply.

¹² If you know what you are saying, answer your neighbour; if not, it is better to say nothing. ¹³ Your words can bring you honour and dishonour; a man's tongue brings about his downfall.

¹⁴ Do not let yourself be known as a scandalmonger or a deceiver. For if shame is the lot of the robber, severe condemnation is the lot of the liar.

¹⁵ Do not sin in big things nor in little things and from being a friend do not turn into an enemy. An evil reputation brings in its train shame and disgrace; such is the lot of the sinner who is accustomed to lie.

6 ¹ Just as the wicked man will inherit confusion and shame so will the sinner who lies. ² Do not give yourself over to your passions; they would turn against you and, like a bull, would tear you to pieces. ³ They would devour the foliage and destroy the fruit, leaving you like a dry stump. ⁴ An evil passion will destroy the one who is held in its power; it will make him the laughing stock of his enemies.

Friends

+ ⁵ A gentle word makes many friends, an agreeable tongue calls forth gracious replies. ⁶ Let your friends be many; but, your counsellors, one in a thousand!

⁷ If you would gain a friend, begin by testing him and do not put your confidence in him too quickly. ⁸ For there is the friend who is such when it

suits him but he does not remain faithful in the time of your adversity.

⁹ There is the friend who becomes an enemy and, to your confusion, makes known why you quarrelled.

¹⁰ There is the friend who shares your table but does not remain faithful when things go against you. ¹¹ In times of prosperity he will be like your shadow and he will speak freely to those of your household. ¹² But, if you are humiliated, he will turn against you and will avoid meeting you.

¹³ Distance yourself from your enemies and be careful about your friends.

¹⁴ The faithful friend is a secure refuge; whoever has found one has found a treasure. ¹⁵ A faithful friend is beyond all price; hold him as priceless. ¹⁶ A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy, and those who fear the Lord will find one.

¹⁷ Whoever fears the Lord will make true friends for, as a man is, such will his friend be.

¹⁸ My son, dedicate yourself to learning from your youth, and you will grow in wisdom until your old age. ¹⁹ Work at it like the worker and the sower, cultivate wisdom and wait for her excellent fruits. For in cultivating her you will have some trouble, but soon you will enjoy her fruits.

²⁰ Wisdom is very severe on the ignorant. A foolish man will not persevere. ²¹ She will be like a heavy weight or a difficult test which he will quickly throw away.

²² For wisdom brings her own honour, she does not reveal herself to everyone. ²³ Listen, my son, and receive my teaching, do not reject my counsel. ²⁴ Put her constraints on your feet and her yoke on your neck. ²⁵ Put your shoulder

9. Mt 5, 37 10. James 1, 9 5. 37, 1-6 24. Mt 11, 29

o 5:6: At times, some Christians rely on God's infinite mercy to continue with their evil behaviour.

+ Here, we have a text concerning true friendship. Ben Sira invites us not to be naive or off guard. We should reflect before confiding in a friend, but we will not lack this *life-saving*

remedy which a true friend is, a grace that God grants to *those who fear him*. Also see 12:8-18 and 37:1-15.

6.18-37: We obtain wisdom through a disciplined life.

7.15: Ben Sira appreciates manual work, specifically work in the fields.



to the burden and bear her yoke; do not rebel against her chains. ²⁶ Come to her with all your soul and with all your soul and with all your strength observe her ways. ²⁷ Pursue her, search for her, she will make herself known to you; when you have her, do not let her go.

²⁸ For, in the end, you will find in her your rest and she will become your joy. ²⁹ Her constraints will strengthen your steps and her collar be like a glorious garment. ³⁰ Her yoke will become an ornament of gold and her chains like precious girdles of hyacinth blue. ³¹ You will adorn yourself as with a garment of glory and you will put her on like a crown of jubilation.

³² If you wish, my son, you will be learned; if you pay attention, you will become clever.

³³ If you love to listen, you will learn; if you really pay attention, you will become wise.

³⁴ Be on your guard in the assembly of the elders and if there is a wise man there, attach yourself to him. ³⁵ Be willing to listen to all discourses on divine things and do not let the sayings of the wise escape you.

³⁶ If you see an intelligent man, follow him from daybreak and let your feet beat a pathway to his door.

³⁷ Meditate on the precepts of the Lord and apply yourself unceasingly to his commandments. He will strengthen your heart and the wisdom you desire will be given to you.

7

¹ Do no evil and evil will not take hold of you.

² Keep away from wrong-doing and it will leave you alone.

³ Son, do not sow in the furrows of injustice for fear of reaping its harvest sevenfold.

⁴ Do not demand authority from the Lord nor from nor from the king a place of honour.

⁵ Do not make yourself out to be a just man before the Lord nor a wise man in front of the king.

⁶ Do not seek a position of responsibility lest you be not powerful enough to root out injustice, lest you be overawed by a powerful man and lose your integrity.

⁷ Do not offend the city's assembly; do not grovel before the people.

⁸ Do not commit the same sin twice; once is enough to bring punishment upon you.

⁹ Do not say, "When I sacrifice to God, the Most High will take into account the number of gifts and he will accept them." ¹⁰ Pray with a strong spirit and do not neglect to give alms.

¹¹ Do not despise a man when he is down-cast, for there is someone who casts down and raises up.

¹² Do not lie against your brother; likewise, do not lie against your friend.

¹³ Do not allow yourself any kind of lie for nothing good will come of it.

¹⁴ Do not gossip in front of the council of the elders, neither keep on repeating your words in prayer.

¹⁵ Do not hate hard work nor the tilling of the land as instituted by the Most High.

¹⁶ Do not join the company of sinners, remember that the wrath of God will not be delayed.

¹⁷ Remain humble, because the godless are punished with fire and worms.

¹⁸ Do not exchange your friend for money, nor a real brother for the gold of Ophir.

¹⁹ Do not separate yourself from a wise and good woman, because a gracious wife is worth more than gold.

²⁰ Do not maltreat the servant who works honestly, nor the labourer who works diligently. ²¹ Love the intelligent slave as yourself and do not deprive him of his freedom.

²² Have you any cattle? Take care of them. If they are profitable to you, keep them.

²³ Have you children? Educate them and teach them to obey from their childhood.

²⁴ Have you any daughters? Guard their virginity and do not be indulgent towards them.

²⁵ If you marry off your daughter you will have accomplished something of importance, but give her to an intelligent man.

²⁶ Have you a wife who is according to your liking? Do not send her away. As for the one you dislike, do not trust her.

²⁷ Honour your father with your whole heart and do not be forgetful of the sufferings of your mother.

²⁸ Remember that they gave you birth. How can you repay them for what they have done for you?

²⁹ Reverence the Lord with all your being and respect the priests.

³⁰ Love your Creator with all your strength and do not abandon his ministers.

³¹ Fear the Lord and honour the priest. Give him the share which has been commanded: the first harvest, the sin-offering, the shoulders of the victims, the holy offerings and the first fruits of sacred things.

³² Stretch out your hand to the poor and you will receive a blessing from the Lord.

³³ May your gifts benefit the living and do not forget the dead.

³⁴ Do not turn away from those who weep and grieve with those who are in sorrow.



³⁵ Do not neglect to visit the sick because it is for such acts that you will be loved.

³⁶ In all your actions remember your last end and you will never sin.

Prudence and common sense

8 ¹ Do not argue with a powerful man lest you fall into his hands.

² Do not quarrel with a rich man lest he throw his weight into the scale against you.

³ Do not argue with a talkative person; do not heap up wood on his fire.

⁴ Do not joke with an ignorant man for fear your ancestors will be insulted.

⁵ Do not offend the man who repents of his sins, remember that we are all sinners.

⁶ Do not despise a man in his old age, because we ourselves will grow old.

⁷ Do not rejoice at the death of any man, remember that we shall all die.

⁸ Do not neglect the teaching of the wise, apply yourself well to their precepts. Through them you will learn how to live and how to serve the great.

⁹ Do not set on one side the teachings of the elders for they also learnt it from their fathers; they will open up your understanding and enable you to reply at the right moment.

¹⁰ Do nothing to arouse the sinner for fear of being burnt by the fire of his flame.

¹¹ Do not annoy the angry man for fear that he will twist your words to his own advantage.

¹² Do not lend to those more powerful than yourself; if you have lent anything, consider it as lost.

¹³ Do not stand surety beyond your means; if you have done so, be ready to pay.

¹⁴ Do not go to law with a judge because, according to his position, judgment will be given in his favour.

¹⁵ Do not travel with an adventurer lest he impose himself on you and, as he does whatever he pleases, you will both perish through his folly.

¹⁶ Do not quarrel with a bad-tempered person nor get involved with him in a lonely place; blood counts for little in his eyes and, in as far as he sees you defenceless, he will attack you.

¹⁷ Do not take counsel with a fool because he will not be able to remain silent about what you have said.

¹⁸ Do nothing which should be secret be-

fore a stranger because you do not know how he will react.

¹⁹ Do not reveal your secrets to any man, he will not be grateful to you for doing so.

Man with women

9 ¹ Do not be jealous of your own wife; do not give her the temptation to disgrace you.

² Do not put yourself into the power of any woman to the point where she can dominate you.

³ Do not go near a woman of ill-repute for fear of falling into her nets.

⁴ Do not dally with a singing girl for fear of being caught in her snares.

⁵ Do not fix your gaze on a young girl for fear of being involved in her condemnation.

⁶ Do not deliver yourself into the power of prostitutes lest you lose your inheritance.

⁷ Do not glance about you in the streets of the town; do not loiter in lonely places.

⁸ Turn your eyes away from a good-looking woman and do not stare at a beautiful foreigner. For the beauty of a woman has caused many to fall; in her presence love blazes up like a fire.

⁹ Never sit near a married woman or drink wine with her for fear that your feelings towards her be roused and that in your passion you slide towards your downfall.

¹⁰ Do not abandon an old friend, for a new one has not the same value.

New wine, new friend; let them mature, then you will enjoy them with pleasure.

¹¹ Do not envy the success of the sinner, you do not know what his end will be.

¹² Do not take pleasure in what pleases the godless, remember that they will be punished before they die.

¹³ Keep well away from the man who has power to kill and you will not experience the fear of death. But if you go with him avoid all offence for fear that he will deprive you of life: realize that you are passing through death-traps and that you are walking on top of the wall.

¹⁴ As far as you can, be sociable and take counsel with learned men.

¹⁵ Love to speak with intelligent men and let all your discourses be about the law of the Most High.

¹⁶ Let just men be your companions at table; take pride in your fear of the Lord.

35. Mt 25, 35 1. Pro 10, 15 5. Job 31, 1

6. Lk 15, 13

8. Mt 5, 28

11. Ps 37

■ Ben Sira lives in a society which holds women in contempt. In that society which had not discovered the rich quality of married love, there are great temptations for young and adult

men who will be more easily satisfied with occasional love. Thus, Ben Sira has many warnings against women's seduction. See 23:12 and 42:12.



¹⁷ An artisan is judged by his work and a leader of the community by the wisdom of his words.

¹⁸ A talkative man is dreaded in his town and the gossip makes himself disliked.

10 ¹ The wise leader will teach his people; the government of the intelligent man will be well-ordered.

² As the leader is, so will his ministers be; as the leader of the city is, such will be its inhabitants.

³ A king without wisdom will ruin his people; a city will prosper through the wisdom of its rulers.

⁴ The government of the earth is in the hands of the Lord; in his own time he will raise up the right leader.

⁵ The success of every man is in the hands of the Lord and he clothes the rulers with his glory.

Pride

◆ ⁶ Do not store up resentment against your neighbour, no matter what his offence; do nothing in a fit of anger.

⁷ Pride is odious to both God and man; injustice is abhorrent to both of them.

⁸ Sovereignty passes from one nation to another because of injustice, violence and wealth.

⁹ How can there be such pride in someone who is nothing but dust and ashes? Even while he is living, man's bowels are full of rotteness.

¹⁰ Look: the illness lasts while the doctor makes light of it; and the king of today will die tomorrow.

¹¹ Once a man is dead, grubs, insects and worms are his lot.

¹² The beginning of man's pride is to separate himself from the Lord and to rebel against his Creator.

¹³ The beginning of pride is sin. Whoever perseveres in sinning opens the floodgates to everything that is evil. For this the Lord has inflicted dire punishment on sinners; he has reduced them to nothing.

¹⁴ The Lord has overturned the thrones of princes and set up the meek in their place.

¹⁵ The Lord has torn up the proud by the roots and has planted the humble in their place.

¹⁶ The Lord has overturned the land of the pagans and totally destroyed them.

¹⁷ He has devastated several of them, destroyed them and removed all remembrance of them from the face of the earth.

¹⁸ Pride was not created for man nor violent anger for those born of woman.

¹⁹ Which race is worthy of honour? The human race.

Which race is worthy of honour? Those who fear the Lord.

Which race is despicable? The human race.

Which race is despicable? Those who break the commandments – the Law.

²⁰ The leader is worthy of respect in the midst of his brethren, but he has respect for those who fear the Lord. ²² Whether they be rich, honoured or poor, their pride should be in fearing the Lord.

²³ It is not right to despise the poor man who keeps the law; it is not fitting to honour the sinful man.

²⁴ The leader, the judge, and the powerful man are worthy of honour, but no one is greater than the man who fears the Lord.

²⁵ A prudent slave will have free men as servants, and the sensible man will not complain because of that.

²⁶ Do not feel proud when you have only accomplished your work; do not put on airs when times are difficult for you.

²⁷ Of greater worth is the man who works and lives in abundance than the one who shows off and yet has nothing to live on.

²⁸ My son, have a modest appreciation of yourself, estimate yourself at your true value.

²⁹ Who will defend the man who makes an attempt on his own life? Who will respect the man who despises himself?

³⁰ The poor man will be honoured for his wisdom and the rich man for his riches.

³¹ Honoured when poor – how much more honoured when rich!

Dishonoured when rich – how much more dishonoured when poor!

11 ¹ The poor man who is wise carries his head high and sits among the great.

² Do not praise a man because he is handsome and do not hold a man in contempt because of his appearance.

³ The bee is one of the smallest of the winged insects but she excels in the exquisite sweetness of her honey.

⁴ Do not be proud because of the clothes you wear; do not be proud when people honour you. Do you know what the Lord is preparing in a mysterious way? ⁵ Many tyrants have been overthrown and someone unknown has received the crown.

⁶ Many powerful men have been com-



pletely disgraced and famous men handed over into the power of others.

⁷ Do not reprehend anyone unless you have first been fully informed, consider the case first and thereafter make your reproach.

⁸ Do not reply before you have listened; do not interrupt the one who is speaking.

⁹ Do not interfere in what is not your business; do not meddle in the disputes of sinners.

¹⁰ My son, do not undertake too many activities. If you keep adding to them, you will not be without reproach; if you run after them, you will not succeed nor will you ever be free, although you try to escape.

Put your trust in God

¹¹ There are those who exhaust themselves, tire themselves out and become anxious, yet in the end they are only the poorer.

¹² There are those who are weak, needing support, lacking goods and in great poverty, yet the eyes of the Lord look on them with favour. ¹³ The Lord will redress their humiliation and raise their heads and many people will marvel on this account.

¹⁴ Good and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, all come from the Lord.

¹⁵ The just can count on the generosity of the Lord and his goodness will guide them forever.

¹⁶ A man may become rich through being careful and miserly and this is his lot. ¹⁷ The day on which he thinks, "I have earned my rest, now I can live on my possessions," he does not know how long he is going to live. He will have to leave his goods to others and die.

¹⁸ Remain faithful to your duty, give your life to it and grow old in your work.

¹⁹ Do not be disconcerted at the success of sinners but have confidence in God and persevere in your own efforts. It is easy for the Lord in an instant to make the poor man rich.

²⁰ The blessing of the Lord is the just man's reward and quickly, in an instant, his benediction will bear fruit.

²¹ Do not say, "What do I need? What more could I have or desire?"

²² Do not say, "I have all that is necessary, what misfortune can harm me now?"

²³ On good days, one forgets the bad; and on bad days one forgets the good.

²⁴ Even when the end draws near, it is easy for the Lord to reward a man according to the way he has lived.

²⁵ The hour of adversity makes one forget the pleasure; at the end of a man's life his deeds will be revealed.

²⁶ Do not consider anyone as blessed before his death, for it is only at his death that a man will be known.

²⁷ Do not invite just anybody into your house for many are clever deceivers.

²⁸ Like a partridge in its cage acting as a decoy so is the heart of the proud man; like a spy he watches out for your weaknesses.

²⁹ He changes good things into evil, he lays his traps and criticizes even the best things.

³⁰ Just as a spark sets the coal on fire, a wicked man prepares his snares in order to draw blood.

³¹ Beware of the wicked man for he is planning evil. He might dishonour you for ever.

³² If you take a stranger into your house, he will cause you trouble; he will estrange you from your household.

12 ¹ If you do good, know to whom you are doing it and you will receive thanks for your kindness.

² Do good to the godly man and you will receive a reward, if not from the man himself at least from the Most High.

³ Blessings are not for those who persist in evil-doing nor for those who refuse to show compassion.

⁴ Give to the godly man, do not help the sinner; do good to the humble, do not give to the ungodly; deny him bread, do not give it to him lest he eventually dominate you. He will repay you with a double evil for all the good that you will have done for him.

⁵ For the Most High himself detests sinners and carries out his vengeance on the ungodly.

8. Pro 18, 13 16. Ps 49, 17 17. Lk 12, 16
Mt 5, 43; Lk 14, 12 6. Lk 6, 35

21. Mt 6, 25 22. Lk 12, 16 23. Jn 16, 21;

♦ A few words of simple philosophy about the modesty suitable for people.

• These thoughts are not new in the Bible which encourages us to trust in God on every page. Ben Sira already says what we will find on the lips of Jesus concerning wealth (see Luke 12:16).

And he says: Love the Covenant, dedicate your life to it. The Covenant means following the

Law. Jesus, too, will speak of seeking the kingdom of God instead of being preoccupied with assuring the future.

Note the end of this text. In Ecclesiastes, as in parts of the book of Job (19:25), there is a glimpse of the destiny God has in store for us after death; *only at his death, will a man be known*. Ben Sira hopes that God will reward the just on the last day of his life, even though he does not know anything concerning this.



⁷ Give to the good man but do not help the sinner.

⁸ A friend does not become an enemy in the time of prosperity nor does an enemy remain hidden in the time of adversity.

⁹ When a man is doing well his enemies are sad; when he is suffering misfortune even his friends hasten to abandon him.

¹⁰ Never trust an enemy, for his malice is like bronze covered in rust.

¹¹ Even if he should act as a humble man and walk with head bowed down, watch yourself and be on your guard against him. Behave towards him as a man who polishes a bronze mirror. Know that the rust will not remain until the end.

¹² Do not place him near you lest he overthrow you and take your place. Do not make him sit on your right hand lest he covet your seat. Let it not be that in the end you understand my words and regret not having listened to my advice.

¹³ Who will have the pity on the snake-charmer bitten by a snake or on those who go near wild beasts? ¹⁴ It is the same for the man who joins company with a sinner and finds himself involved in his wrongdoing. ¹⁵ The sinner will remain quietly with you for an hour but scarcely are you distracted than he will throw away his mask.

¹⁶ The enemy is all sweetness in his speech but in his heart he is planning to throw you in the ditch. The enemy has tears in his eyes but, if he finds an opportunity, he cannot have enough of your blood.

¹⁷ If misfortune comes to you, you will find him there before you; pretending to help you, he will be scheming to get rid of you. ¹⁸ He will wag his head in mockery and clap his hands, he will whisper unceasingly and will show his true face.

By way of the great

+13 ¹ He who touches tar will be soiled, he who associates with an arrogant man will become like him.

Do not carry too heavy a load; do not make friends with someone stronger and richer than you. Why put

the earthen pot near the iron one? One will bang the other and break it.

³ The rich man does wrong and is unconcerned; the poor man is insulted and apologizes.

⁴ He uses you as long as you are useful to him; when you have nothing left he deserts you.

⁵ He will stay with you as long as you have something; he will drain you without a second thought.

⁶ If he really needs you he will deceive you, smile at you and raise your hopes; he will speak smooth words and say, "What would you like?"

⁷ He will show his gratitude by entertaining you until he has taken all you possess and he will make fun of you in the end. Afterwards, when he sees you, he will have nothing to do with you, shaking his head when he meets you.

⁸ Take care not to be deceived and humiliated through stupidity.

⁹ When an influential person invites you, delay and he will call you all the more.

¹⁰ Do not go so far forward that you are pushed aside or so far back that you are overlooked.

¹¹ Do not try to talk to him as an equal or trust his many words. With all this verbiage he is only trying to test and, under pretence of kindness, he is weighing you up.

¹² He will repeat your words without pity and he will not spare you either blows or chains. ¹³ Be wary and take great care because you are walking with your own stumbling block.

¹⁵ All that lives loves its own kind and each person his own neighbour.

+ This long paragraph is an invitation not to seek the company of those above us. Often, the rich, those above, are godless, without conscience. The author points out the dangers:

- those above take advantage of those who

seek to become familiar with them;
- to be admitted into the friendship of the rich, we have to accept many humiliations and to forget our own dignity;
- in our contact with the rich, we will come to imitate their faults.



¹⁶ Every animal relates to its own species and man to his own kind.

¹⁷ Can the wolf go along with the lamb? It is the same with the sinner and the virtuous man. ¹⁸ What kind of peace can exist between the hyena and the dog? What peace between the rich and the poor man?

Wild donkeys are the prey of desert lions; so, also, are the poor the prey of the rich.

²⁰ The proud man hates humility; so, also, the poor man is detestable to the rich man.

²¹ When the rich man stumbles his friends support him, but when the poor man falls his friends desert him.

²² When the rich man gets into trouble there are many who come to his rescue; if he speaks nonsense they congratulate him. When the poor man makes a mistake, they criticize him; if he speaks sensibly they pay no attention. ²³ When the rich man speaks all are silent and they praise his words to the skies. The poor man speaks and people ask, "Who is this?" And if he stumbles they throw him down.

²⁴ Wealth is good if there is no sin in it and poverty is evil when it is the reward for godlessness.

Enjoy life without greed

²⁵ Man's heart is reflected in his face, for better or for worse.

²⁶ A good heart is seen in a happy face; it is hard to find.

14 ¹ Happy the one who has not sinned in speech or who feels no remorse for his faults.

² Happy is he whose own conscience does not condemn him and who has not fallen from his ideals.

³ Wealth does not befit the small-minded man; why would you give the greedy man riches? ⁴ He who hoards, depriving himself, is hoarding for others: others will enjoy his goods.

⁵ He who is mean to himself, with whom will he be good? He does not even enjoy his own riches.

⁶ There is nothing worse than one who is mean to himself, this is how his evil repays him.

⁷ If he does good, he does it without realizing it but, in the end, his evil will be revealed.

⁸ Evil is the greedy-eyed man who does not pay attention to persons and looks down on people.

⁹ The ambitious man is not content with what he has, wicked injustice shrivels up the heart.

¹⁰ The envious eye covets the food of others; there will be misery and famine at his table.

¹¹ My son, use well whatever you have and give worthy offerings to the Lord.

¹² Remember that death will not delay and your time has not yet been revealed to you.

¹³ Be good to your friend before you die and be generous to him in any way you can.

¹⁴ Enjoy happiness and do not reject lawful pleasure when it comes your way.

¹⁵ Will you not have to leave to another the fruit of your works? The fruit of your labour, will it not be shared out by lot?

¹⁷ All living things grow old like clothing. This is the eternal law: "You will die."

¹⁸ Like green leaves on a bushy tree: some sprout and others fall off, so are the generations of flesh and blood: one dies and another is born. ¹⁹ All finite things pass away and their maker with them.

Happy the one seeking wisdom

²⁰ Happy the one who is intent on wisdom and can reply to those who question him; ²¹ who makes his own the ways of wisdom and meditates on her secrets; ²² who pursues her like a hunter, lies in wait by her paths, ²³ peeps in at her windows and listens at her doors; ²⁴ he sets up camp near her house, fixing his stakes in her walls.

²⁵ He places his tent in the hands of wisdom; he stays in a happy lodging.

²⁶ He places his sons beneath her protection and finds shelter beneath her branches. ²⁷ He is shaded by her from



the heat and he makes his camp in her glory.

15 ¹Such is the one who fears the Lord; he who embraces the Law will obtain wisdom. ²She will come out to meet him like a mother and greet him like a virgin bride; ³she will feed him with the bread of understanding and give him the water of wisdom to drink. ⁴He will rely on her and will not waver; he will lean on her and will not be let down.

⁵Wisdom will make him greater than his friends and he will be able to speak in the full assembly. ⁶He will be crowned with happiness and joy. He will inherit an everlasting name.

⁷The fool will never possess her, and sinners never set eyes on her. ⁸She will be far away from pride, and liars will know nothing of her.

⁹Praise is not fitting on the lips of sinners since it does not come from the Lord. ¹⁰Praise must come from the wise man; so the Lord himself inspires it.

God made us free and responsible

■ ¹¹Do not say, "It was God who made me sin." God does not cause what he hates.

¹²Do not say, "He made me do wrong," for he has nothing to do with a sinner. ¹³The Lord hates all evil and those who fear him hate it as well.

¹⁴When he created man in the beginning he left him in the hands of his own conscience.

¹⁵If you wish, you can keep the commandments and it is in your power to remain faithful.

¹⁶He has set fire and water before you; you stretch out your hand to whichever you prefer.

¹⁷Life and death are set before man:

whichever a man prefers will be given him.

¹⁸How magnificent is the wisdom of the Lord! He is powerful and all-seeing.

¹⁹His eyes are on those who fear him. He knows all the works of man.

²⁰He has commanded no one to be godless and has given no one permission to sin.

No happiness for the wicked

16 ¹Do not long for a brood of worthless children, and take no joy in godless sons.

²However many you have, do not rejoice in them if they have no fear of God.

³Do not depend on their having a long life, or trust in their number, because one is better than a thousand and their death is preferable to their being godless.

⁴A city can arise from one man who is prudent. Yet, even though the wicked become a great tribe, they will be destroyed. ⁵I have seen such things with my own eyes and my ears have heard of still greater things.

⁶Fire has come upon the meeting of sinners and God's wrath is kindled against rebellious people.

⁷God did not pardon the leaders of old who rebelled in their pride of strength.

⁸He did not spare the city where Lot lived; he detested their pride.

⁹He showed no pity on the people doomed to destruction; they were annihilated for their sins.

¹⁰In the same way, he dealt with the six hundred thousand men who, in the hardness of their hearts, had revolted.

¹¹Had there been only one stubborn man it would have been amazing if he had escaped unpunished, since mercy and anger belong to the Lord who is powerful both in forgiveness and punishment.

¹²His justice is as great as his mercy and he judges men by their deeds.

¹³Just as the sinner will not escape with his booty, the patience of the upright man will not go unrewarded.

¹⁴God will reward every act of mercy; each person will be treated according to his deeds.

1. Wis 8, 2

6. Wis 8, 10

12. James 1, 13

17. Dt 11, 26

18. Dt 30, 15

3. Wis 4, 1

4. Wis 3, 19

7. Gen 6, 1

8. Gen 19

11. Ex 34, 6

16. Ps 139, 7; Jer 23, 24

■ This poem clearly declares that human beings are free and responsible. In his letter (1:13), James will recall the first sentence of this paragraph. In Dt 30:15-20, Moses was already telling his people: Life and death are before you; choose.

At times, the Bible seems to be saying that God pushes man to sin in order to punish him

later (see Ex 10:27; 2 Sam 24:1); yet, there is no doubt that man is free. The Israelites were so convinced that nothing was done without God that they had trouble explaining how someone can sin without this being God's will. But, even though they lacked the words to express it, they always saw human beings as persons responsible for their actions.



¹⁷ Do not say, "I will hide from the Lord; who will remember me up there? I will not be recognized in the midst of so many. What am I in the immensity of creation?"

¹⁸ Look; the sky and the heavens above the sky, the sea and the earth tremble when he comes.

¹⁹ The mountains, together with the foundations of the earth, are filled with dread before his sight.

²⁰ But nobody thinks of such things: who is interested in the ways of God?

²¹ Most of his works go unnoticed and man does not see where the storm originates.

²² "Who tells us of the interventions of God? Who expects them? The Covenant is far away."

²³ Such are the thoughts of the man of little sense, the foolish, dissolute man who loves his illusions.

²⁴ Listen to me, my sons; acquire knowledge and apply your heart to my words. ²⁵ I will expound the teaching step by step and impart knowledge carefully.

God the creator

◆ ²⁶ God created his works from the beginning and, as he made them, he assigned to each its place. ²⁷ He arranged them for all time, their beginning and their unfolding. They do not hunger or grow weary and they never cease from their duties. ²⁸ Not one has collided with its neighbour; they will never disobey his commands.

²⁹ Afterwards, the Lord looked down on the earth and filled it with his riches. ³⁰ He covered its surface with all kinds of living things and all return to it.

17 ¹ The Lord created man from the earth and let him return to earth. ² He settled a fixed time for

them and a set number of days, giving them power over everything on earth. ³ He endowed them with a strength like his own, making man in his own image.

⁴ He put the fear of men in all living things, thus they had mastery over the animals and birds. ⁵ He endowed them with knowledge; he gave them tongue and eyes, ears and a mind to think with.

⁷ He filled them with wisdom and knowledge; he taught them good and evil. ⁸ He put his own inner eye in their hearts so they would understand the greatness of his works. ¹⁰ They will praise his holy Name and relate the magnificence of his creation.

¹¹ As well as this, he gave them revealed knowledge and handed over to them the Law of life. ¹² He established an everlasting covenant with them and let them know his judgments.

¹³ Human eyes saw the splendour of the Glory of God; their ears heard the grandeur of his voice. ¹⁴ He said to them, "Keep yourselves from all wrongdoing", and he gave to each of them commands regarding his neighbour.

¹⁵ Their conduct is always before the Lord; they cannot escape his sight.

¹⁷ He has placed a leader over each nation but Israel is the Lord's own portion.

¹⁹ Their deeds are as clear as the sun to him, he always observes their ways.

²⁰ Their misdeeds cannot be hidden from him, all their sins are before the Lord.

²² He holds a man's almsgiving dear as a

21. Rom 11, 33	26. 42, 20-25	30. Ps 104, 29	1. Gen 2, 7; Eccl 3, 20; 12, 7	2. Gen 6, 3; 1, 28
3. Wis 9, 2	8. Wis 13, 1; Rom 1, 19	13. Dt 4, 11	17. Dt 7, 6	

◆ Here, we have an optimistic vision of men. God gave them power over all things of the earth. This is why they must not give themselves to evil.

The inner eye, that is to say, conscience which lets us recognize the work of God. The greatest human gift is not our reason which discusses and argues, but the instinct for truth,

the divine ability, leading us to true wisdom. The sacred author states that it is present in every human being.

But then, God had to reveal himself to us so that this capacity to come to the truth would lead to sound knowledge, decisive in terms of the direction of our lives: in verses 11-14, the author refers to the gift of the Law to Israel through Moses.



priceless signet ring; he cherishes a good deed like the apple of his eye.

²³One day he will rise and reward them; he will place their prize on their heads.

²⁴He allows those who repent to return; he comforts those whose hopes are fading.

²⁵Be converted to the Lord and give up your sins, plead with him to lessen your offense.

²⁶Return to the Almighty, turn aside from wrongdoing and totally detest evil.

²⁷For who in the grave will praise the Almighty, if the living do not give him glory?

²⁸The dead man is as if he did not exist and cannot give praise; he who has life and health can praise the Lord.

²⁹How great is the mercy of the Lord and his forgiveness for those who turn to him!

³⁰Man cannot have everything in his power since he is not immortal.

³¹What is brighter than the sun? Yet it disappears. Man is no more than flesh and blood, yet he thinks of doing evil. ³²While the sun surveys the stars in the lofty sky, all men remain dust and ashes.

The greatness of God

18 ¹He who lives forever created all without exception. ²The Lord alone will be found righteous.

⁴He has made no one powerful enough to proclaim his works; who then, will reveal his marvels?

⁵Who can calculate the power of his majesty and relate his great goodness?

⁶Nothing can be added to him or taken away; no one can fathom the wonders of the Lord.

⁷When man thinks he has finished, then he is only beginning and when he stops he is puzzled by it all.

⁸What is man? What is his purpose? What is the good in him and what the bad?

⁹Take the length of his life: a hundred years is long. ¹⁰Like a drop of water from the sea, a grain of sand, such are his few years compared with eternity.

¹¹For this reason, the Lord has patience with them and pours out his mercy on them.

¹²He sees and realizes how miserable their end is and so he heaps his forgiveness upon them.

¹³Man's mercy is for his neighbour but the compassion of the Lord reaches all people; he rebukes, corrects, teaches and brings back his flock like a shepherd. ¹⁴He takes pity on those

who accept correction and eagerly seek his will.

¹⁵My son, do not mix your favours with unkind remarks or your gifts with bitter words.

¹⁶Does not dew temper the heat? So, too, a kind word is much better than a gift.

¹⁷The gift is not as valuable as the words which accompany it, but a generous man brings both.

¹⁸The fool intends to please but insults, a grudging man's gift scorches the eyes.

¹⁹Find out the facts before you speak; look after yourself before you become ill.

²⁰Examine yourself before judgment comes and, on the day of God's visitation, you will be forgiven.

²¹Humble yourself before you become ill and show repentance for your sins.

²²Let nothing prevent you from fulfilling your vow on time; do not wait until death to put things in order.

²³Prepare yourself before praying and do not be one of those who tempt the Lord.

²⁴Keep in mind the justice of the last days: God will turn his face from you on the day of vengeance.

²⁵When you experience abundance, remember the days of famine; when you enjoy riches, think of poverty and misery.

²⁶Time slips by between morning and evening, all things pass quickly before the Lord.

²⁷The prudent man is cautious in everything; when sin abounds he will keep away from wrongdoing.

²⁸Every sensible man recognizes wisdom and respects those who obtain her.

²⁹Those who speak sensibly are wise, and marvellous sayings flow from them.

³⁰Do not let your passions rule you and restrain your desires.

³¹If you satisfy your lusts you will make yourself the laughing-stock of your enemies.

³²Do not impoverish yourself by feasting on credit when you have nothing in your pocket.

19 ¹A drunken worker will never be rich; he who is careless in small things will soon fall.

²Wine and women corrupt the best of men; whoever frequents prostitutes loses all sense of shame. ³He will be the victim of grubs and worms and lose his life because of his stupidity.



When to speak and when to be silent

⁴ He who is too quick to trust others reveals a shallow mind, whoever sins injures himself.

⁵ One who revels in pleasure will be condemned, ⁶ hating gossip will save one from evil.

⁷ Never repeat what you are told and you will come to no harm.

⁸ Report nothing to friend or foe and, unless silence is sinful, reveal it to no one, ⁹ They will listen, distrust you and you will end up being hated.

¹⁰ Have you heard something? Let it die with you, remain calm; you will not burst with it.

¹¹ A fool suffers like a woman in childbirth over something he is told.

¹² Like an arrow stuck in his thigh, such is a secret inside a fool.

¹³ Speak with your friend: perhaps he has done nothing and, if he has, he will not do it again.

¹⁴ Speak with your friend: perhaps he has not said anything and, if he has, he will not say it again.

¹⁵ Speak with your friend for there is much slander; do not believe all that you hear. ¹⁶ Often, unintentional slips are made; for who has never sinned by speech? ¹⁷ Speak with your neighbour before you heap accusations on him; then leave room for the Law of the Almighty.

²⁰ All wisdom is in the fear of the Lord; in all wisdom is the fulfilment of the Law.

²² Knowledge of evil is not wisdom, and prudence is not found in the advice of sinners.

²³ There is a cleverness that is loathsome; it belongs to the evildoer who lacks wisdom.

²⁴ Better to lack sense and be full of the fear of the Lord, than to be clever in violating the Law.

²⁵ There is an ingenious shrewdness

which carries out injustice; ²⁶ it is the art of dissimulating in order to do evil. One pretends to be harmed and weighed down with burdens but in his heart there is only cunning; ²⁷ he hides his face and pretends to be deaf but, as soon as you are distracted, he will take advantage of you.

²⁸ One does not sin while the means are lacking; at the first opportunity, he will do wrong.

²⁹ You can tell a man by his appearance; the responsible man can be recognized by his face.

³⁰ A man's way of dressing reveals who he is, as does his manner of laughing and walking.

The stupid and foolish

+20 ¹ There are rebukes which are inopportune; there is the silence of a sensible man.

² Better to rebuke than nurse a grudge. He who recognizes his fault diminishes its consequences.

⁴ Like a eunuch desiring to violate a girl, such is he who uses force in pretending to be just.

⁵ One keeps silent and is thought to be wise, the other makes himself hated because of his gossiping.

⁶ One remains silent because he does not know how to reply; the other keeps quiet, waiting for the right moment.

⁷ The wise man keeps silent until the right moment; the chatterer and fool speak out of turn.

⁸ He who speaks too much makes himself hated; he who wishes to impose himself stirs up ill will.

⁹ Man can turn his troubles to his advantages; a lucky chance can turn to loss.

¹⁰ There is a type of generosity which will not reward you and another which will repay you double.

¹¹ One is humiliated for having had honours; another is humiliated and, then, lifts up his head.

¹² One buys much with little money; another pays seven times its value.

¹³ The wise man makes himself lovable through his words alone while the favours of the fool are lost.

¹⁴ The fool's gift is not to your advantage; he gives with greedy eyes. ¹⁵ He gives little

^o In many passages, throughout the book of Sirach, as in Proverbs, the author shows that controlling one's tongue is a prerequisite for wisdom.

+ 20:1. We must avoid two errors: correction with anger because we fall into excesses, and being resentful in silence, without letting off steam.

but puts on a great outward appearance and exclaims for all to hear; he lends today and recovers the loan tomorrow; he is a despicable man.

¹⁶ The fool says, "I have no friends, no one welcomes my favours. ¹⁷ Those who eat my bread have evil tongues." How often they will mock him, and how many!

¹⁸ Better to stumble to the ground than make a slip with the tongue; this is how easily the wicked fall.

¹⁹ The rough-mannered man is like an indiscreet story.

²⁰ The proverb told by a fool will fail, since he does not speak it at an appropriate time.

²¹ One keeps himself from sin because he does not have the means to act; when he gets the chance, he will have no remorse.

²² One loses his soul out of false shame; he loses himself for fear of what a foolish man thinks. ²³ Out of false shame he wants to win a friend; he gets an enemy, in fact, for nothing.

²⁴ Lying is a shameful defect in a man; fools are used to it.

²⁵ Better to be a thief than a liar, yet both are heading for disaster.

²⁶ Habitual lying is detestable; disgrace never leaves the liar.

²⁷ The wise man's words advance his cause; the shrewd man will gain favour with the powerful.

²⁸ He who tills the earth increases his produce; he who pleases the great, is forgiven his wickedness.

²⁹ Presents and gifts blind a wise man's eyes; like a muzzle they silence the conscientious.

³⁰ Concealed wisdom and hidden treasure: what good are these?

³¹ The man who conceals his stupidity is better than he who conceals his wisdom.

21 ¹ Have you sinned, my son? Do not do it again and beg forgiveness for your past sins.

² Escape from sin as you would from a snake; if you go near, it will bite you. Its teeth are like those of a lion and destroy human lives.

³ All evil is like a double-edged sword which inflicts wounds past remedy.

⁴ Violence and pride bring down the rich; the arrogant man's house will be brought low.

⁵ The poor man's prayer reaches the ears of the Lord and his judgment will not delay.

⁶ Whoever hates correction goes the way of sinners; he who fears the Lord turns to him in his heart.

⁷ The chatterer is known everywhere but the discreet man recognizes his weakness.

⁸ Building a house with borrowed money is like collecting stones for your own tomb.

⁹ The meeting of sinners is like a pile of rope which will go up in fire and flames.

¹⁰ The path of sinners is well paved but it ends in the fiery abyss.

¹¹ He who keeps the Law is in control of his thoughts; the fear of the Lord brings wisdom.

¹² The man who is not clever will never be taught; but there is a cleverness which leads to bitterness.

¹³ The wise man's knowledge spreads out like a flood and his advice is like a spring.

¹⁴ The fool's heart is like a broken glass which cannot hold any teaching.

¹⁵ If an educated man hears a wise saying he values it and adds another. If the good-for-nothing hears it he is annoyed and tosses it over his shoulder.

¹⁶ The fool's talk weighs like a load while the wise man's words give rest.

¹⁷ The assembly awaits the wise man's words; each one takes to heart whatever he says.

¹⁸ The fool thinks of wisdom as a house in ruins but the knowledge of the fool amounts to nonsense.

The stupid and foolish

■ ¹⁹ As far as the fool is concerned, instruction is no more than handcuffs and fetters. ²⁰ The idiot laughs aloud while the intelligent man merely smiles quietly.

²¹ Instruction is like a golden ornament to the shrewd man, like a bracelet on his right arm.

²² The fool steps inside the house immediately, the experienced man would not be so bold. ²³ The fool looks in through the door, the polite man remains outside. ²⁴ Listening outside doors reveals a bad upbringing, the upright man would be ashamed of doing so.

²⁵ Strangers speak thoughtlessly of everything while wise men's words are carefully weighed. ²⁶ The heart of fools is in their mouth but the mouth of the wise is in their heart.

²⁷ When the godless man curses his opponent, the curse descends on himself. ²⁸ The slanderer taints himself and makes himself hated by all around him.

22 ¹ The idler is like a dirty stone, his disgrace is laughed at.

² The idler is like a heap of dung, all who touch it shake it off their hands.

³ Badly brought up sons are the shame of their father, and daughters, a humiliation.

⁴ A sensible daughter is a treasure to her husband but the disgraceful one is a burden to her father.

⁵ A shameless daughter brings disgrace on her father as well as her husband; both hate her.

⁶ The untimely word is like music at a funeral but beating and correction guided by wisdom are never out of place.

⁷ Teaching a fool is like gluing a broken jar, it is easier to awaken a man deep in sleep.

⁸ Reasoning with a fool is like reasoning with a drowsy man; at the end, he will ask you, "What is it about?"

⁹ Weep for the dead man since the light has deserted him, weep for the fool because understanding has deserted him.

Cry less for the dead man; he has found his rest but the fool's life is worse than death.

¹² Mourning the dead lasts seven days but it lasts all their life for the fool and godless man.

¹³ Do not waste words on the fool or go with the stupid man; beware of him lest he bring you trouble and his contact leave you contaminated. Stay away from him if you want rest and do not want to be worn out by his requests.

¹⁴ What is heavier than lead? What is its name but Fool?

¹⁵ Sand, salt and a load of iron are easier to bear than a fool.

¹⁶ The wooden joint in a building is not dislodged by an earthquake; a determined heart, after careful reflection, will not be moved when crises come.

¹⁷ A decision based on serious reflection stands like plaster on a firm wall.

¹⁸ Stakes set on a height do not resist the wind; the fool's heart, frightened by his own imaginings, cannot withstand fear.

¹⁹ Striking the eye brings tears; if you strike the heart, lucidity will come forth.

²⁰ Whoever throws stones at birds scares them off; reproach a friend and you will kill the friendship.

²¹ If you have drawn your sword against a friend, do not despair, it can be put back; ²² if you have spoken harshly, do not fear, reconciliation is possible; but in the event of insult, contempt, betrayal of a confidence or treacherous blow, any friend would desert you.

²³ Win your neighbour's confidence when he is poor so that you may enjoy his goods with him when he grows rich; be loyal in his hour of trouble and you will win, in the end, a share in his inheritance.

²⁴ Smoke and fumes precede the fire; so, too, insults herald the blows.

²⁵ I will not be ashamed of protecting a friend nor will I avoid him; ²⁶ if evil comes to me from him, all who hear of it will beware of him.

²⁷ Who will put a guard on my mouth and effectively lock up my lips to prevent me from sinning and my tongue from hastening my ruin?

23 ¹ O Lord, Father and master of my life, do not abandon me to the whims of my lips or allow me to fall because of them.

² Who will deal out punishment to my thoughts and apply the discipline of wisdom to my heart? ³ Let them not indulge my sins or the mistakes of my mind, lest my errors increase and my sins multiply, and I fall into the hands of my enemies, to the joy of my foes.

⁴ Lord, Father and God of my life, do not allow me to become haughty; ⁵ keep greed far away from me.

⁶ Do not let lust and lechery take hold of me; do not deliver me to filthy passions.

⁷ Children, learn how to control your language; if you are able to watch over it, you will not be taken by surprise.

⁸ The sinner will be caught in his own

27. Ps 141, 3

2. Ps 141, 5

■ The politeness of well educated people shows their noble spirit. When we are truly wise, we instinctively discover the rules of good education. As Saint Francis de Sales used to say: "Courtesy is the precious flower of charity."

◆ Prayer of the youth who discovers his weakness when faced with life's temptations. Prayer of the adult person who has experienced that evil is deep-rooted in his heart. An invitation to parents to look after their children's training.



words, as happens to the proud man and him who curses.

⁹ Do not get used to swearing, taking the name of the Holy One.

¹⁰ For, just as the slave who is constantly watched will not escape without blows so you, also, will not be found guiltless after constantly calling upon his name.

¹¹ The man who swears at any time will be found full of sins, and disgrace will not depart from his house. If he fails to keep his oath due to carelessness, punishment will descend upon him; if he fails knowingly, his sin is double and if he has sworn falsely, he will not be forgiven; in any case, his house will be filled with disasters.

About impurity and adultery

¹² There is a way of talking which deserves death; let it not be used by Jacob's descendants. Virtuous men keep far away from it and do not wallow in sin.

¹³ Do not accustom your mouth to foul language for it will be sinful talk.

¹⁴ Remember your father and mother when you are sitting in the company of the great, lest you forget yourself in their presence and act like a fool. Then you would wish you had never been born, and curse the day of your birth.

¹⁵ A man used to indecent talk will never be reformed in his lifetime.

¹⁶ Two types of men multiply sins and a third attracts the Lord's anger:

¹⁷ A blazing passion which burns like fire will not be extinguished until it burns itself up.

A man who seeks pleasure from his own body, he will not give up until he catches fire; to the indecent man,

all food tastes sweet and he will not be satisfied until death.

¹⁸ The man unfaithful to the marriage bed who thinks like this, "Who sees me? Darkness surrounds me, the walls hide me; nobody can see me. Why should I worry? The Almighty will not take note of my faults."

¹⁹ He fears the scrutiny of men and does not realize that the Lord's eyes are a thousand times brighter than the sun, that they watch the conduct of all men and penetrate into the most secret corners. ²⁰ All things were present to him before they were created and so will they be after their end.

²¹ This man will be punished in view of the whole city, he will be caught when he least expects it.

²² In the same way, the woman who is unfaithful to her husband and gives him an heir by another man will be punished. ²³ First, she has disobeyed the Law of the Almighty. Secondly, she has sinned against her husband and thirdly, she is tainted with adultery, for she has had children by another man.

²⁴ She will be taken before the assembly and questioned about her children. ²⁵ The children will not be able to take root; their branches will not bear fruit. ²⁶ She will leave behind a cursed memory and her shame will never be blotted out.

²⁷ People who have seen her will know that nothing matters more than the fear of the Lord and nothing is sweeter than fulfilling his commands.

9. Mr 5, 34; James 5, 12

The sin of the tongue (or the lips) means, first of all, proud words and proud projects. This is always the beginning of all the other sins.

o Ben Sira speaks of impurity in the traditional sense: sin against chastity.

- In 23:12-15, he speaks of vulgar words and malicious conversations. As Jesus says in Matthew 12:34: *the mouth speaks of what fills the heart*.

- 23:16-21 refers to extramarital relationships.

- 23:22-23 deals with an adulterous woman, though it can also be applied to the adulterous man: 1) It is a sin against God; 2) it is a sin against the spouse; 3) it is a sin against the family honour.

+ This poem attributed to the Wisdom of God resembles those of Proverbs 8 and Wisdom 7.



The hymn of wisdom

+24 ¹Listen to wisdom singing her own praises and extolling self in the midst of her people. ²See, she opens her mouth in the assembly of the Most High, she glories in herself before the Almighty.

³I came out from the mouth of God and covered the face of the earth like a mist; ⁴although my dwelling place is in the highest heavens, my throne is within the pillar of cloud.

⁵I alone have seen and understood the vault of the skies and strolled through the depths of the abyss, ⁶taking possession of the raging sea and of the earth as well, with all its peoples and nations.

⁷In all of these, I looked for a place to rest; in which territory would I set up my abode?

⁸Then the creator of the universe commanded me, he who created me assigned the place of my rest, "Pitch your tent in Jacob; Israel will be your homeland."

⁹He had created me from the beginning, before time began and I will never cease to be, ¹⁰-serving him in his Holy Tent, before his presence. But then I was established in Zion.

¹¹The Lord let me rest in his beloved city and Jerusalem is the heart of my kingdom. ¹²I took root in the people God has favoured, in the land of the Lord, in their inheritance.

¹³I grew like a cedar in Lebanon, as the cypress on Mount Hermon.

¹⁴I grew like the palm trees in Engedi and the rosebuds of Jericho; as a magnificent olive on the plains like a fragrant flower, like exquisite myrrh I have given choice scent; like sweet-smelling plants and as the smoke of incense which burns in the Sanctuary of God.

¹⁵I spread out my branches like a vine; these are Glory and Grace. ¹⁷Just like a vine I put out graceful shoots and my blossoms are riches and glory.

¹⁹Come to me, you who desire me and take your fill of my fruits. ²⁰To experience me is sweeter than honey and to possess me sweeter than any honeycomb. ²¹Those who eat me will still hunger for me; those who drink me will still thirst for me. ²²Those who obey me will not be put to shame; those who serve me do not fall into sin.

²³All this is understood in the Bible, the Testament of the Most High God, the book of the Law which Moses entrusted to us, the inheritance of the people of Israel.

²⁵This Law feeds the springs of wisdom, like the Pishon or Tigris in the season of fruit. ²⁶Waters overflowing with understanding come from it, as from the Euphrates and Jordan at harvest time; ²⁷the floods of

1. Job 26; Bar 3, 9; Pro 1, 20; 8; 9, 1-6
21. Jn 4, 13; 6, 35

23. Dt 33, 4

4. Ex 13, 21
25. Jos 3, 15

8. Pro 8, 27; Ps 132, 8

20. Ps 19, 11

What is emphasized here is the presence of Wisdom in God's people.

Two events from sacred history help us understand this presence of God himself through his Wisdom:

- The *cloud* which accompanies the Hebrews in the desert (see Ex 13:21).
- The *Tent* which served as sanctuary in the desert (see Ex 25).

The first image teaches us that God's glory so surpasses man, that we can only know something of God when he hides his glory in the cloud. The second image teaches us that the real

dwelling of God is not something material that we call "heaven;" God's presence in this world is something mysterious and provisional, something like a tent.

The Wisdom of God rules the universe and all the nations and yet, it came in a special way to Israel, which is its dwelling and inheritance. This prepares us for what John says in his Gospel 1:3 and 1:9: the Wisdom of God is Christ and the people where it will be present is the Church.

Catholic liturgy has used this poem for the feasts of the Virgin Mary because the words fit

instruction run like the Nile or the Gihon in time of vintage.

²⁸ He who comes first is unable to grasp her fully and neither will the last exhaust her. ²⁹ For her thoughts are wider than the sea and her designs deeper than the abyss.

I have not worked for myself alone

■ ³⁰ I, for my part, was like a brook from a river, a stream diverted into a delightful garden. ³¹ I thought, "Let me irrigate my orchard and water my flowers." But, now, my brook has developed into a river and the river has grown into a sea.

³² May my teaching shine forth like the dawn; may I carry its light to faraway places. ³³ I will spread my teaching like a prophecy and leave it to future generations.

³⁴ See, all of you, that I have not worked for myself alone but for all those who seek wisdom.

25 ¹ Three things delight me and are delightful to God and men: agreement between brothers, friendship between neighbours, and perfect harmony between husband and wife.

² There are three kinds of persons whom I detest and whose existence I cast away from me: a poor man full of pride, a rich man who is a liar, and an adulterous old man who is a fool.

³ If you have saved nothing in your youth, what will you have in old age?

⁴ What a great thing is old age that knows how to advise, an old man who can judge!

⁵ What a great thing is wisdom in those who are old, or understanding and prudence in the great.

⁶ Rich experience is the crown of the old, their pride is the fear of the Lord.

⁷ I think of nine things which I consider happy and a tenth to which I will also refer: the man who finds his happiness in his children, he who sees the ruin of his enemies in his lifetime.

⁸ Happy the man who lives with a sensible wife; he who does not plough with a donkey and ox; he who has done no wrong in speech; he who does not serve an unworthy master.

⁹ Happy he who has obtained good sense and is able to speak before an attentive audience!

¹⁰ Great is he who has gained wisdom, but no one surpasses the man who fears the Lord.

¹¹ Since the fear of the Lord excels everything, who can compare with the one who possesses it?

¹³ Any wound rather than the wound of the heart; any wickedness rather than the wickedness of a woman; ¹⁴ any sadness rather than that inflicted by an enemy; any vengeance rather than the vengeance of a foe.

¹⁵ There is no poison worse than a snake's venom, there is no rage worse than an enemy's.

¹⁶ Better to live with a lion and a snake than to share a house with a wicked woman.

¹⁷ Wickedness disfigures a woman's appearance, it saddens the face, making her look like a bear.

¹⁸ When her husband dines with his neighbour, he sighs bitterly, in spite of himself.

¹⁹ All wickedness is nothing compared with a woman's wickedness. Let her be the lot of a sinner!

²⁰ As a sandhill is to an old man's feet so is the talkative woman to her quiet husband. ²¹ Do not be fooled by a woman's beauty or fall in love with her.

²² Expect anger, reproach and plenty of shame when the wife rules the husband.

²³ Dejected spirits, a sad face and unseen

31. Ezk 47

17. Pro 21,9

the role that God gave her in the Church. On the day of the Annunciation, she received Jesus in the name of all. This is why she has been granted to be the first of God's people and the mother of all others.

The last verses return to practical things: the Wisdom of God is found especially in the Law, that is, in the book of his words.

■ Ben Sira is a sage. All the rich experience that he shares with us comes from this unique wisdom. He marvels at all he received from God which, now, enables him to teach and guide many: *The Almighty has done great things in me* (Luke 1:49).

◆ Ben Sira praises the perfect woman from a moral and physical viewpoint. This appreciation of the feminine charm of a wife brings us to denounce two evils which trouble many marriages:

- the conditions of life for country women make them lose their grace and gifts within a few years;
- the lack of conversation and common interest between spouses, making women dedicate themselves only to their children, thus ceasing to be their husband's lovers.



wounds, these are the work of a wicked woman. Idle hands and unsteady knees are found when a wife brings her husband no happiness.

²⁴For sin began with woman and we all die because of her.

²⁵Do not let water leak out or give free rein to a wicked woman. If she does not do as you tell her, get rid of her.

26 ¹Happy the husband of a good wife, the number of his days will be doubled. ²A woman of character is her husband's joy, he will live in peace all the years of his life.

³A good wife is the best of gifts, reserved for those who fear the Lord; ⁴rich or poor, he will have a serene heart and wear a happy face.

⁵Three things disturb me and a fourth frightens me: neighbourhood gossip, a rioting mob, a false accusation, all these are worse than death. ⁶But the woman jealous of another woman brings heartbreak, her tongue lashes out at everyone.

⁷A bad wife is like a badly fixed yoke; taking her is like grasping a scorpion.

⁸A drunken wife causes scandal; her disgrace will not remain hidden.

⁹A licentious woman is noticed by her secretive looks and recognized by her lively eyes. ¹⁰Keep a firm eye on a defiant daughter, so that she may not take advantage of some occasion.

¹¹Guard against the provocative woman and do not be surprised if she wishes to drag you into disgrace.

¹²She opens her mouth like a thirsty traveller to drink any water coming her way: she sits by any pole and opens her quiver to every arrow.

¹³A wife's grace gladdens her husband and her prudence refreshes his body. ¹⁴A wife who knows how to be silent is a gift from the Lord; the well-trained wife is invaluable. ¹⁵A modest wife is a favour among favours: the chaste wife is priceless.

¹⁶Like the sun rising over the mountains of the Lord, such is the enchantment of a good wife in a well-kept house.

¹⁷Like the light which shines from

the sacred lamp-stand, such is a beautiful face in a well-shaped body. ¹⁸Like pillars of gold on a silver base, such are beautiful legs on sturdy feet.

²⁹There are two things which grieve me and a third which makes me angry: a warrior who suffers want; intelligent men who are treated contemptuously; a man who turns from virtue to sin. The Lord singles this man out to strike him.

³⁰The merchant can barely avoid greed; the shopkeeper cannot remain sinless.

27 ¹Many sin for love of gain, he who desires riches silences his conscience.

²Just as the stake is settled between two stones, so sin wedges itself between buying and selling. ³The house of him who does not keep himself firmly in the fear of the Lord, will soon be knocked to the ground.

⁴When a sieve is shaken the dirt falls through; so, too, the defects of a man are seen when he begins to speak.

⁵The kiln tests the potter's handiwork; a man is tested by his conversation.

⁶A welltended tree is shown by its fruits so a man's feelings can be detected in what he says.

⁷Praise no one before he has spoken, since this is the acid test.

⁸If you pursue righteousness you will achieve it and wear it like a festive garment.

⁹Birds associate with their own kind, so, too, does truth greet those who are faithful.

¹⁰The lion lurks in wait for its prey; so, too, does sin lie in wait for those who do wrong.

¹¹The wise man's conversation follows wisdom all the time. In contrast, the fool changes like the moon.

¹²When among fools, be sparing with your time; among thoughtful people, be lavish with it. ¹³The conversation of fools is hateful, their laughter is coarse and raucous.

¹⁴No one can bear those who swear all the time. Their quarrels make you cover your ears.

¹⁵Blood is spilt when proud men quarrel and their insults are painful to the ear.

¹⁶He who betrays a secret is no longer trusted; he will no longer find reliable friends.

¹⁷Love your friend and be loyal; if you have revealed his secrets, go with him no longer.

¹⁸Like a man whose relative has died, so you have lost this friendship.

¹⁹The same happened with your friend, you will not get him back. When you open your hand, the bird flies off; ²⁰do not pursue him: he is far away and has fled like a gazelle

from the snare. ²¹For a wound can be bandaged and an insult forgiven but, if you betray a secret, there is no hope.

²²The man who winks an eye is plotting evil, no one can persuade him to change. ²³He is all sweetness to your face, praising your words but, behind your back, he speaks differently and twists your words.

²⁴I hate many things but nothing more than this man; the Lord, also, hates and curses him.

²⁵He who tosses a stone in the air will have it fall on his head, whoever deals a treacherous blow, wounds himself.

²⁶He who digs a pit will fall into it; he who sets a snare will be caught in it.

²⁷If you do evil, evil will befall you and you will not know from where it comes.

²⁸The proud man makes use of mockery and insults but vengeance lies in wait for him like a lion.

²⁹Those who gloat over the downfall of good men will fall into the snare; suffering will consume them before they die.

Don't bear grudges

28 ¹He who demands revenge will suffer the vengeance of the Lord who keeps a strict account of his sins. ²Forgive the mistakes of your neighbour and you may ask that your sins be forgiven.

³If a man bears resentment against another, how can he ask God for healing? ⁴If he has no compassion on others, how can he pray for forgiveness for his sins? ⁵As long as he, mere flesh and blood, is resentful, how can he be forgiven?

⁶Remember your end and give up hatred; keep in mind your final corruption in the grave and keep the commandments. ⁷Remember the commandments and do not bear grudges against your neighbour. Remember the covenant with the Most High and overlook the offence.

⁸Keep away from quarrels and you will avoid sin; the hot-headed man sparks off disputes.

⁹The sinner causes trouble between friends, sowing discord among peaceful people.

¹⁰Fire burns when fuel is thrown on it; stubbornness drags out the discussion.

The more powerful the man, the greater his rage; his anger will be in proportion to his riches.

¹¹A sudden quarrel sparks off a fire; a hasty dispute leads to bloodshed.

¹²Blow on a spark and it ignites; spit on it and it dies out: both come from your mouth.

¹³Cursed be the gossip with his spiteful tongue. He has destroyed many who lived peacefully. ¹⁴The vicious tongue has demolished many and hounded them from nation to nation. He has ruined powerful cities and laid low great households.

¹⁵The vicious tongue has cast out wives who were beyond reproach, depriving them of the fruits of their work. ¹⁶Whoever listens to it will never find rest or be able to live in peace.

¹⁷The whip leaves a mark but the lash of the tongue shatters bones.

¹⁸Many have been felled by the sword but been exposed to its fury, who has not been weighed down by its yoke or been tied up in its chains.

²⁰For it is a yoke of iron and its chains are bronze. ²¹It brings a miserable death. Actual death is better! ²²But it will not tyrannize those who keep faith, it will not consume their soul.

²³Those who desert the Lord will be its victims, it will burn them without being burnt up itself; it will lunge at them like a lion, and rip them apart like a leopard.

²⁴Look, you put a fence around your property and protect your silver and gold. ²⁵In the same way, make weights and scales for your words and put a bolted door at your mouth.

²⁶Beware of a slip of the tongue when you speak, lest you fall in front of those who lie in wait for you.

+29 ¹Lending to your neighbour is an act of mercy, going to his aid fulfils the commandments.

²Learn to lend to your neighbour when he is in need and, in turn, repay him any loan on time.

³Keep your word, remain faithful and you will find what you need on every occasion.

⁴Many think of a loan as a quick deal and put those who help them in a fix.

⁵The moment they receive it, they kiss the

2. Mt 5, 23; 6, 12 4. Mt 18, 23 7. Lev 19, 17; Ex 23, 4 13. James 3, 1 2. Tob 12, 8
+ 29:2-6: this presents those who ask for loans and do not pay back.
Alms, and in a broader sense all that we do for others, without charge, is the best assurance against misfortune. On this subject see Tobit 4:9 and Luke 16:9.

hand of the moneylender and humble themselves in deference to his wealth. But, on the day repayment is due, they prolong the time, repay with reproaches and blame the current situation.

⁶If they can repay, they pay barely half and the moneylender will be grateful for that much. They have robbed him of his money and, moreover, he has gained enemies, for they repay him with curses and insults and reproaches instead of gratitude.

⁷Many a good person refuses to lend, not for any malicious reason: he is afraid of being cheated without cause.

⁸Nevertheless, be kind to those who have fallen on hard times, do not keep them waiting for your help.

⁹For the commandments' sake, help the poor man; see his need and do not turn him away empty-handed.

¹⁰Better to spend your money on a brother or friend than to let it rust under a stone, to your discredit.

¹¹Use your money according to the commandments of the Most High and you will find it more valuable than gold.

¹²Fill your barns with good deeds and these will exempt you from misfortune.

¹³They will fight for you against your enemy better than any strong shield and mighty spear.

¹⁴A good man goes surety for his neighbour: the scoundrel leaves him to his fate.

¹⁵Do not forget the favours of your guarantor: he has risked his life for you.

¹⁶The sinner wastes his guarantor's money: the ungrateful man forgets the one who saved him. ¹⁷Acting as guarantor has ruined many a good man and has tossed him like the waves of the sea. ¹⁸It has banished powerful men and forced them to wander among foreign nations.

¹⁹The sinner is anxious to be a guarantor but he will be condemned as a loan shark.

²⁰Help your neighbour as far as you can but beware of falling into the same plight.

²¹Some things you cannot live without: water, bread, clothes and a house for shelter.

²²Better a poor man's life in his wooden

shack than lavish banquets in another man's house.

²³Be content with whatever you have, be it great or small; this is better than to go elsewhere and be reproached as an outsider.

²⁴It is hard to go from house to house; ²⁵where you are an outsider, do not risk opening your mouth. You will eat and drink without much welcome and, on top of that, hear bitter remarks: ²⁶"Come, stranger, set the table and whatever you have, give it to me to eat."

²⁷"Be off, stranger, make room for somebody more important; my brother is coming to see me, I need the house."

²⁸It is hard for a good man to have hospitality denied him and to be treated like a debtor.

Correct your child

■ 30 ¹The man who loves his son makes use of the rod; later on he will be proud of him. ²The man who corrects his son will reap the benefit and be proud of him among his acquaintances. ³By instructing his son he makes his enemy envious; he will be well pleased with him in the company of his friends.

⁴If such a father dies it is as if he had not died, for he leaves behind him another man like himself. ⁵In life he had the joy of his company and he is not sorrowful when death comes.

⁶He leaves him to his family to take revenge on his enemies and return gifts to his friends.

⁷The man who coddles his son will be constantly bandaging his wounds; at his every cry he will be troubled.

⁸Just as a badly broken-in horse cannot be mounted, so a spoiled son becomes insolent. ⁹Pamper your

8. Mt 6, 19

10. James 5, 3

12. Tob 4, 9; Lk 16, 9

4. Tob 9, 6

■ Here Ben Sira touches a point on which the destiny of a people depends. Everybody complains that responsible people are few. We see good feeling everywhere, but where are the people able to persevere in doing good and carrying out their good intentions? The major cause of a lack of maturity in willpower is found in the total lack of parental authority. A three-month old baby knows that if he keeps crying he will force his mother to pick him up. When he is

two years old, a child knows how to threaten, scream, have a tantrum, with the assurance that, in the end, his parents will give in: "What can we do? The child does not want it."

Ben Sira knows that only the children who are subject to discipline and whose whims are not satisfied by their parents, only they will come to real freedom, because they are able to persevere in doing good.

Christianity is not founded on the observance

child and later he will terrify you; play with him and he will bring you sorrow.

¹⁰ Do not laugh at him lest you have to suffer and grind your teeth. ¹¹ Do not let him be independent as a child ¹² but rather bruise his ribs while he is still young, lest he grow stubborn and refuse to obey.

¹³ Be strict with your son and persevere in this, so as not to suffer because of his misconduct.

¹⁴ Better a poor man healthy and fit, than a rich man tormented in body.

¹⁵ Health and vigour are worth more than gold, a robust body more than great wealth. ¹⁶ No riches are preferable to physical well-being, and no joy is greater than a cheerful heart.

¹⁷ Death is better than a wretched life and eternal rest preferable to lasting sickness.

¹⁸ Dishes of food placed on an empty tomb are like good things offered to one who cannot eat.

¹⁹ What good is a sacrifice offered to an idol? It can neither eat or smell. So is it with the one whom the Lord has stricken; ²⁰ he sees with his eyes and groans, like a eunuch embracing a virgin and sighing.

²¹ Do not give yourself over to sadness or torment yourself with brooding.

²² Joy of heart is life to a man; gladness gives him length of days.

²³ Delight your soul and console your heart; chase sorrow far away, for sorrow has destroyed many and never did good to anyone.

²⁴ Jealousy and anger shorten your life; worry makes you old before the time.

²⁵ A cheerful and kindly person will have a good appetite and enjoy his food.

31 ¹ The sleeplessness that wealth brings makes a man lose weight; his worries drive sleep away.

² The cares of the day prevent sleep; in the same way, serious illness makes rest impossible.

Happy the one who doesn't go after gold

³ The rich man toils to increase his wealth and then sits back and lives in

luxury; ⁴ the poor man toils to survive and is in want as soon as he leaves off.

⁵ He who loves gold cannot be righteous; whoever runs after gain will be led astray. ⁶ Many have been ruined because of gold; disgrace went to meet them.

⁷ Gold is a snare for those who are possessed by love of it. The senseless will be caught in it.

⁸ Happy is the rich man who has not sinned in this way and has not gone after gold! ⁹ Who is he? Let us say: Fortunate man! For he has given a wonderful example.

¹⁰ Who has been tested in this and found perfect? He has reason to be proud. Who could have sinned but resisted, who could have done wrong and did not do it? ¹¹ His fortune is firmly established and the assembly will acknowledge his generosity.

Dinner parties

◆ ¹² You are seated at a lavish banquet. Don't be over-ready to eat and don't say, 'What a feast!'

¹³ Remember that a greedy eye is an evil thing. What is worse than such an eye? That is why it was condemned to weep

¹⁴ Do not stretch out your hand to everything you see or be quick in reaching for a dish.

¹⁵ Judge the needs of your fellow guest by your own and in all things act prudently.

¹⁶ Eat what is set before you like an educated person and don't be a glutton lest you be detested.

¹⁷ Like a well-mannered man, be the first to stop; don't be voracious if you are to avoid difficulties. ¹⁸ If important people are present, do not be the first to serve yourself.

¹⁹ A little is sufficient for a well-bred person; your breathing moreover will be easier when you go to bed. ²⁰ Healthy sleeping is for the moderate eater. He rises early and feels fit! Sleeplessness and stomach trouble attend the over indulgent. ²¹ If you are obliged to eat too much go off and vomit and you will be at ease.

²² Listen to me, my friend, and do not neglect what I say; in the end you will see the truth

of a law, but though we may experience something of the "spirit," we will have trouble reaping its fruits if we are not disciplined.

◆ The Bible does not condemn the use of wine: it was made for the delight of men (see Psalm 104:15). Only those consecrated as

of it. Be moderate in all that you do and you will be without illness.

²³ A generous host is appreciated and he deserves praise. ²⁴ but everyone will complain about a stingy host and their complaints will be justified.

²⁵ Do not try to show how much wine you can take, for wine has been the ruin of many.

²⁶ As the furnace tests the temper of steel so wine proves hearts and makes proud men quarrel.

²⁷ Wine is life for man if taken in moderation. What is life without wine? ²⁸ Wine makes for a glad heart and a cheerful mind, if taken moderately and at the right time. ²⁹ But if taken to excess it brings bitterness of soul, excitement and a fumbling step.

³⁰ Drunkenness inflames the anger of a stupid person to the point of scandal. It reduces his strength and brings him blows. ³¹ Do not reproach a neighbour during a wine feast, and don't look down on him when he is merry; do not speak harshly to him or annoy him by asking him to settle a debt.

32

¹ Have you been chosen to preside at a party? Don't give yourself airs! Just be like everyone else in the group: see to their needs and then sit down. ² When you have done what you should, take your place and enjoy yourself with the others. They will congratulate you for a job well done.

³ If you are older, speak as fitting to your age, but know what you are talking about and do not interrupt the music.

⁴ If there is a concert, refrain from speaking: it is not the time for playing the wise man.

⁵ A musical concert at a wine banquet is like a ruby set in gold.

⁶ If you are young, speak if you have to, but not more than twice and only if requested.

⁷ Keep to the point and say it all in a few words. Show that you are well informed but not over anxious to speak.

⁸ Do not try to be the equal of eminent people and do not chat when someone else is speaking.

⁹ As lightning goes before thunder the reputation of a modest man goes before him.

¹⁰ Leave the party at the right time and do not be slow about it; no lingering, go straight home!

¹¹ There you may relax and do as you please, but do not sin by bragging.

¹³ And thank your Creator for the enjoyment of all good things.

¹⁴ Whoever fears the Lord will accept his correction, and those who rise at dawn will win his favour.

¹⁵ The man who follows his Law will be nourished by it, but the hypocrite will find it a stumbling block.

¹⁶ Those who fear the Lord will please him and their good deeds will shine as the light.

¹⁷ The sinner refuses correction and excuses himself for doing what he wants.

¹⁸ Never act without first reflecting and you will have no regrets.

¹⁹ A man of decision will reflect before hand. The alien and the proud man fear nothing.

²⁰ Do not go along a rough road lest you stumble on stones. ²¹ And do not be too sure of your step on a smooth path. ²² Beware even of your own children.

²³ Be careful in whatever you do. In so doing you keep the commandments.

²⁴ Those who trust in the Law will keep the commandments and those who obey the Lord will come to no harm.

33

¹ Evil will not go to meet the one who fears the Lord; if he is in danger he will be rescued.

² The wise man never departs from the Law; he who only pretends to keep it is like a storm-tossed boat.

³ An intelligent man has faith in the Law which for him is as trustworthy as an oracle.

⁴ If you want people to listen to you, prepare what you have to say; make good use of what you know before you give an answer. ⁵ A cart wheel! That is what the feelings of a fool are like. His mind resembles a turning axle.

⁶ A mocking friend is like a wild horse, neighing when anyone rides him.

⁷ Why is one day holier than another, when the light of the sun shines on every day of the year? ⁸ The decision of the Lord made them different; he has arranged the different seasons and feasts.

⁹ Some of these he chose to make holy, others he made ordinary days. ¹⁰ all men come from clay just as Adam himself was formed.

¹¹ In the fullness of his wisdom the Lord has made each one unique and diversified his conditions.

¹² Some he has made holy, keeping them near to himself. Others he has cursed and

humiliated, removing them from where they were.

¹³ As clay in the hand of the potter to be moulded as he pleases, so are all in the hands of the Creator to be dealt with as he sees fit.

¹⁴ Good is opposed to evil, life to death, and opposed to the upright man is the sinner.

¹⁵ Consider all the works of the Most High and you will see how they go in pairs, by opposites.

¹⁶ As for me I have been the last to keep watch like a gleaner following the grape-pickers. ¹⁷ By the blessing of the Lord I have taken the lead and like the grape-picker I have filled the winepress. ¹⁸ Note that not only for myself have I toiled, but for all who seek instruction. ¹⁹ Hear me, rulers of the people, leaders of the assembly hear!

²⁰ Neither to son, wife, brother or friend give power over yourself during your life. Do not give your property to another in case you regret it and have to beg them to return it.

²¹ As long as you live and there is breath in you, do not give power over yourself to anyone. ²² It is preferable for your children to be dependent on you rather than that you be obliged to depend on them. ²³ Be master of all that you do; let not others stain your reputation.

²⁴ Wait until the end of your days, until death is near, to distribute your inheritance.

Your slaves

²⁵ Fodder, stick and burdens are for the donkey; bread, correction and work are for the slave.

²⁶ Work on your slave and you will have peace. Let him take it easy and he will want to be free. ²⁷ The yoke and harness will bow the neck. For a criminal slave there are torture and the stocks.

²⁸ Send him to work or he will be idle, and idleness teaches much evil. ²⁹ Give him work that is appropriate for him; if he does not obey, put his feet in chains.

³⁰ But do not be over-demanding with anyone and do nothing without discernment.

³¹ You have a slave? Let him be like you; for you bought him through blood.

³² You have a slave? Treat him like a brother. You need him as you need yourself.

³³ If you ill-treat him and he escapes, where will you go to look for him?

Dreams

34 ¹ The foolish are deceived by vain and false hopes; dreams give them wings.

² To rely on dreams is like grasping a shadow or like chasing the wind.

³ What you see in dreams are only reflections: a person sees his own image.

⁴ What clean thing can come from what is unclean? What truth comes from what is false? ⁵ Divinations, auguries and dreams are empty like the fantasies of a woman in labour.

⁶ Unless they come as messengers of the Most High do not pay attention to them. ⁷ For dreams have led many people astray. Those who hoped in them have fallen.

⁸ Not so the Law, which never fails but comes true. Wisdom from the truthful lips of God is the highest truth.

⁹ One who has travelled knows a great deal, and a man of wide experience will talk soundly. ¹⁰ A person who has not had trials knows very little. But the travelled man is competent in many ways. ¹¹ I have made many discoveries on my travels and understood more than I can express. ¹² I have often been in danger of death but have been saved thanks to my experience.

¹³ The spirit of those who fear the Lord will live, for their hope is placed in the One who saves.

¹⁴ He who fears the Lord is in dread of nothing. He will not be cowardly for He is his hope. ¹⁵ He who fears the Lord is a happy person. To whom does he turn? Who is his support?

¹⁶ The eyes of the Lord are on those who love him. For them he is powerful protection, strong support, shelter against scorching wind and the midday sun. He is a guide against stumbling and assurance against a fall. ¹⁷ He lifts up the soul and gives a sparkle to the eyes; he gives healing, life and blessing.

13. Is 29, 16; Rom 9, 21 15. 42, 24; Ecl 3, 1-8 25. Pro 26, 3 3. Job 14, 4 5. Ecl 5, 6 16. Ps 33, 18

o Previously in Israel, dreams had been very important. Here we have a reaction against dreams. Without denying that, in some cases, God can guide or warn the believer through a dream, the author teaches that we must not be

guided by dreams: the sure way is to fulfil God's Law (see commentary on Gen 37).

+ What infuriates the sacred author is that after having stripped the humble, the rich come

Offerings pleasing to God

+¹⁸ An offering to God from stolen goods is a stained offering; such sacrifices do not please God.

¹⁹ The Most High takes no pleasure in the offering of the godless. It is not the number of victims that obtains pardon for sin.

²⁰ Offering to God from what belongs to the poor is like slaughtering a son in the presence of his father.

²¹ The food of the wretched is the poor man's life; he who takes it from them is a murderer. ²² He who deprives others of a livelihood kills them and whoever withdraws the salary of the worker is guilty of blood.

²³ If one builds and the other destroys, what do they gain besides trouble? ²⁴ If one prays and the other curses, whose voice will the Master listen to?

²⁵ If a man is cleansed after touching a corpse and then touches it again, what good was there in his cleansing?

²⁶ If anyone fasts for his sins and then commits the same sins, who will hear his prayer? What value is there in his fasting?

35 ¹ Keeping the Law is worth many offerings. Being faithful in keeping the commandments is a helpful sacrifice.

² Thanksgiving is an offering of fine flour; giving alms is a sacrifice of praise.

³ Keeping away from sin pleases the Lord and shunning injustice is a sacrifice of atonement.

⁴ Do not appear before the Lord with empty hands. The commandment requires that you bring an offering.

⁵ When the offering of the righteous is burned on the altar, the fat drips down and a fragrant aroma rises to the Most High.

⁶ The sacrifice of the just man pleases God and will not be forgotten. ⁷ Honour the Lord

with a generous heart and do not be stingy with the first fruits of your harvest.

⁸ Offer your gifts with a smiling face and when you pay your tithes do it gladly.

The Lord will not delay

■ ⁹ Give to the Most High as he has given to you; give generously to the rewarding Lord according to what you have; ¹⁰ he will reward you sevenfold.

¹¹ If you attempt to bribe him with gifts he will not accept them; do not rely on offerings from dishonest gain.

¹² The Lord is judge and shows no partiality. ¹³ He will not disadvantage the poor, he who hears the prayer of the oppressed. ¹⁴ He does not disdain the plea of the orphan or of the widow when she pours out her complaint.

¹⁵ When her tears flow down her cheek, is she not crying against the one who caused her to weep?

¹⁶ The one who serves God wholeheartedly will be heard; his petition will reach the clouds. ¹⁷ The prayer of the humble person pierces the clouds and he is not consoled until he has been heard. ¹⁸ His prayer will not cease until the Most High has looked down, until justice has been done in favour of the righteous.

¹⁹ And the Lord will not delay, nor will he be patient with the wicked. ²⁰ but he will crush the merciless and have vengeance on the nations, ²¹ until he has completely destroyed the hordes of the violent and broken the power of the wicked, ²² until he has repaid each one according to his deeds, ²³ until he has judged his people and made them rejoice because of his mercy.

19. Am 5, 21; Is 1, 11; Ps 50, 8	22. Lev 19, 13; Jer 22, 13	2. Lev 2, 1	4. Lev 7, 11
5. Lev 16, 1	6. Dt 7, 16	10. Dt 26, 1	11. 2 Cor 9, 7; Dt 14, 22
16. Ex 22, 31; Pro 23, 10	21. Job 18, 18		15. Dt 10, 17

to the Temple to offer their magnificent presents.

■ We must generously assist in the cost of worship as long as it is not a way of forgetting our

responsibilities with regard to injustice in our world. The Lord is pleased with our sacrifices, but above all, he hears the prayer of the orphan and he sees the tears of the widow.

²⁴ Blessed is his mercy in the time of adversity! It is like rain clouds during a drought!

Prayer for the deliverance of Israel

◆36 ¹ Have mercy on us, Master, Lord of all, and look on us; make every nation stand in fear of you.

² Take action against the pagan nations and let them see your power.

³ In punishing us you have shown them your holiness, so now let us see your great power in dealing with them.

⁴ Let them acknowledge, as we have acknowledged, that there is no god but you, Lord.

⁵ Give new signs, do fresh wonders, stretch out your hand and be glorified in your strength.

⁶ Kindle your fury and rouse your anger, destroy your opponents, crush your enemy.

⁷ Hasten the day, remember your covenant so that we may speak of your great deeds. ⁸ Do not let those who oppress your people survive. ⁹ Crush the heads of hostile rulers – those who say they alone count.

¹⁰ Gather all the tribes of Jacob, give them back their inheritance as in the beginning.

¹¹ Have pity, Lord, on the people known by your Name, on Israel whom you called your first-born.

¹² Show compassion to the holy city, to Jerusalem where you rest.

¹³ Fill Sion with the fame of your wonders and your people with your glory.

¹⁴ Confirm your promises made to your people long ago and fulfil the promises made in your name.

¹⁵ Reward those who wait for you and fulfil the words of your prophets.

¹⁶ Hear the prayer of your servants, Lord; hear your priests giving Aaron's blessing to your people.

¹⁷ So that all on the earth may acknowledge that you are Lord and everlasting God.

Choosing a wife

¹⁸ The stomach takes in all kinds of food but one food is better than another.

¹⁹ Just as the tongue can distinguish the flavour of game, so does the alert mind detect lies.

²⁰ A crooked heart causes sorrow but an experienced person knows how to repay it.

²¹ A woman will accept any husband but some girls are better than others.

²² A woman's beauty makes a man happy and is all that he could wish for.

²³ If she is kindly spoken and gentle he is the most fortunate of men.

²⁴ When a man marries he acquires a fortune, someone who understands him and who will help and support him.

²⁵ When there is no hedge the property will be destroyed; and when a man has no wife he is a fretful wanderer.

²⁶ Who would trust a clever robber flitting from town to town? ²⁷ And who would trust a man without a nest, who lodges wherever nightfall finds him.

Friends and counsellors

37 ¹ Every friend says, "I am your friend, too," but some friends are only friends in name.

1. Ps 79; Jer 10, 25	3. Eek 38, 22	5. Is 45, 14; 1 K 8, 43	11. Ex 4, 22	12. 2 S 5, 9
16. Num 6, 22	23. Pro 5, 15	1. 6, 5-17		

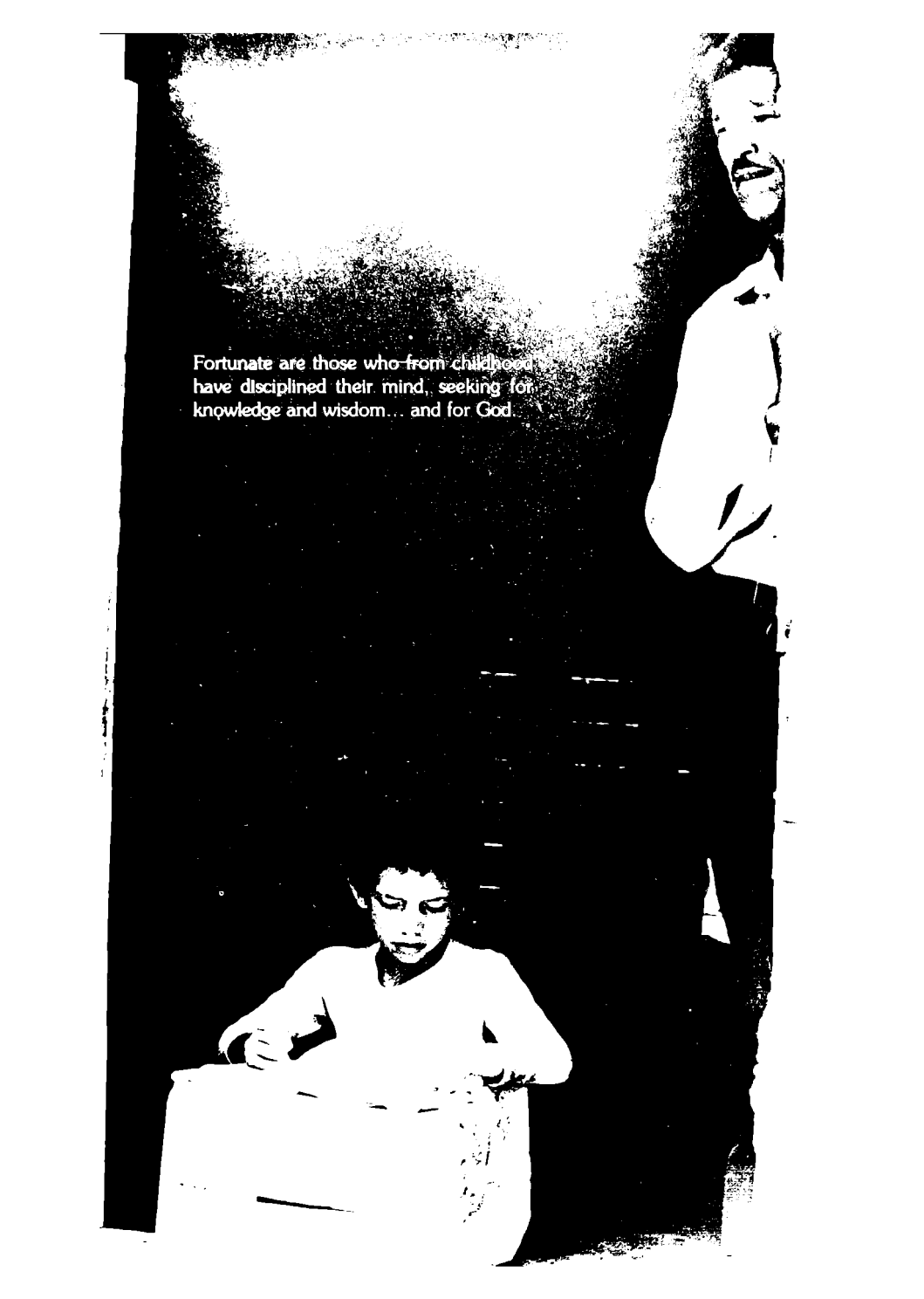
◆ The author shares the ideas of his contemporaries who only thought of the salvation of the world under the rule of the Jewish people. His assurance can serve us as well; he trusts in the promise of the prophets: God will do justice; God will gather all his scattered children.

Such a hope has always been the strength of the Jewish people. After Christ, they were dispersed as the Gospel prophesied. Later, they were unfortunately persecuted in Christian

countries. Yet, they continued to be encouraged by the hopes expressed here.

Even when they have moved away from their ancient faith, modern Jews preserve the assurance of being the chosen race and the ones who will save the world. This can help us understand several historical events.

On one hand, the Jews have never ceased wanting to return to Palestine so that Israel may be reborn



Fortunate are those who from childhood
have disciplined their mind, seeking for
knowledge and wisdom... and for God.



² Is it not a deadly grief when a companion or friend turns enemy?

³ O evil intention! From where have you sprung, to cover the earth with deceit?

The comrade takes advantage of his friend's good fortune; in time of trouble he turns against him. ⁴ A comrade shares his friend's suffering, out of concern; when it comes to a fight, he thinks only of saving himself.

⁵ Do not neglect a friend or forget him once you are wealthy.

⁷ All advisers give advice but some seek only their own gain.

⁸ Distrust the person who offers advice lest he take advantage of you; first of all, ask yourself what he lacks, and what his own interest suggests to him.

⁹ Perhaps he says to you, "You are on the right road," while he keeps his distance, to see what happens to you.

¹⁰ Do not seek advice from one who looks at you suspiciously; hide your plans from those who envy you.

¹¹ Do not consult a woman about her rival, or a coward about war, or a merchant about exchange rates, or a buyer about selling or a jealous man about gratitude, or a miser about generosity, or an idler about any kind of work or a casual worker about finishing a job or a lazy servant about an important undertaking. Do not rely on these people for any advice.

¹² But go to a trustworthy man whom you know to be a keeper of the commandments, whose soul reflects your own and who will suffer with you, if you fail.

¹³ In the end, keep to your own heart's advice since no one deserves to be trusted more than your heart;

¹⁴ For a man's soul often gives better advice than seven watchmen placed on a height.

¹⁵ Besides all this, implore the Almighty to guide your steps in the truth.

¹⁶ A plan must be at the beginning of all work; the decision comes before every action.

¹⁷ The mind operates along four directions: ¹⁸ good, evil, life and death; the tongue always imposes the decision.

¹⁹ A clever man may teach many but do no good to himself.

²⁰ A man may be wise, but if his words are rejected he will end up starving.

²¹ nor having won the favour of the Lord and being destitute of all wisdom.

²² Another man is wise in his own eyes; the one who says that his wisdom is profitable.

²³ The truly wise man teaches his people and the fruits of his understanding are certain.

²⁴ The wise man is full of blessings; those who see him call him happy.

²⁵ Man's days are numbered but Israel's days are countless.

²⁶ The wise man will win the confidence of his people; his name will live forever.

²⁷ My son, test yourself during the course of your life: see what is harmful and avoid it.

²⁸ For everything does not suit everybody, nor is everyone satisfied with all things.

²⁹ Do not be insatiable in every pleasure, or be excessive in what you eat; ³⁰ for overeating leads to sickness and gluttony brings indigestion. ³¹ Many have died because of gluttony; he who takes care prolongs his life.

The doctor

o 38 ¹ Give due honour to the doctor for you need him and God himself established him.

² Healing, in fact, comes from the Most High; the gift of healing comes from the Sovereign.

³ The doctor's expertise gives him prestige and wins for him the admiration of the powerful.

⁴ The Lord created the medicinal herbs which grow from the earth and these, a sensible person will not despise.

⁵ Remember that he used a simple wooden rod to purify water and so make known his power to everyone.

⁶ It is he who gives knowledge to men so that they may glorify his

28. 1 Cor 3, 2

5. Ex 15, 23

On the other hand, let us remember that Karl Marx was a Jew. Though he did not believe in the faith of his ancestors, he was inspired by the ideal of the people who would save the world and by the hope of a time of universal peace and prosperity in the days of Moses. These elements are found in his doctrine, though transformed. For communism, the proletariat is the people chosen to save humanity and, in achieving the

definitive revolution, it will bring us to an earthly paradise in which people will no longer have evil desires.

o We must pray to be healed from a disease, but without neglecting the help of doctors as some people do. This is clearly stated in the Bible.



power; ⁷ the doctor uses it to heal and comfort, the chemist to make his mixtures. ⁸ In that way the Lord's work never ceases and well-being prevails on the earth.

⁹ My son, when you are sick do not be anxious; pray to the Lord to heal you. ¹⁰ Give up bad habits, keep your hands clear of evil., and purify your heart from all sin.

¹¹ Offer incense and a memorial gift of fine flour and rich offerings according to your means. ¹² Then consult the doctor; remember that he was established by the Lord, so do not disregard him – you need him. ¹³ There are cases when good health depends on doctors. ¹⁴ They, too, will pray to the Most High to grant relief and healing in order to save life.

¹⁵ May he who sins before his Maker, fall into the hands of the doctor!

Grieving

¹⁶ My son, weep for the dead, lament to express your sorrow and bury the dead with fitting ceremonial and do not fail to honour his tomb.

¹⁷ Weep bitterly, cry out with full voice, and observe the period of mourning in accordance with the merits of the deceased. Let it be for one or two days, and so avoid criticism, and then be consoled in your grief.

¹⁸ For sorrow may lead to death and a dejected heart loses its vitality.

¹⁹ Let your affliction cease with the funeral; a life of sorrow is intolerable.

²⁰ Do not let your heart give way to grief; bear up and think of your own end.

²¹ Remember! There is no coming back, you do no good to the dead, but rather harm yourself.

²² Keep in mind my sentence which will be yours as well: Mine yesterday, yours today!

²³ When the dead is at rest, let his memory be one of peace; be comforted on his account once his spirit has departed.

Craftsmen and wise men

²⁴ A law student acquires wisdom during his leisure hours; free from business he is capable of becoming wise.

²⁵ Could the man who steers a plough become wise, he whose pride lies in waving a whip and driving a bullock, who works continually and talks of nothing but cattle? ²⁶ His heart is set on ploughing furrows and all his attention is given to fattening heifers.

²⁷ It is the same for all craftsmen and skilled workers who toil day and night, professional engravers and designers of seals. All are intent on creating different designs and reproducing the model and they work by night in order to succeed.

²⁸ So, too, is the smith standing beside the anvil, intent on forging iron; his face is scorched by flames from the fire and he struggles in the heat of the furnace, the clang of the hammer is deafening; his eyes are fixed on the model to be copied, he makes every effort to work well and spends time at night in bringing his task to perfection.

²⁹ It is the same for the potter seated at his work, his foot turning the wheel, always concentrating on what he is moulding, every movement purposefully controlled. ³⁰ His arm kneads the clay, his feet make it pliable. All his attention is needed in applying the glaze and at night he sees to the cleaning of the furnace.

³¹ All these craftsmen depend on their hands for gaining skill in their different crafts. ³² Without them a city could not be built; no one could live there or travel.

³³ But they are not to be found in the councils of people nor do their words carry weight in an assembly. They do not occupy the judge's seat and they are not familiar with the Law.

³⁴ They are not cultured people or skilled in judgment and they are not found among authors of proverbs.

Although they uphold creation and civilization, their prayer does not go beyond their life's work.

39 ¹ Quite different is it with the person who spends his life reflecting on the Law of the Most High. He examines the wisdom of the sages in times past and in his free time he studies prophecies.

² He keeps in mind what men of renown said and penetrates the mystery of parables.

³ He searches for the inner meaning of proverbs and is interested in the secret of parables.

⁴ He is at the service of great men and is seen in the company of leaders. He travels in foreign lands and has experience of both the good and evil in mankind.

⁵ Early in the morning his heart is set on turning to the Lord, his Maker and raising his being to the Most High. He opens his mouth in



prayer and makes supplication because of his sins.

⁶ If such is the will of the great Lord he will be filled with spirit of discernment. He will then speak words of wisdom and celebrate the Lord in prayer.

⁷ He will acquire just judgment and knowledge and reflect on me Lord's hidden mysteries.

⁸ He expresses and explains his teaching and glories in the law of the Lord's covenant.

⁹ Many people praise his discernment and never will he be forgotten. His memory will not fade and his name will live on from generation to generation.

¹⁰ Nations will proclaim his wisdom and the assembly celebrate his praise.

¹¹ As long as he lives his name will be more glorious than a thousand others and when he dies that fame will be enough for him.

All creation is good

¹² I wish to share still more of my reflections: I am filled with these just as the moon is said to be full.

¹³ Hear me, devoted people, and grow as a rose planted near a stream.

¹⁴ Spread around you fragrance like incense; blossom and perfume the air like the lily; sing a hymn and bless Yahweh for all his works.

¹⁵ Magnify his Name and publish his praise with song and lyre and express this with thanksgiving.

¹⁶ How magnificent are the works of the Lord! All his orders are appropriately timed and satisfy every need.

No one should say: "What is this? Why that?" All must be studied at its time.

¹⁷ At his word the waters ceased to flow and piled up; his voice caused the reservoir of water to open; ¹⁸ at his order his every wish is fulfilled, and no one hinders his work of salvation.

¹⁹ The deeds of every man are before him, nothing is hidden from his eyes; ²⁰ he sees all from eternity to eternity and nothing surprises him.

²¹ No one must say: "What is that? Why is it so?" for everything is created for a purpose.

²² His blessing covers all things and like a river drenches the land as in a flood. ²³ Similarly he may pour out his wrath on the nations turning fresh water to salt.

²⁴ If his ways are smooth for holy people they are full of obstacles for the wicked.

²⁵ From the beginning good things have been

created for the good and likewise evil things for the wicked.

²⁶ Most necessary for man's life are water, fire, iron and salt, wheaten flour, milk, honey, the juice of the grape, oil and clothing.

²⁷ All these are good for those who are good, but for sinners they become evil.

²⁸ Certain winds are created as a means of punishment and in their fury they are a scourge, unleashing their violence in the time of destruction and satisfying the wrath of their Creator.

²⁹ Fire, hail, famine and death have all been created for punishment.

³⁰ The fangs of wild beasts, scorpions, vipers and the avenging sword for the destruction of the wicked, ³¹ all joyfully carry out his commands, all are ready when need arises and at a given moment they will not fail to obey his word.

³² For that reason I reflected and from the beginning I decided to write:

³³ All the works of the Lord are good and he will satisfy every need in time.

³⁴ You must not say: This is less good than that, for in due time everything will serve a purpose.

³⁵ So now with all your heart and in full voice sing and bless the Name of the Lord.

Misery of human life

40 ¹ Painful is the lot of all men, a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam from the day they leave their mother's womb to the day they return to earth, the mother of us all.

² What is on their mind, what they fear in their heart, is the day of their death. ³ From the King, glorious on his Throne, robed in purple and wearing a crown, ⁴ to the lowliest person sitting in dust and ashes and covered with sackcloth, there is anger, envy, trouble and unrest, fear of death, rivalry and quarrels.

⁵ And at night when we lie down we have fresh worries: ⁶ scarcely are we at rest and asleep when we are troubled by dreams as vivid as if it were day and we were fleeing from a battle. ⁷ When it is time to wake up, we feel surprised to find that there is nothing to fear.

⁸ This is the fate of every living creature man and beast, but for sinners it is seven times worse ⁹ with death, bloodshed, strife, sword, misfortune, famine, affliction and calamity.

¹⁰ All these were created for the wicked, and the flood as well was sent on their account.

¹¹ Everything that comes from the earth goes back to the earth and what comes from water returns to the sea.



¹² All bribery, all injustice will disappear but good faith will last forever.

¹³ The rich who have gained their wealth dishonestly will vanish like a stream that dries up; they will crash like a clap of thunder during a shower.

¹⁴ A generous man has reason to rejoice whereas sinners go to their ruin.

¹⁵ The children of the ungodly will not be blessed with large families; they are like plants taking root on sheer rock, ¹⁶ like reeds in water and along the river bank, withering before other plants.

¹⁷ Kindness is like a garden of blessings and charity endures forever.

¹⁸ Life is pleasant both for an independent person and a self-reliant worker, but still better off is the one who finds a treasure.

¹⁹ The name of a man who has children or who has established a town will live on but to have found wisdom is a greater good.

Owning cattle and plantations brings fame but a perfect wife is a richer blessing.

²⁰ Wine and music gladden the heart but better still is the love of wisdom.

²¹ The flute and harp make fine music but even more appreciated is a pleasant voice.

²² Gracefulness and beauty delight the eye but not as much as the fresh growth of fields.

²³ It is always good for friends and companions to meet, better still for husband and wife.

²⁴ Brothers and protectors are useful in hard times but it will be greater help to have been a giver of alms.

²⁵ Gold and silver make for security but good advice is better.

²⁶ Wealth and strength give confidence but good counsel is more esteemed than both.

You cannot suffer a loss when you fear the Lord, with it you have all the support you need.

²⁷ The fear of the Lord is like a garden of blessings; he himself put it higher than any glory.

²⁸ My son, do not live the life of a beggar; it would be better to die than beg.

²⁹ When a man is always looking towards another's table it cannot be said that he is really living, for he is defiling himself with another's food;

an intelligent and educated man will avoid this.

³⁰ That for which a shameless man begs may seem sweet to his mouth but his inner being is burning.

Death

41 ¹ Death! What a bitter thought for someone who lives happily with his possessions, a prosperous and successful man who is still able to enjoy his food!

² Your sentence, Death, is welcome to a needy person whose strength is failing, who is old, worn out, full of worries, angry and without hope!

³ Do not be afraid of Death's sentence, think of those who have gone before you and those who will follow you. ⁴ The Lord has decreed it for every living creature; why should you rebel against the good pleasure of the Most High?

Whether you live for ten, a hundred or a thousand years, no one in the netherworld is concerned.

⁵ Abominable people, such are the children of sinners who haunt the houses of the ungodly.

⁶ The inheritance of the sons of sinners will perish; their prosperity will be a lasting reproach.

⁷ An ungodly father will be insulted by his children, for they hold him responsible for their disgrace.

⁸ Woe to you, wicked people who have forsaken the law of the Most High! ⁹ At birth you are born to be cursed and you will be cursed at death.

¹⁰ All that comes from the earth returns to the earth, and the ungodly go from curse to ruin.

¹¹ People grieve because their bodies will perish but even the evil names of sinners will be blotted out.

¹² Have regard for your reputation, for it



will live on, of greater value than a thousand treasures of gold. ¹³Few perhaps are the days of the just man's life but an honoured name endures forever.

True and false shame

¹⁴My children, keep my teaching and live in peace. Of what use is hidden wisdom and unseen treasure?

¹⁵It is better for a man to hide his foolishness than to hide his wisdom.

¹⁶Therefore, feel shame according to what I say. It is not always fitting to feel shame but it is not understood by everyone.

¹⁷Be ashamed of licentiousness before your father and mother, and of a lie before a ruler or an important person.

¹⁸Be ashamed of criminal behaviour before a judge, and of iniquity before an assembly of people.

¹⁹Feel ashamed of dishonesty before your partner or friend, and of a theft in the place where you live.

²⁰Be ashamed before the truth of God and his covenant, of keeping the loaves for yourself, ²¹of being unable to give and to receive, of not returning a greeting,

²²of staring at a prostitute,

of rejecting a compatriot.

²³of depriving someone of what is his,

of gazing at another man's wife,

²⁴of being too familiar with your maid-servant – keep away from her bed!

²⁵of insulting words to a friend –

do not reproach after making a gift!

²⁶of repeating what you have heard and betraying secrets.

²⁷On these occasions feel genuine shame and you will be respected by all.

42 ¹But do let not yourself be led astray by what others think of what follows.

²Do not be ashamed

of the law of the Most High and his covenant.

of judging even the wicked fairly,

³of keeping accounts with a travelling companion,

and of sharing your inheritance with friends.

⁴of checking weights and scales, ⁵of making a profit whether small or great.

of bargaining with traders, and of being strict with children,

of severe corporal punishment for a servant who deserves it.

⁶With a prying wife or when many people are around it is wise to make use of seal and lock!

⁷For deposits it is essential to reckon by number and weight and keep a written record of what you give and receive.

⁸Do not be ashamed of correcting someone who is foolish or stupid or an old man who has become childish.

Doing that, you prove that you are a well educated person and you will be generally respected.

9 ⁹A daughter causes her father hidden worries; anxiety on her account keeps him awake:

Is she young? She may not marry. Is she married? She may be disliked;

¹⁰Is she a virgin? She may be seduced and become pregnant in her father's house!

Is she married? She may be unfaithful or unable to have children!

¹¹Your daughter is unruly? Watch her well, or she may make you a laughing stock for your enemies, the talk of the town and a public disgrace.

¹²Do not be taken by human beauty and do not sit down in the company of women;

¹³for just as a moth comes out of a garment, woman's wickedness comes out of a woman.

¹⁴Better a man's wickedness than a woman's kindness; women bring shame and disgrace.

o Sirach's original text, written in Hebrew was much longer in verse 9 and said: Her room should have no windows and she should not be able to see the entrances to the house. Such advice is one more proof of the male domination

in Hebrew culture which the Greek translator did not dare show his readers who were more liberal-minded. However inspired the authors of the Bible were, God did not miraculously free them from the limitations of their culture.



SECOND PART: GOD'S WISDOM IN HISTORY

Wonders of nature

+ ¹⁵ Now I shall remind you of the works of the Lord and relate what I have seen.

The Lord's works depend on his word, and creation obeys his will.

¹⁶ The sun shines on everything and the work of the Lord is filled with his glory.

¹⁷ Not even to his holy ones has the Lord given full knowledge of all his marvellous works.

The Lord, Master of the universe has ordained that all should stand firm in his glory.

¹⁸ He penetrates both the depth of the abyss and the human heart and knows their secrets.

For the most High has full knowledge and ordains the signs of the heavens.

¹⁹ He knows the past and foretells the future and reveals the trace of secret events.

²⁰ No thought escapes him, no word is hidden from him.

²¹ He has ordered the marvellous works of his wisdom, which last from eternity to eternity. Nothing can be added, nothing can be taken away and he has no need of counsel.

²² All his works are beautiful, even to the smallest spark of light.

²³ All this lives and endures forever: all is useful and obedient to his will.

²⁴ All things are in pairs, one opposite the other and nothing he makes is in any way deficient.

²⁵ One thing emphasises the excellence of the other; Who could ever weary of admiring his glory?

43 ¹ The pride of the heights above is a clear firmament; the appearance of the heavens is a spectacle of glory.

² When the sun rises and appears it makes a proclamation: "I am your marvellous work, Most High!"

³ At noon, it dries up the land; who can bear its burning heat?

⁴ You may stoke a furnace to produce heat,

but three times greater is the heat of the sun burning the mountains, and sending out fiery vapours, blinding the eyes with its rays.

⁵ How great is the Lord who made it and whose word directs its rapid course.

⁶ There is also the moon, exact in marking the months and the passage of time. ⁷ With its full light gradually decreasing, the moon determines and rules over the feast days. ⁸ The "month" also takes its name from the moon. How marvellously does it increase in its revolution, providing a signal for the heavenly hosts, brightly shining in the expanse of the sky!

⁹ The bright radiance of the stars accounts for the beauty of the sky. What a brilliant ornament they are for the heights of the Lord!

¹⁰ At the command of the all Holy they stand as appointed and never fail to keep watch.

¹¹ Look at the rainbow and praise the One Who made it. How magnificent it is in splendour!

¹² It forms a circle of glory in the sky, a bow that is bent by the hands of its Maker.

¹³ At his order the snow falls and lightning strikes according to his decrees.

¹⁴ The storerooms of heaven are opened and clouds fly away like birds.

¹⁵ It is his power that thickens the clouds making them freeze and break into hailstones.

^{16a} He has only to look and the mountains are shaken; ^{17a} the voice of his thunder terrifies the earth.

^{16b} At his will the south wind blows, ^{17b} as do cyclones and hurricanes from the north.

¹⁸ The snow flutters down like birds and alights on the ground like locusts.

The eye marvels at the beauty of its whiteness and the mind is amazed to see it fall.

¹⁹ He sprinkles frost on the earth like salt; it freezes and becomes like thorny spikes.

²⁰ The cold north wind blows and turns the water to ice.

20. Ps 139, 1 21. Ecl 3, 14 25. Ecl 3, 1
8. Ps 89, 38; 104, 19 10. Bar 3, 35 12. Gen 9, 13

1. Ps 19 2. Ps 8, 4 7. Gen 1, 14
19. Ps 147, 16

+ Modern civilization separates people from nature. In their work, many people see electricity more often than they see the sun. Many do not know either the silence or the sounds of nature, because noise has invaded everything. Because we know something about silence, we think we know the mysteries of the universe. In our cities, it is increasingly more difficult for us to experience the mystery and the beauty of the universe.

God speaks to us through his creation as authentically as he does in the words of Christ. The languages are different, in the same sense that music tells us something in a way that is different from words. Those who know how to see God in the universe are also able to discover him in the great human achievements: dams, electronic computers, buildings, new materials, etc. What emerges from human hands also belongs to God's creation.



Ice forms on all stagnant water giving it a freezing coat of armour.

²¹ He wears down the mountains and scorches the desert, withering the green grass as if by fire.

²² A mist is a timely remedy, and dew after the heat restores it all to life.

²³ According to his plan he stilled the great deep and planted islands in it.

²⁴ Those who cross the seas tell of its dangers and we listen in astonishment to what they relate:

²⁵ They are all strange and marvellous adventures with marine animals and monsters of all kinds.

²⁶ Thanks be to God, all turns out well and everything is held together by his word.

²⁷ We shall not give further examples; one last word: He is everything.

²⁸ Where shall we find the strength to glorify him? For he is the Mighty One, greater than all his works.

²⁹ The Lord is awesome and sovereignly great, and admirable in his power.

³⁰ Let your praises exalt the Lord as well as you can, he is greater than you could even express.

Honour him with all your strength, and do not tire for you can never praise him enough.

³¹ Who has seen him and could describe what he saw? Who could glorify him as he merits?

³² Many mysteries greater than these still remain, for we have only seen a fraction of his works.

The Lord has created all things and to upright men he has given wisdom.

In praise of ancestors

■ 44 ¹ Let us now praise illustrious men, the ancestors of our people.

² The Lord gave them great glory and

showed his greatness in them from the beginning.

³ Some ruled their kingdoms and were renowned for their achievements, others were wise and able to counsel and spoke as prophets.

⁴ They led the people with their warnings and instructed them with the wise words of their teaching.

⁵ Some cultivated music and poetry, ⁶ others were rich and powerful men living peacefully in their homes.

⁷ All were highly respected in their days and honoured by the people they lived with.

⁸ The names of some lived on and people still praise them today; others ⁹ are not remembered and have disappeared as if they never existed. They might never have been and it is the same for their children.

¹⁰ But now consider the godly men whose good deeds have not been forgotten. ¹¹ Those who came after them benefited from the rich legacy they left; ¹² their race remained faithful to the Covenant, their children followed their example. ¹³ Their family will endure forever and never will its glory be tarnished. ¹⁴ Their bodies were buried in peace but their memory lives through generations. ¹⁵ Peoples will speak of their wisdom and the assembly will celebrate their praise.

¹⁶ Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up, calling future generations to repentance.

¹⁷ Noah was found to be perfectly just; at the time of divine anger he was the ransom; through him a remnant was left on earth after the flood. ¹⁸ Eternal covenant were made with him to ensure that never again would life be destroyed by flood.

Abraham

◆ ¹⁹ No one has been found to equal Abraham, the great ancestor of many nations. ²⁰ He was faithful to the Law of the Most High who

21. Job 38, 22 24. Ps 104, 5; 104, 25; 1 Mac 2, 51
20; 2 Per 2, 5; Gen 9, 9 20. Gen 12, 2; Rom 4, 1 21.

■ After the hymn to God whose glory is revealed through his creation, the author will present us with God's work in his chosen people, Israel.

In his poem of praise of the ancestors, we have a glimpse of all the famous people of Israel: kings, liberators, prophets, sages, poets. The author notes that there are many courageous and just people who died and whose deeds and virtues will not be recorded after them. Yet, the author knows that, even though all the descendants of any famous man may disappear, for example Moses, the people of Israel hold on to the promises of eternity: "In any case, we shall win."

16. Gen 5, 24; Heb 11, 5 19. Gen 6, 9; 1 Per 3,
Gen 17, 10 22. Gen 22, 16; 1 Mac 2, 52; Heb 11, 17.

◆ In what follows, Ben Sira remembers the most prominent people of sacred history. He attributes more or less importance to them according to the ideas of his days. He was living in an age when priests had the most important role and the entire life of the Jews unfolded around the Temple. And so, he speaks with great enthusiasm of Aaron, Phinehas and Simon II, whom he had known personally.

In 48:11, as in Mal 3:24, we find the Jewish belief that Elijah would return in the days of the Messiah. For the Jews, Elijah was the man who raised the dead and who had been preserved from death by God. Ben Sira hopes to regain life to see the happy days of salvation.



made a covenant with him, a covenant that was marked on his flesh and on the day he was tested he was found faithful. ²¹that is why God promised by oath to bless all the nations through his descendance, to make it as numerous as the dust of the earth and to exalt his posterity like the stars. He promised that their land would stretch from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.

²²The Lord renewed his Covenant with Isaac for the sake of his father, Abraham. This Covenant and the blessing of all mankind he made to rest on the head of Jacob.

He assured Jacob of his blessing, giving him the land that would be his and determining the portions to be shared among the twelve tribes.

Moses

45 ¹From Jacob's descendants the Lord brought forth an upright man who won the favour of everyone and was loved by God and men – Moses. Blessed be his memory! ²The Lord gave him glory equal to his only angels and power that terrified his enemies. ³At Moses' word he halted disaster; the Lord exalted him in the presence of kings. He gave him commandments for his people and let him glimpse something of his glory.

⁴He chose him from among the living to become holy by being faithful and humble. ⁵God let him hear his own voice and led him into darkness where face to face he gave him the commandments, the law of life and knowledge, to teach Jacob the covenant and make his decrees known to Israel.

⁶He raised up Aaron, the brother of Moses, a holy man like Moses, of the tribe of Levi. ⁷He made an eternal covenant with him and conferred on him the priesthood of the people.

⁸He honoured him by giving him majesty and putting a glorious robe upon him. His vestments and ornaments were splendid in their perfection, breeches, cloak and ephod. ⁹As a fringe to his vestment he placed pomegranates and many golden bells to tinkle as he walked and so be heard in the Temple as a reminder to the sons of his people.

¹⁰The Lord gave Aaron sacred vestments of gold, blue and purple, the work of artists, the pectoral of judgment, the Urim and Thummim, scarlet yarn spun by a craftsman, ¹¹precious stones with engravings in a setting of gold, the work of a jeweller, to serve as a memorial with graven inscriptions of the tribes of Israel. ¹²He gave him the turban with

a golden diadem engraved with the words of his consecration, a superb ornament, expertly crafted and a delight to the eyes.

¹³Such things had never been seen before Aaron's time; no outsider ever put them on or ever will, only his children and descendants.

¹⁴His sacrifices were to be completely burned twice daily in perpetuity.

¹⁵It was Moses who consecrated him and anointed him with holy oil. It was for him an eternal alliance and for his descendants, for as long as the heavens would last, to serve the Lord as his priests and bless the people in his name. ¹⁶He chose him among all the living to offer sacrifice to the Lord and sweet smelling incense as a memorial to make atonement for the people.

¹⁷The Lord gave him to interpret his commandments uttering decisions to teach Jacob the divine words and enlighten Israel with his Law. ¹⁸Outsiders conspired against him and were jealous of him in the desert – Dathan and Abiram and their followers and the supporters of Korah, all violent and full of hate. ¹⁹The Lord saw it and was angry and in his wrath he destroyed them. He wrought wonders against them, consuming them in the flames of fire.

²⁰He increased Aaron's glory, by giving him a heritage. He allotted to him the first fruits and to begin with, bread in abundance. ²¹For their food is the sacrifice offered to the Lord, given by him to Aaron and his descendants.

²²But he was to inherit no land as patrimony, no special portion was to be his own, for the Lord himself is his portion and inheritance.

Phinehas

²³As for Phinehas, son of Eleazar, he is the third in glory, for he was full of zeal in the fear of the Lord when he stood firm among a rebellious people with noble courage and made atonement for Israel.

²⁴Consequently a covenant of peace was concluded with him, making him the leader of the sanctuary and of his people. He and his descendants were to have the dignity of high priesthood forever. ²⁵It is not like the covenant established with David, the son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah, for the kingship passes from father to one of his sons only, but the heritage of Aaron passes to all his descendants.

²⁶May the Lord give them wisdom of heart to judge his people with justice, so that their prosperity may not dwindle and their glory live on in their descendants!



Joshua and the judges

46 ¹Joshua, son of Nun, was a valiant warrior and as a prophet he was the successor of Moses. He lived up to his name proving himself to be a saviour God's chosen people, punishing the enemies that attacked them and leading Israel to claim their land.

²How magnificent to see him, arm raised and his sword ready to attack the cities!

³Who before him had such staying power? He was, indeed, Yahweh's warrior. ⁴Was it not he who held back the sun making one day as long as two? ⁵He called on the Most High when the enemy pressed on every side, and the Mighty Lord responded with hailstones of exceptional size. ⁶He attacked the enemy nation and destroyed the assailants at the pass of Beth-horan, so that the nations might know the strength of Joshua and that they were fighting against the Lord.

⁷Joshua was loyal and devoted to the Almighty in the time of Moses, he and Caleb, son of Jephunneh. They stood firm against the assembly and tried to keep them from sinning and to silence their wicked murmuring.

⁸Because of this they were the only two spared out of six hundred thousand people on foot. And they took possession of their inheritance in a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁹The Lord gifted Caleb with strength; this he enjoyed to the end of his days, and he went into the hill country that was given to his children in heritage. ¹⁰With this it was clear to all Israel that it is good to follow the Lord. ¹¹After that came the judges. Although each of them won his own renown, all were men of faithful heart who did not turn away from the Lord. Blessed be their memory! ¹²May their bones spring to life from the tomb and the names of these illustrious men live on in their children!

Samuel

¹³Samuel was prophet and beloved of the Lord. He established the kingdom and anointed rulers to govern his people.

¹⁴He judged the assembly according to the Law of the Lord and the Lord protected Jacob.

¹⁵He was accepted as prophet because of his faithfulness and proved that his words were of a trustworthy seer.

¹⁶He called on the Almighty Lord when the enemy pressed from all directions and he offered a sucking lamb.

¹⁷Then with a mighty roar the Lord thun-

dered from heaven ¹⁸and destroyed all the enemy's leaders and the tyrants of Philistia.

¹⁹Before his time came for eternal rest, Samuel called men to witness before the Lord and his anointed: "I have not taken anyone's belongings, not even his sandals", and there was no one to accuse him.

²⁰Even after he died he prophesied and revealed to the king his death. From the grave he spoke as a prophet to blot out the wickedness of his people.

David

47 ¹After him the Lord raised Nathan to prophesy in the time of David.

²As fat is selected from the peace offering so David was chosen from among the Israelites.

³He played with lions and bears as if they were lambs or young goats.

⁴He was still young when he slew a giant to restore the honour of his people; with a sling he aimed a stone that killed the arrogant Goliath.

⁵He invoked the Lord Most High who gave him strength to slay a mighty warrior and so exalt the power of his people.

⁶So they glorified him for his ten thousands and praised him as a blessing from the Lord when he was chosen king.

⁷For he wiped out his enemies on all sides and annihilated his adversaries, the Philistines, crushing their power forever.

⁸In all that he did he gave thanks to the Most High and showed his love for his Maker by singing with all his heart.

⁹He placed singers accompanied by harps before the altar to make beautiful music; ¹⁰he gave splendour to feasts and even greater magnificence to the more solemn occasions, exalting the holy Name of the Lord and having the sanctuary ring with his praises from early morning.

¹¹The Lord forgave David's sins and established his power forever; he made a covenant with him for the benefit of the Kings and gave him a glorious throne in Israel.

Solomon

¹²A wise son succeeded him and fared well because of him.

¹³Solomon reigned during times of peace and God gave him rest from war to enable him to build a house for his Name, a sanctuary that would stand forever.

4. Jos 10, 13	7. Num 14, 6	9. Jos 14, 10	13. 1 S 10; 16, 13	16. 1 S 7, 9	19. 1 S 12
20. 1 S 28, 6	1. 2 S 7, 12	4. 1 S 17	6. 1 S 18, 7	8. 2 S 23, 1	14. 1 K 5, 17

¹⁴ How wise you were in your youth, Solomon! as full of understanding as a river. ¹⁵ Your spirit covered the earth, you filled it with proverbs and parables. ¹⁶ Your reputation reached distant islands and you were loved for your peace. ¹⁷ Your songs, proverbs, parables and interpretation drew the admiration of the world.

¹⁸ In the name of the Lord God, called the God of Israel, you accumulated gold like tin and gathered silver like lead.

¹⁹ But you gave your body to women and became the slave of your senses; ²⁰ you stained your reputation and defiled your descendants, bringing wrath and disaster upon your children because of your foolishness.

²¹ It divided the nation and from Ephraim came a kingdom in revolt.

²² But God's mercy never fails nor does he forget his promises; he did not deprive his chosen one of descendants nor destroy the race of the one he loved. So to Jacob he gave a remnant and allowed David's family to survive.

²³ Solomon rested with his forefathers and left one of his sons to rule after him, the most foolish of men and without intelligence; this was Roboam who drove the people to rebellion.

²⁴ As for Jeroboam, son of Nebat, it was he who caused Israel to sin and taught Ephraim the way of evil.

From then on their sins increased and later brought about their exile, ²⁵ for they were intent on doing every sort of evil until vengeance fell on them.

Elijah and Elisha

48 ¹ Then came the prophet Elijah like a fire, his words a burning torch.

² He brought a famine on the people and in his zealous love had them reduced in number.

³ Speaking in the name of the Lord he closed the heavens and on three occasions called down fire.

⁴ How marvellous you were, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! Who could ever boast of being your equal? ⁵ In the Name of the Most High you brought a dead man back to life; ⁶ you brought kings to destruction and thrust famous men from their beds.

⁷ You heard rebuke at Sinai and sentences of punishment at Horeb; ⁸ you anointed kings to be avengers and prophets to succeed you.

⁹ You were taken up by a whirlwind of flames in a chariot drawn by fiery horses.

¹⁰ It was written that you should be the one to calm God's anger in the future before it broke out in fury, to turn the heart of fathers to their sons and to restore the tribes of Jacob.

¹¹ Happy are those who will see you and those who die in love, for we too shall live.

¹² Such was Elijah, taken up in a whirlwind, and Elisha was filled with his spirit.

During his life no leader could shake him, no one dominated him. ¹³ Nothing was too difficult for him and even in death his body prophesied. ¹⁴ In life he worked wonders, in death his deeds were amazing.

¹⁵ For all this the people were not converted and did not turn away from sin; not until they were deported far from their country and scattered over the earth.

¹⁶ The people were greatly reduced in number but they still had a ruler from the line of David. Some of them were upright people, others became sinful.

¹⁷ Hezekiah fortified his city and brought water within its walls, tunnelling the rock with iron tools for the construction of cisterns.

¹⁸ During his reign Sennacherib began his campaigns and sent off Rabshakeh, and insolent and arrogant as he was, he raised his arm against Zion.

¹⁹ Then their courage was shaken, their hands trembled, they felt anguish like women in labour. ²⁰ They stretched out their hands and called on the merciful Lord.

From heaven the Holy One quickly heard them and saved them by the hand of Isaiah.

²¹ The Lord struck the Assyrian camp and his angel wiped them out.

²² For Hezekiah did what was pleasing to the Lord and was firm in following the ways of David, his father, as the great and faithful prophet, Isaiah, ordered him in visions.

²³ In his time the sun went back and he lengthened the life of the king.

²⁴ In the power of the spirit he foresaw the last things and consoled the afflicted people of Zion. ²⁵ He revealed what would happen until the end of time and made hidden events known before they occurred.

49 ¹ The memory of Josiah is like blended incense carefully prepared by the perfumer; it is like delicious honey to every mouth, like music during a banquet.

² He followed the right way in converting the people and removing the horror of idolatry.

³ He set his heart on the Lord and succeeded in having godliness prevail over wickedness.

⁴ With the exception of David, Hezekiah



and Josiah, the kings were very sinful men. they abandoned the Law of the Most High bringing an end to the kings of Judah.

⁵They surrendered their power and their honour to foreign nations. ⁶Their enemies set fire to the holy city, making its streets desolate ⁷as Jeremiah had foretold.

⁸It was Ezechiel who saw the vision of Glory when the Lord showed it to him above the chariot of the cherubim. ⁹He also remembered Job, the one who always followed the way of justice.

¹⁰As for the twelve prophets, may their bones spring to life from the tomb for they comforted the people of Jacob and saved them with confident hope.

¹¹Can we ever adequately praise Zerubbabel and ¹²likewise Joshua, son of Jozadak? They were men who in their days built the Temple and directed to the Lord a holy people destined for everlasting glory. ¹³Lasting too is the memory of Nehemiah who rebuilt our ruined walls, provided gates and bars and rebuilt our homes.

¹⁴No one on earth was created to equal Enoch for he was taken up from the earth.

¹⁵And never was there a man like Joseph, the greatest among his brothers, the leader of his people: his bones were honoured.

o ¹⁶Shem and Seth were exalted among men but Adam's glory greater than any other living being.

Simon the priest

50 ¹The High Priest Simon, son of Onias, repaired the Temple during his life-time.

²He laid the foundations for the high double wall and for the fortifications surrounding the Temple.

³In his days a reservoir for water, a cistern as great as a sea, was excavated.

⁴Anxious lest his people might perish he fortified the city against a siege.

+ ⁵How magnificent he was when surrounded by his people he emerged from the inner sanctuary ⁶like the morning star amidst the clouds, like

the full moon ⁷like the sun shining on the Temple of the Most High or a rainbow in a glory of clouds!

⁸He was like a rose in spring, a lily beside a stream, or a twig of frankincense on a summer day, ⁹or incense burning in the censer.

He could be likened to a massive, golden vase adorned with every kind of precious stone, ¹⁰or to an olive tree heavy with fruit or to a cypress rising to the clouds, ¹¹when robed in ceremonial garb and in perfect splendour, he went to the sacred altar filling the court of the sanctuary with glory.

¹²There he would receive from the hand of the priests the portions of the sacrifice, as he stood by the hearth of the altar encircled by his brethren like a young cedar on Lebanon.

¹³It was as if he was surrounded by palm trees when all the sons of Aaron in their splendour, with the offerings to the Lord in their hands, stood before the assembly of Israel.

¹⁴When he had completed the service at the altar and presented with dignity the offering to the Almighty and Most High, ¹⁵he took the cup in his hand and poured out a libation of the juice of the grape at the foot of the altar, a pleasing aroma to the Most High, King of the world.

¹⁶Then the sons of Aaron shouted; they blew their trumpets of solid silver making a great noise as a memorial before the Most high.

¹⁷Then suddenly all the people bowed down with their faces to the ground and adored the Lord, the Almighty and most High God.

8. Eek 1.3

11. Ag 2, 23

14. 44, 16

5. Lev 16, 23

13. Num 10, 2

o Suddenly, before praising the high priest Simon, his contemporary, Ben Sira remembers the origins. At the beginning, the first man. Surpassing the current ideas of the Jews who, until then, did not look much further than their own history, Ben Sira thinks about the first man, the father of all humanity. Adam represents all sinful humanity, called to salvation. But he is also

the first man who bears in him the destiny of all the rest. In Rom 5:12-20. Paul will speak of Christ as the New Adam. Of him one can say: "Adam is above every living being."

+ Let us underline this lengthy portrait of Simon, the high priest. Ben Sira, who carried out responsibilities and knew life, feels no shame

¹⁸ The choir as well sang his praises making beautiful music. ¹⁹ And the people made supplication to the Most High and prayed to their merciful Lord until the ceremony was over and the service of the Lord completed.

²⁰ The High Priest then came down and raised his hands towards the whole assembly of the people of Israel to give them with a loud voice the blessing of the Lord and have the honour of pronouncing his name.

²¹ Then for a second time the people bowed in worship to receive the blessing of the Most High:

²² "And now bless the Lord of the universe who everywhere does great things, who exalts our days from birth and is merciful to us.

²³ May he give us happiness and grant peace to Israel in our days and forever!

²⁴ May he continue to give us his blessings and be a saviour to us in our days."

²⁵ There are two nations I greatly dislike, the third is not a nation: ²⁶ they are the inhabitants of Mount Seir, the Philistines and the foolish people who live in Shechem.

²⁷ Instruction in understanding and knowledge, that is what Jesus the son of Sira, the son of Eleazar of Jerusalem, has written in this book as he poured out the wisdom of his heart.

²⁸ Happy the one who pays attention to this teaching and gains wisdom by taking it to heart.

²⁹ Doing that he will be strong in all circumstances, for the light of the Lord is his path.

Prayer of Jesus, son of Sira

51 ¹ I will give thanks to you, O Lord and King; I praise you, my God and Saviour, I give thanks to your Name.

² For you are my protector and help and you delivered my body from destruction, from the snare of the wicked tongue and from lips that speak lies.

In the presence of those who stood against me you were my helper, my deliverer.

³ In the fullness of mercy and the glory of your Name, you delivered me from the teeth of those ready to do it, and from the hand of those wanting to take my life. ⁴ You rescued me from the countless trials I suffered from choking fire on every side; I passed through fire and was not burned.

⁵ You delivered me from the depths of the netherworld, from an impure tongue and lying word, ⁶ from vicious slander reported to the king. I was near to death, I was already at the gates of the Netherworld.

⁷ They surrounded me on every side with no one to help me.

⁸ Then, Lord, I remembered your mercy and your deeds from all eternity, knowing that you deliver those who hope in you and save them from the hands of their enemies.

⁹ I sent up my prayer from the earth, begging to be delivered from death.

20. Num 6, 25

24. Am 8, 1

26. Is 55, 1; Mt 11, 29

in expressing his great admiration for the Temple rituals. As for any Jewish believer, the sacred vestments, the music and the solemn ceremonies were revealing something to him about the world of God which is splendour, happiness, celebration and praise.

■ This is thanksgiving for a liberation. The listing of the dangers from which God can free people, recalls for us the heroes of the Old

Testament: Daniel in the lions' den, Daniel and his friends in the furnace, Joseph imprisoned, Susanna, David.

This is used for the feasts of martyrs in the liturgy of the Church. Their death (see Wisdom 3:1) was a liberation from evil. Like Jesus, martyrs did not escape from evil and from death, but they conquered both, overcoming natural fear and accepting to forgive their enemies.

¹⁰ I called on the Lord, the Father of my Lord: "Do not forsake me in the day of my affliction, when I am helpless against arrogant enemies; I will praise your name continually and sing to you my thanksgiving."

¹¹ And my prayer was heard, you saved me from destruction and delivered me from an evil plight.

¹² That is why I will give you thanks and praise and bless the Name of the Lord.

¹³ In my youth before set out on my travels, I openly sought wisdom in prayer; ¹⁴ before the Temple I asked for her and I will pursue her to the end of my days.

¹⁵ While she blossomed, like a ripening cluster, my heart was delighted in her; my feet followed the right path because from my youth I searched for her.

¹⁶ As soon as I began listening to her she was given to me and with her much instruction.

¹⁷ With her help I made progress and I will glorify him who gives me wisdom, ¹⁸ for I decided to put it into practice and ardently seek what is good. I shall not regret it.

¹⁹ My soul has struggled with her help. I have been attentive to observe the Law, and after my faults I have stretched my hands to heaven and lamented my ignorance of her.

²⁰ My love of her increased and I

found her in repentance. It was through her from the beginning that I learned to possess my heart. She will not forsake me.

²¹ With my whole being I sought her; that is why I won what is best.

²² In return for this the Lord has given me words to praise him.

²³ Come near, you are without understanding and join her school.

²⁴ Why do you say you are deprived of all this and that your souls are thirsty?

²⁵ This is what I say: Buy this without money; ²⁶ put your neck under the yoke and let your minds receive instruction; it is very near and within your reach.

²⁷ See for yourselves how easy it was for me to have much rest.

²⁸ Be instructed whatever the cost and you will gain what is better than gold.

²⁹ Let your soul find joy in the mercy of the Lord and do not be ashamed to praise him.

³⁰ Do your work within the appointed time and the Lord in his time will give you his reward.

Why all the Bibles do not have the same Books

At the time of Jesus no Jew doubted that the books of Moses and the Prophets were the word of God. In the course of time other books known as *Writings* or *Wisdom books* had been welcomed and added to the first but it was not made clear what degree of authority should be given them.

A part of these books was written not in Hebrew but in Greek, which was the international language. That is why there were more books in the Greek bible which was used by the Jews outside Palestine and even in many Palestinian synagogues.

It was only after Jesus – and after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans – that the Pharisees in the year 95, summoned a council in Jamnia, to reorganize the Jewish community. It was then that they definitively established the *canon*, that is, the standard of the Jewish bible. Although they accepted some of the more recent books, for example that of Daniel, they systematically excluded all that were written in Greek.

Meanwhile the Church used the Greek bible as the apostles had done, and was only concerned with what should be included in the New Testament.

In the year 384 the so-called Decree of Damasius finally established the canon of the Christian bible and accepted some of the books proper to the Greek bible that the Jews had rejected in Jamnia, in spite of a minority opinion that placed them in a lower rank. These books are called *deuterocanonical*, that is, books of the second standard.

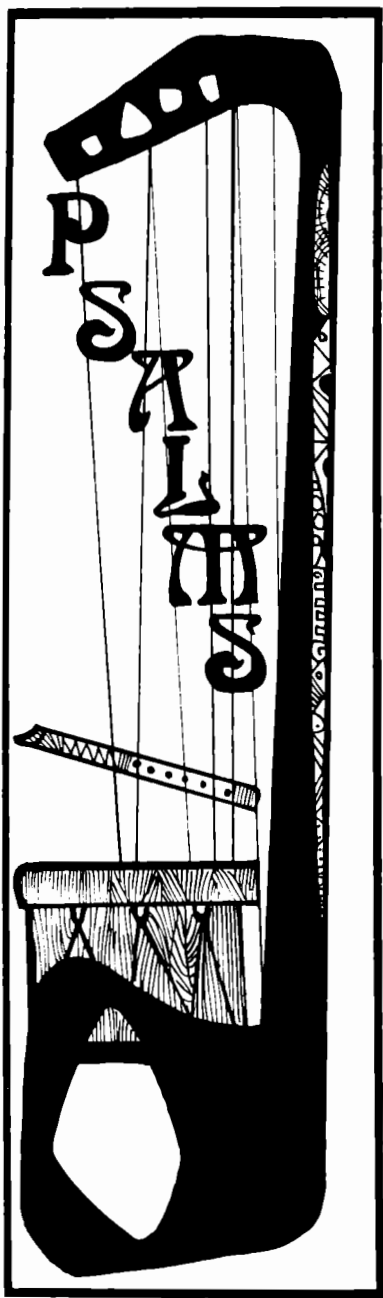
When the Protestants departed from the Church, twelve centuries later, they had not thought of criticizing the standard of the New Testament, but as they were divided on the deuterocanonical books, they considered it safer to exclude them. They called them *apocrypha*, that is, non-authentic. But up to the nineteenth century they usually published them in their bible. Later they were totally excluded.

The deuterocanonical books are:

<i>1st and 2nd Maccabees</i>	<i>Tobit</i>	<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>
<i>chapters 13-14 of Daniel</i>	<i>Judith</i>	<i>Sirach</i>
<i>chapters 11-16 of Esther</i>	<i>Baruch</i>	

All the modern biblical studies point out the importance of these deuterocanonical books as a link between the Hebrew books of the Old Testament and those in Greek which make up the New Testament.

Note that the only way to know which are the sacred books and which books are not to be included in the Bible is to refer to the decision of the Church. Those who now accuse the Church in the name of the Bible would not know where the word of God is to be found if the Church had not declared it.



PSALM 1

The two ways. -- God, the creator of human nature, only wishes man's happiness. It is very significant to note that this first psalm speaks on the theme of happiness just as Jesus' first discourse will begin by "happy."

¹ Blessed is the man
who follows not the counsel of the
wicked,

nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits where the scoffers sit;

² instead, he finds delight in the law
of the Lord

and meditates day and night
on his commandments.

³ He is like a tree beside a brook
producing its fruits in due season,
its leaves never withering.

Everything he does is a success.

⁴ But it is different with the wicked.
They are like chaff
driven away by the wind.

⁵ The wicked will not stand when
judgment comes,
nor the sinners when the righteous
assemble.

⁶ For the Lord keeps the way of the
righteous
but cuts off the way of the wicked.

Happy New Year! Many happy returns! Our own
language expresses man's just and eternal longing for happiness.

But, according to the Bible, happiness must be first
sought first in external things (money, pleasure, power,
etc.) P comes to the people who follow God's Law.

With images taken from natural life -- that of the tree
and of the chaff -- the psalm expresses the man who
accepts God and the one who rejects him. The first en-
joys strength, constancy, and fruitfulness while the sec-
ond is empty and futile.

Jesus is the open, and fruitful tree, ever verdant. All
that is good, great, beautiful, and holy, in man's hearts
matures in the tree of the Cross.

PSALM 2

We know of king Herod's fear on finding out about the birth of the King of the Jews in Bethlehem; this happens again and again in the course of history.

On one hand, we have those who want to be in charge of their own destiny without submitting to a law above men. These are the "kings of the earth," the "princes of the earth;" they are not only the persecuting rulers, but all those with power over the minds of people, those who fabricate the public opinion of the masses.

On the other hand, we have God and at his side, Christ the Victor, called here the Anointed one and the Son.

The two reigns. – This struggle between the "kings of the earth" and the Anointed of God announce the book of Revelation. We must not, however, totally identify these antagonistic forces with the Church and those opposed to it, since the barrier between them passes through every man's heart. This struggle exists in all ages, but in these years, we witness a growing opposition of the powerful to the church of Christ and its poor.

¹Why do the nations conspire?

Why do the peoples plot in vain?

²The kings of the earth brace themselves
and the rulers together take their stand
against the Lord and his anointed.

³They say "Let us break their bonds!
Let us cast away their chains!"

⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord looks at them in derision.

⁵Then in anger he speaks to them,
terrifying them in the fury of his wrath:

⁶"Behold the king I have installed
upon my holy hill, Zion!"

⁷I will proclaim the decree of the Lord.
He said to me: "You are my son.
This day I have begotten you.

⁸Ask of me and I will give you
the nations for your inheritance,
the ends of the earth for your possession.

⁹You shall rule them with iron scepter
and dash them to pieces as a potter's ware."

¹⁰Now therefore, learn wisdom, O kings;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.

¹¹Serve the Lord with fear
and fall at his feet;
lest he be angry and you perish
when his anger flares up suddenly.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him!

PSALM 3

How many are my enemies! – Just like every Christian, King David has an ally stronger than all his enemies: God.

²O Lord, how great in number are my foes!
How numerous are those who rise up against me!

³How many are they who say of my soul:
"There is no help for him in God!"

⁴But you are my shield, O Lord,
my glory, you lift up my head.

⁵Aloud I cry to the Lord,
and from his holy hill he answers me.

⁶When I lie down and sleep,
again I awake, for the Lord sustains me.
⁷I fear not the thousands standing against me.
⁸Arise, O Lord!
Deliver me, O my God!
You strike on the cheekbone all my enemies,
you have broken the teeth of the wicked.
⁹Salvation comes from the Lord.
May your blessing be upon your people!

PSALM 4

A good prayer for believers living in the world, surrounded by evil, besieged by their own weakness and threatened by scoundrels. But, they always have something for which to give thanks to the Lord because there is also the experience of the good achieved.

Below we cite another evening prayer, a very ancient hymn of the Eastern church.

Happy light of the holy and immortal glory of the Father,

Holy and blessed Jesus Christ!

*Having reached the sunset hour,
we sing to the Father, to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit of God.*

*You are always worthy of being
praised by holy voices.*

O Son of God who gives life

Evening prayer. – An evening prayer for people who trust God in spite of their difficulties because they remember how often the Lord has sustained them in their anguish.

²Answer me when I call, O my God of justice!
When I was in distress, you gave me solace.
Have compassion on me and now hear my plea.

³O sons of men, how long
will you harden your hearts?
How long will you delight in deceit?
How long will you love falsehood?

⁴But you must know that the Lord
has shown his kindness to me.
When I call to him, he listens to me.

⁵You may feel indignant, but do not sin.
Search your heart
when you are in bed, and be still.

⁶Offer the sacrifice commanded by the Law
and put your trust in the Lord your God.

⁷Many ask, "Who will show us any good?"
Let your favor shine upon us, O Lord!

⁸Let them rejoice in their abundant wine
and grain, you have given more to me.

⁹I lie down and rest in peace,
for you alone, O Lord,
make me feel safe and at ease.

PSALM 5

Prayer on waking up. – This psalm invites us to begin our day by calling on God to be our light and our strength and also by going to the House of God, his temple, where his light and his strength are within our reach.

²O Lord, listen to my words. Give
consideration to my sad plight,

³give heed to the sound of my

sighs, I beseech you, my King and my
God.

⁴From dawn you hear my voice,

from dawn I pledge to you and wait in expectation.

⁵You are not a God who takes delight in wickedness; evil does not abide in you.

⁶The arrogant cannot stand before your sight. You hate all who do evil;

⁷you destroy all who speak falsehood, who thirst for blood and live on lies; all of them the Lord detests.

⁸But I, by your love and grace may come into your house. In reverence I will bow down and worship at your holy temple.

⁹Lead me, O Lord, through your path of righteousness; make your way straight before me, for my enemies are lying in wait.

¹⁰Not a word of their mouth can be trusted, for their heart is filled with mischief. Their throat is an open grave; their tongue flatters with deceit.

¹¹O Lord, make them suffer from their guilt. Let their snares boomerang on them.

Cast them out for their many sins – for their offense and rebellion.

¹²But for those who take refuge in you, let them ever sing and rejoice. Spread out your deliverance over them, that they may praise you in gladness – those who love your name, O Lord.

¹³You bless all who live in righteousness; with your favor you cover them, as though with a shield.

PSALM 6

Prayer of the afflicted.

²O Lord, in your anger, reprove me not; in your fury, chastise me not.

³Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I have no strength left.

O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in torment.

⁴My soul also is troubled greatly.

How long, O Lord – how long will you be?

⁵Turn back to me, O Lord, deliver my life;

rescue me for the sake of your love.

⁶For no one remembers you in the grave, no one can give you praise in the world of the dead.

⁷I have become wearied with moaning; I weep by night,

drenching my bed with tears.

⁸My eyes have grown dim because of woes; they have weakened because of my foes.

⁵At dawn you hear my voice. When we wake up in the morning we look ahead to the day we are about to live. Throughout the day, we will have to choose between good and evil, between God's calls and worldly attractions. However, it is hard to carry out what we have found to be God's will and this is why we cry out to God.

Punish them, O God, as they deserve. This medi-

tation of the Hebrew psalmist is expressed in a language which seems unlike the Gospel when he calls unbelievers "foolish," "wicked," "liars" and begs God to punish them. We must remember that in the Jewish mentality there was no distinction between actions and people, between sin and sinner. More than the hatred or fanaticism of the just this language reveals their passionate attachment to God's Law.

⁹Away from me, you who rejoice in evil,
for the Lord has heard my plaintive voice.
¹⁰The Lord has given heed to what I implore;
the Lord will grant all that I pray for.
¹¹All my enemies fall back in shame,
all of a sudden – the whole bunch of them!

PSALM 7

Free me from my persecutors. – A cry demanding justice rises from the depth of the soul. God listens.

²O Lord, my God, in you I take shelter; deliver me from all my pursuers. ³Lest I become like prey of a lion, torn to pieces and rescued by none.

⁴O Lord, my God, if my hands are stained with guilt – ⁵if with evil I have repaid good, if I have helped some oppressor, ⁶let the enemy pursue me as does a hound, let him trample my life to the ground and lay down my glory in the dust.

⁷Arise, O Lord, in your wrath; rise up against the fury of my foes. Awake, O my God, for the time of judgment.

⁸Let the nations gather round you, and take your seat high above them.

⁹The Lord judges the nations. Proclaim, O Lord, my righteousness; you see that I am blameless.

¹⁰Bring to an end the power of the wicked, but set the just up on his feet,

O righteous God, searcher of mind and heart.

¹¹Covering me as a shield is God, who protects the upright of heart.

¹²A righteous judge is God, who is always indignant at those who refuse to repent.

¹³God has his sword ready and sharpened, his bow bent and arrows aimed.

¹⁴He has in hand, ever in watch, his deadly weapons and fiery darts.

¹⁵He who conceives iniquity and is pregnant with mischief gives birth to destruction.

¹⁶He digs a pit and makes it deep, and falls into the trap he made.

¹⁷His evil intent recoils upon his head; his wicked design comes back in his face.

¹⁸I will rejoice in the Lord for his justice, and sing to the Most High in gratitude and praise.

PSALM 8

Glorious God and dignity of man. – Thanks to scientific progress, the universe reveals the glory and the beauty of God to men, though never as much as in our own days. But, in becoming man, the Son of God has placed men above all the material creation and he has underlined the fundamental equality of all people.

²O Lord, our Lord,
how great is your name throughout the world!
In the heavens above,
your glory is praised in chants
³from the mouths of children and infants.

You have built a rampart
against your foes to thwart

their vengeful plots and hostile acts.

⁴ When I observe the heavens,
all wrought by your hands,
the moon and the stars arrayed in a vault –
⁵ what is man that you should be mindful of him,
the son of man that you should care for him?

⁶ Yet you have made him a little lower than the
angels;

you have crowned him with glory and honor.

⁷ You have given him dominion over the works
of your hands;

you have put all things under his feet –

⁸ the sheep and the oxen

the beasts of the field,

⁹ the birds of the air,

the fishes of the sea,

and all that swim the paths of the ocean.

¹⁰ O Lord, our Lord,

how great is your name all over the world!

PSALM 9

God, refuge of the oppressed.

² Let my heart praise the Lord, I
will proclaim all your marvelous
deeds.

³ I will rejoice and exult in you. I
will sing praise to your name, O Most
High.

⁴ As my enemies fell back in re-
treat, they stumbled before you and
perished.

⁵ You have upheld my right and
my cause, seated on your throne, O
just judge.

⁶ You have turned back the
nations; you have battered down the
wicked and struck out their names
forever and ever.

⁷ Your enemies lay in endless ruin,
their cities trampled, their memory
blotted out.

⁸ But the Lord shall reign forever,
having set up his throne for judgment.

⁹ He will judge the nations with
justice and govern the peoples in
righteousness.

¹⁰ The Lord is a rampart for the
oppressed, a refuge in times of dis-
tress.

¹¹ Those who cherish your name, O
Lord, can rely on you, for you have
never forsaken those who look to
you.

¹² Sing praises to the Lord en-

⁹ This psalm was written at a time of anguish. It opposes two types of men: the oppressed who acknowledge God and the oppressors who despise God as much as they despise men (the poor, the orphans, the workers). The godless are not concerned about the judgment of God, because he is far away and does not intervene.

God, in fact, appears very remote, passive and silent. Thus, the psalmist expresses his complaint in a passionate way: *Lord extend your hand, break the arm of the godless*. God is Lord and he will have the final word, to

the extent that we should fear no one here since even man is "made of clay." God will do justice for the oppressed and for those who suffer.

Every Christian with enough earthly possessions must seriously ask himself if he is not responsible, to some degree and in some way, for these injustices and oppressions. We know, from the book of Exodus, that God's judgment can fall over the oppressors in a tremendous way. We also know that authentic love, the source of justice, can change the face of the earth.

throned in Zion, proclaim his deeds among the nations.

¹³ For he who avenges blood remembers and has not turned a deaf ear to the cries of the multitude that suffers.

¹⁴ Have mercy on me, O Lord. See how my foes have afflicted me. Oh, lift me up from the gates of death, ¹⁵ that I may declare all your praise, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation.

¹⁶ The nations have sunk into the pit they have dug, their own feet ensnared by the trap they laid.

¹⁷ The Lord has made himself manifest in the execution of his judgment – the wicked plotters have been trapped by the work of their own hands.

¹⁸ To the netherworld the wicked will depart, all the nations that turn away from God.

¹⁹ For the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish forever.

²⁰ Rise, O Lord, let not man prevail; let the nations stand on trial before you.

²¹ With terror, O Lord, strike at them; let the people realize that they are but men.

PSALM 10 (9)

Continuation of the previous psalm.

¹ Why, O Lord, do you stand afar? Why hide from us in trouble and war?

² The weak suffer harassment from the wicked acting in arrogance; the poor become victims of the evil-doer's vicious contrivance.

³ The exploiter wallows in his power and greed; the covetous blasphemes and renounces God.

⁴ In his pride the wicked says,

"There is no God to ask me for account."

⁵ Evil people prosper in their ways, your laws have become too far from their minds; in haughtiness they sneer at all their rivals, ⁶ saying to themselves, "Nothing will trouble me. I will always be secure, powerful and happy."

⁷ His mouth is full of curses, deceit and oppressive language; under his tongue are spite and mischief.

⁸ He lies in ambush near the villages, murdering the innocent and the unfortunate, spying upon his next victim.

⁹ He lurks in secret, like a lion in its covert, waiting to seize his prey and drag him off in his net.

¹⁰ Stooping, lying prone or crouching, he waits till the hapless victim falls into his power.

¹¹ He thinks to himself: "God has forgotten; he has hidden his face and will never see this."

¹² Rise, Lord, O God, raise your hand, do not forget the afflicted.

¹³ Why do the wicked revile Go and assure themselves, saying, "He cannot hold me accountable for what I do"?

¹⁴ But you see those in misery, O God, and you take them into your hands. The unfortunate commits himself to you; the orphan turns to you for help.

¹⁵ Break the power of the wicked – seek out their wickedness till there is none to be found.

¹⁶ The Lord is king forever and ever; the pagans are doomed to vanish from his land.

¹⁷ You hear, O Lord, the longings of the afflicted, and you strengthen their hearts; ¹⁸ you give heed to the miserable plight of the exploited, so that man may no longer strike terror on earth.

PSALM 11 (10)

If the foundations are in ruins, what can the just man do? This is what the Tempter suggests: you will achieve nothing by denouncing evil. Everybody does it, do as they do and shut up: "Flee, you half wit, to the mountain"; you have seen nothing; forget injustice and mind your own business. Or else, simply comply with your religious practices.

The just are not afraid. – If God is with us, who will condemn us? May he free us from fear when we have to remain steadfast before the threats or the scorn of others.

¹In the Lord I take refuge.
How, then, can you say to me,
"Flee to the mountains like a bird"?

²Look, the wicked fit their arrows
to the string and bend their bows.
They get ready to shoot in the dark,
they take aim at the upright of heart.

³When foundations fall to ruin,
what can they do – the righteous men?

⁴The Lord is in his holy mountain –
our God whose throne is in heaven.
He looks down to the earth
to observe the children of men.

⁵The Lord examines both righteous and wicked.
He hates those who delight in violence.

⁶Upon the wicked, he will rain
coals of fire and brimstone;
a burning blast will be their lot.

⁷For the Lord is righteous;
he loves justice.
The upright man will see his face.

PSALM 12 (11)

Against the world of lies. – Lies, propaganda, false prophets of the easy life, all of this hides the daily injustices. On the contrary, the Word of God is truthful and it will judge everyone. In the Word of God become flesh, that is to say, in Christ, there is no "yes" with "no": in him all of God's promises have become a "yes."

²Help us, O Lord, for the godly are all gone,
and the faithful are no longer seen.

³Everybody lies and with flattering lips speaks
from a double-dealing heart.

⁴May the Lord cut off every insincere lip,
every glib tongue that utters deceit.

⁵Many say, "Our strength lies in our tongue.
We know how to speak,
who will lord it over us?"

⁶"The poor are despoiled
and the needy suffer,
I will now save them," says the Lord.
"I will give them security."

⁷The promises of the Lord are clear

and strong – silver refined from the furnace,
seven times, and freed from dross.

⁸ Do save us, O Lord, for your keeping;
protect us always from this generation,
⁹ where on all sides the wicked prowls,
and the basest of them are exalted.

PSALM 13 (12)

Look and listen to me. – God does not forget his children; he raised up Christ. May he lead his people from the present trials to his glory.

¹ Till when, O Lord, will you forget me?
Till when will you hide your face from me?
² Till when must I suffer pain in my soul
and bear grief in my heart all the day long?
Till when shall my enemy triumph over me?
³ Look upon me and answer, O Lord my God!
Give light to my eyes,
lest I sleep the sleep of death;
⁴ lest my enemy say,
"I have put him to rout";
lest my foes rejoice in seeing me brought to
naught.
⁵ But I put my trust in your unfailing love,
my heart rejoices in your redeeming grace.
I will sing to Yahweh,
for he has been good to me!

PSALM 14 (13)

The world without God. – There is not a single just person in our sinful world. The believer remains confident: God is faithful.

¹ The fool says in his heart,
"God does not exist."
All have strayed,
all are perverted,
there is no one who does good.
² The Lord looks down from heaven
upon the children of men,
to see if there are any
who seek God and act wisely.
³ They have all turned aside:
corrupt – all of them alike.
⁴ Will they ever learn –
these doers of evil,
For they devour my people,
just as they devour their food
and call not upon the Lord.

⁵ They shall be in such great terror
as has never been known before,
for God is on the side of the virtuous.

⁶ You may confound the hope of the poor,
but you will get nowhere,
for the Lord is there refuge.

⁷ Oh that out of Zion
would come Israel's salvation!
When the Lord brings home
his people from exile –
what joy will it be for Jacob,
what happiness for Israel!

PSALM 15 (14)

Following are two prayers from
the baptismal ceremony:

"Receive this white garment and
present it without stain at the tribunal
of Jesus Christ, in such a way as to
possess eternal life."

"Receive this lighted candle and
keep the grace of your baptism with
abiding faithfulness. Observe God's
commandments so that when the
Lord comes for the eternal wedding
feast, you will meet him with all the
saints of the heavenly court and live
for ever and ever."

Lord, who shall dwell in your tent? – May the Lord help us
to follow his commands.

¹ O Lord who will dwell in your tent
and reside on your holy mount?

² He who walks blameless
and does what is right;
who speaks truth from his heart
³ and controls his words;

⁴ who looks down on evildoers
but highly regards God's servants
who at all cost stands
by a pledged word;

⁵ who does not lend money with interest
and refuses a bribe
to victimize the innocent.
He who does all this
will never be shaken.

PSALM 16 (15)

The Israelites lived in the midst of
pagan nations, but even among this
people, there were those who shared
pagan superstitions even though
they professed to believe in the one
God. When they participated in the
sacrifices offered to the local gods,
they were mixing authentic religion
with idolatry.

The author of this psalm struggles
against this attitude. The God of Is-
rael is their Lord, his most precious
asset, the part allotted to him in
entering this world (the *cup* they
used in drawing lots). This allegiance
to God does not manifest itself only in
visible ways, religious practices, but it

The Lord is part of my inheritance. – God is part of my
inheritance since I chose him as the only Lord. I will delight in him
for all eternity.

¹ Keep me safe, O God,
for in you I take refuge.

² I say to the Lord,
"You, my Lord, are my only good."

³ How many people in your land
delight in other deities.

⁴ Those who ran after foreign gods
only have their sorrows multiplied.
I will not shed blood for them
and never will I rely on them.

penetrates the core of his being. God is the center of his thoughts and his desires night and day. "You cannot abandon me soul to hell nor allow your friend to be corrupted." The psalmist is certain that God can pull him out of that dark and sad place, "sheol," where, according to Jewish mentality the souls of the dead were located, in order to introduce him at his right hand, in the fullness of life and joy for ever. From the beginning, Christians realized that these words applied in a special way to the Risen Jesus (Acts 2:25 and 13:35). Because Jesus had been the perfect servant of his Father, God snatched him from the corruption of the grave on the day of his Resurrection.

This psalm also applies to each one of us. Through baptism the Christian becomes a member of Christ and thus he belongs to God. Some experience this in a more radical sense when they renounce the world to dedicate themselves exclusively to the service of the Gospel. Yet, all Christians are called, in one form or another, to give witness to God as the only Lord, among men. Even among those who claim to be Christians, there are some people who sacrifice their Christian dignity on the altar of money and success.

⁵ O Lord, my heritage and my cup,
my chosen portion – hold secure my lot.

⁶ Pleasant places have been marked out
for me by the measuring lines.
Delightful indeed is my inheritance!

⁷ I bless the Lord who counsels me;
even at night, my inmost self instructs me.

⁸ I keep the Lord always before me;
for with him at my right hand – never
will I be shaken or troubled.

⁹ My heart, therefore, exults, my soul rejoices;
my body, too will rest assured.

¹⁰ For you will not abandon
my soul to the grave,
nor will you suffer your holy one
to see decay in the land of the dead.

¹¹ You will show me the path of life,
in your presence the fullness of joy,
at your right hand happiness for ever and ever.

PSALM 17 (16)

Outcry of the innocent.

¹ Hear a just cause, O Lord,
listen to my pleading word.
Give heed to my prayer
which my lips free from deceit utter.

² Let my defense come forth from you;
your eyes see what is right.

³ Probe my heart, search me at night,
test me by fire, and you will see
no wickedness in me.

⁴ I have not sinned by my words
as humans do;
I have kept your word
and followed your ways.

⁵ Hold firm my steps upon your path,
that my feet stumble not.

⁶ I call on you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me; hear my word.

⁷ Show your wonderful love, O saviour
of those who flee from their persecutors
to seek refuge at your right hand.

⁸ Keep me as the apple of your eye;
under the shadow of your wings hide me,

⁹far away from my violent pursuers,
from the onslaught of my wicked despoilers.

¹⁰Their mouths speaking arrogantly
they have shut their hearts to mercy.

¹¹They surround me now,
their eyes eager to see me overthrown.

¹²They are like lions made fierce by hunger,
wanting nothing but to kill and tear.

¹³Arise, O Lord, confront them!
Let your sword deliver me from the wicked.

¹⁴O Lord, do away with them;
strike them with your hand
and give them no share with the living.
May their belly be filled
with what you have stored up for them.
And may their sons have more than enough
to leave to their descendants.

¹⁵As for me, righteous in your sight,
I shall see your face and, awakening,
gaze my fill on your likeness.

PSALM 18 (17)

A liberator gives thanks to God. – This psalm was written after a victory. We are impressed by the underlying enthusiasm, the fervor of the gratitude and the marvelous idea the psalmist has of God.

²I love you, O Lord, my strength.

³The Lord is my rock, my rampart,
my deliverer and my God, the rock in
whom I take refuge. He is my shield,
the horn of my salvation, my strong-
hold.

⁴I call on the Lord, who is worthy
of praise; he saves me from my ene-
mies.

⁵Torrents of destruction in a vio-
lent rampage, rushed at me in their
vicious rage.

⁶Caught as by the cords of the
grave, I was utterly helpless before
the snares of death.

⁷But I called upon the Lord in my
distress, to my God I cried for help;

and from his temple he heard my
voice, my cry of grief reached his
ears. Then the earth reeled and
rocked; the foundations of the moun-
tains shook; they trembled at his fury.

⁹Smoke rose from his nostrils,
from his mouth a devouring fire
throwing off live embers.

¹⁰He bent the heavens and came
down with dark clouds under his feet.

¹¹He rode on a cherub and flew,
borne on the swift wings of the wind.

¹²Veiled with darkness surround-
ing him, he made misty rain clouds his
tent.

¹³Then from the brightness of his
presence hail and fiery embers broke

¹⁸He inclined the heavens and came down. He literally did this when his own Son came down among us and became one of us in order to deliver mankind from their interior (sin, suffering) and also exterior enemies (the control of others, cultural imperialism, ignorance).

Christian worship and especially the mass is "thanks giving" to God for this work. However, the entire life of men must be one of gratitude to God.

By being transformed, by becoming the image and likeness of God ever more clearly and purely, we are praising God.

forth. ¹⁴From heaven the Lord thundered: the voice of the Most High resounded.

¹⁵Sending out a hail of arrows, he scattered them; flashing forth bolts of lightning, he routed them.

¹⁶The beds of the seas lay uncovered as the foundations of the world were bared at the rebuke the Lord uttered, at the blast of his nostril's breath.

¹⁷Reaching down from above, he drew me out of the deep waters.

¹⁸Too strong for me were my enemies, but he rescued me from my adversaries.

¹⁹They launched their attack in an opportune day but the Lord has been my stay.

²⁰In the open he has set me free. How great indeed is his love for me!

²¹The Lord rewarded me according to his justice, and according also to my righteousness.

²²For I have been faithful to the Lord's way and from my God have not fallen away.

²³With his ordinances all before me, I have always followed his statutes.

²⁴Before him I have done uprightly and kept myself from iniquity.

²⁵Therefore the Lord has given me recompense according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands.

²⁶To the faithful you show yourself faithful; to the blameless you show yourself blameless; ²⁷to the pure you show yourself pure; but to the crooked you show yourself astute.

²⁸For you raise up the humble and bring down the arrogant.

²⁹Lord, you give light to my lamp. O my God, you brighten up the dark.

³⁰Yes, with you I can crush an armed band, and by my God I can leap over a wall.

³¹This God – his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is always fulfilled.

For those who seek refuge in him, he is a shield.

³²There is no other God but the Lord. There is no other rock but our God.

³³He is the God who girds me with strength and keeps my path unerring and safe.

³⁴He has made my feet as swift as the hinds'; he has set me secure on the heights.

³⁵He trains my hands for war and my arms to bend a bow of brass.

³⁶You have given me your shield for protection, your right hand has upheld me, and your help has made me great.

³⁷You have given a wide space for my steps, so that they never faltered.

³⁸I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them; I did not turn back till I had destroyed them.

³⁹Thrusting them through, I did not give them time to rise as they fell under my feet.

⁴⁰You have given me strength for the battle; you have subdued my adversaries beneath me;

⁴¹you have put my enemies to flight and destroyed those who hated me.

⁴²They cried for help, but no one came. They cried to the Lord; he did not answer them.

⁴³I pulverized them as dust before the wind; like mud in the streets I trampled them.

⁴⁴You have delivered me from the people's assault and have made me head over the nations. They came to serve me – people I have not known.

⁴⁵At the sound of my voice, they rose to obey. Foreigners approached me cringing and fawning. ⁴⁶Staggering out of their fortresses, they came to me trembling in fear.

⁴⁷The Lord lives! Praised be my rock! Exalted be my saviour God –

⁴⁸the God who granted me vengeance and subdued the peoples for me.

⁴⁹He delivered me from my foes; he exalted me above my adversaries; he rescued me from men of violence.

⁵⁰For this I will extol you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing praise to your name.

⁵¹You have given your king great victory; you have shown your love to your anointed David, and to his descendants forever.

PSALM 19 (18)

The Lord, the sun of justice. – We have a tiny glimpse of God's glory in the splendor of the sky. We also have a sense of his presence when we meditate on his commandments, light and happiness to the soul.

² The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the work of his hands.

³ Day talks it over with day; night hands on the knowledge to night.

⁴ No speech, no words, no voice heard –

⁵ but the call goes on throughout the universe;

the message is felt to the ends of the earth.

⁶ High above, he has pitched a tent for the sun, which comes out as a bridegroom from his pavilion,

or as a relay champion all set to run his course.

⁷ Rising from one end, it makes its circuit of the heavens, and sets at the other end; and nothing is hidden from its heat.

⁸ The law of the Lord is perfect: it gives life to the soul.

The word of the Lord is trustworthy: it gives wisdom to the simple.

⁹ The precepts of the Lord are right: they give joy to the heart.

The commandments of the Lord are clear: they enlighten the eyes.

¹⁰ The fear of the Lord is pure, it endures forever;

the judgments of the Lord are true, altogether just and right.

¹¹ More precious are they than gold – even pure gold of the highest quality; they are much sweeter than honey and drippings from the honeycomb.

¹² They are a light to your servant, keeping them is indeed a great reward.

Following are some lines from the book, *The Imitation of Christ* (3:1), inviting us to discover those other wonders that God works in us.

Happy the soul who listens to the Lord speaking to it deep within, gathering from his lips the Word of life and joy!

Happy the eyes closing to external spectacles in order to be more attentive to the inner vision.

Focus on these things, my soul, close the door to your senses, in order to be able to hear what the Lord, your God is saying.

¹³ But how can I discern my own errors?
 Forgive my failings of which I am unaware.

¹⁴ Help me also keep away from willful sin;
 do not let it get the better of your servant.
 Would that I walk blameless
 and innocent of transgression!

¹⁵ May the words of my mouth
 and the meditations of my heart
 find favor in your sight,
 O Lord – my redeemer, my rock!

PSALM 20 (19)

Prayer of the Jews for their king. – For the one they call "Christ," that is, the Anointed of God. May the Lord protect those who struggle to bring about the reign of truth as he protected Christ, our king.

² May the Lord answer you in time of calamity;
 may the name of Jacob's God give you
 protection.

³ May he send you help from the sanctuary
 and give you support from Mount Zion.

⁴ May he remember all your oblations tenderly
 and regard your burnt offerings favorably.

⁵ May he grant you the desire of your heart
 and the fulfillment of all your plans.

⁶ In your victory we will shout for joy
 and in God's name raise our banner.
 May the Lord grant all your requests.

⁷ Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;
 he has answered him from his holy heaven
 with victories of his right hand.

⁸ Some boast of chariots, some of horses;
 but our boast is in the name of the Lord our God.

⁹ Their forces will collapse and be crushed,
 but ours will rise resolute and undeterred.

¹⁰ When we call, answer us –
 O Lord, make the king victorious!

PSALM 21 (20)

Thanksgiving for our King. – "He asked life of you and you gave it to him, to live many years, forever and ever."

² In your power the king rejoices,
 O Lord; for you gave him victory.

³ His desire you have granted him;
 his request you have not rejected.

⁴ Surely you have welcomed him

with rich blessings; you have placed a
 golden crown upon his head.

⁵ When he asked for it, you gave
 him life: for length of days – forever
 and ever.

⁶Great is his glory through your victory; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty.

⁷You have conferred on him eternal blessings; you have made him glad with your presence.

⁸Since the king trusts in the Lord, through the love of the Most High, his reign will be unshaken.

⁹Your hand will reach all your enemies; and lay hold of all your foes.

¹⁰When you appear you will make of them a blazing furnace. The Lord

will devour them in his wrath; his fire will engulf them, burning them up.

¹¹You will destroy their fruit from the earth and their posterity from humanity.

¹²Against you they may plot evil, they may devise wicked schemes, but they will never win;

¹³for they will fall back in fear when you aim your arrows at them.

¹⁴Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength! We will sing in praise of your might.

PSALM 22 (21)

The prayer of Christ on the Cross. – Reading this psalm reminds us of going from night to dawn. The first part is gloomy, dark; the second is like the sunrise lighting up the fields, bringing things back to life, and happiness to men's hearts. The theme of this psalm is in fact, that of the persecuted one, who on the verge of the abyss, recovers assurance and confidence.

²My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from me, so far from the words of my groaning?

³O my God, I call all day, but you do not answer; and all night I cry to you but find no rest.

⁴Yet you are enthroned the Holy One, the praise of Israel.

⁵In you our fathers put their trust, and you delivered them

⁶To you they cried and they were saved; in you they trusted and were not frustrated.

⁷But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men, despised by people.

⁸All who see me make a jest of me; they sneer and shake their heads.

⁹"He put his trust in the Lord, let the Lord rescue him! If the Lord is his friend, let him help him!"

¹⁰Yet it is you who brought me out of the womb and kept me safe at my mother's breasts.

¹¹I have been yours since I was born; you are my God from my mother's womb.

¹²Stay not far from me for trouble is near, and there is no one to help me.

¹³I am surrounded by a herd of bulls – strong bulls of Bashan closing in on me,

¹⁴their mouths open, like lions roaring at their prey.

¹⁵I am like water drained out; my bones are all out of joint, my heart melts away like wax.

¹⁶My strength is dried up like a potsherd; my tongue is stuck to my palate. You have laid me down in the dust of death.

¹⁷Round about me are vicious dogs; encircling me are villainous rogues. They have pierced my hands and feet.

¹⁸I can count all my bones. There they are, gloating over me,

¹⁹dividing among them my gar-

²¹ When we read the Bible it does not seem that, with so many blessings from God, the kings of Israel, his chosen ones, were more successful than any other king. But the Word of God is true: God's elect discover with amazement that by persevering in their faithfulness, God works wonders in their lives.

²² Christian tradition applied this psalm to Jesus himself from the beginning. In fact, in reading it we find many references to the details of Jesus' Passion. The 'bulls,' the 'lion,' the 'dogs' point to his enemies, the comparison with the worm fits the humiliation of the blows and the infamy of the cross; the division of his

ments and casting lots for my raiment.

²⁰O Lord, be not far from me! O my strength, hurry to my aid!

⁴¹Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the powerful grip of the dog.

²²Rescue me from the jaws of the lion, my soul from the horns of the wild bull.

²³I will proclaim your name to my brothers, I will praise you in the assembly.

²⁴All you who fear the Lord, praise him! All you sons of Jacob, glorify him! All you sons of Israel, revere him!

²⁵For he has not scorned or loathed the afflicted in his misery. He has not hidden his face from him but has listened when he cried to him.

²⁶My praise is of you in the great assembly. I will fulfill my vows before those who fear you.

²⁷The poor will eat and be satisfied. Those who seek the Lord will praise him. May your hearts live forever!

²⁸From one end to the other the whole earth will remember and turn to the Lord; all the pagan nations will worship him.

²⁹For dominion belongs to the Lord and he reigns over the nations.

³⁰Before him all the rich will bow down; all who go down to the dust will bow. And for him my soul will live.

³¹My descendants will serve him, and proclaim the Lord to the coming generation; ³²they will announce his salvation to a people yet unborn. These are the things that he has done.

PSALM 23 (22)

The Lord is my shepherd. – He is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. Before me are the table and the cup of Christ. Better than the anointing with holy oil, I have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit (John 2:27); I look forward not to the rest of death, but to resurrection beside the Father.

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside the still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He guides me through the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Although I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil.

for you are beside me.

Your rod and your staff are there to comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my foes.

clothes also takes place exactly as it had been anointed.

However, there is much more than that. Jesus applied this psalm to himself when he cried from the cross: "My God, why have you abandoned me?" Jesus himself had the feeling of having called his Father in vain, as the Father is silent and deprives his Son of all heavenly consolation. Such was the supreme trial which Jesus wanted to endure in order to take on our sins.

Yet, in the midst of this tremendous darkness, deep down in Jesus' soul, there is a light which does not

flicker. He knows that in spite of silence, the Father is always with him and the entire second part of the psalm is a song of trust which rises and grows into a triumphant shout: the Crucified of Good Friday is transformed into the Glorious Lord and his rule will be universal. Jesus had said: "When I am lifted up above the earth, I will draw all things to me."

The Christian life involves passing from death to life. What is marvelous is that through Jesus, we can always draw good out of evil, happiness out of suffering and out of death itself.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup is overflowing.

⁶ Goodness and kindness will follow me
all the days of my life,
I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
as long as I live.

PSALM 24 (23)

Modern man's claim to advance more through scientific progress and social planning is not, in and of itself, pride but rather the manifestation of his great destiny. This destiny tends to more than earthly conquests; it tends to the life of God. Thus, God had to come to earth in order to bring men to his own dwelling.

The earth and its fullness are the Lord's. A procession makes its way to the Temple; the Israelites joyfully carry the Ark of the Covenant to the place where God himself, the Creator of the Universe, will dwell in their midst.

O gates, lift up your lintels so that the king of glory may come in. Let us contemplate this mystery: the Almighty comes to live in our midst and he dwells in the humble home we prepare for him. He became man in Mary's womb.

Who is this king of glory? On the day of his Resurrection and Ascension, Christ became the king of glory; he went up the "Holy Mountain" and was the first one to enter God's eternal dwelling place. All those who share his upright life and seek God with a sincere heart, will follow after him, also in the glory of Jesus and they will share eternal happiness.

The destiny of man. – God created the universe to display his riches in it; but the world is not finished until God has visited man, until the birth of the new Man, the son of God.

To the Lord belong the earth and its fullness –
the world and all that dwell in it.

² He has founded it upon the ocean,
and set it firmly upon the waters.

³ Who will ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who will stand in his holy place?

⁴ Those who are clean of hands and pure of
heart,
who desire not what is vain,
who never swear to a lie.

⁵ They will receive blessings from the Lord
and be holy for God, their saviour.

⁶ Such are the people who seek him,
who seek the face of Jacob's God.

⁷ Lift up, O gateways, your lintels,
open up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may enter!

⁸ Who is the king of glory?
The Lord, the strong, the mighty,
the Lord, the valiant in battle.

⁹ Lift up your lintels, O gateways,
open up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may enter!

¹⁰ Who is the King of glory?
The Lord of Hosts,
he is the King of glory!

PSALM 25 (24)

Calling on God in trials. – The Bible does not know despair. Even in the most difficult situations when man is broken by misfortune, anxiety, the weight of his own sins, he is always left with a way out. All our ways, even the worst, can finally lead to a Love stronger than all the powers of this world.

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

² O my God, in you I trust; let me
not be put to shame, let not my ene-

mies exult over me.

³ May those who hope in you never
be humbled; those who turn away



Where shall we find some likeness of the wonderful and magnificent God?



Shanty towns: inexhaustible reserves of hope and joy.

from you without cause suffer disgrace!

⁴Teach me your ways, O Lord; make me know your paths.

⁵Guide me in your truth and instruct me, for you are my God, my saviour, for I hope in you all the day long.

⁶Remember your compassion, O Lord, your unfailing love from of old.

⁷Remember not the sins of my youth, my transgressions and rebellious ways; but in your love remember me, O Lord!

⁸Good and upright, the Lord instructs the sinners in their paths.

⁹He teaches the humble of heart and guides them in what is right.

¹⁰The ways of the Lord are love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and precepts.

¹¹For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my iniquity, no matter how great it be.

¹²Those who fear the Lord will learn from him how to choose their way.

¹³In prosperity they will stand, and their descendants will inherit the land.

¹⁴The Lord comes to those who fear him and he makes his covenant known to them.

¹⁵My eyes are on the Lord forever, for he will free my feet from the snare.

¹⁶Turn to me and have compassion on my loneliness and affliction.

¹⁷Free my heart of its bitterness; relieve me from this harrowing distress.

¹⁸Consider my trouble and all my sufferings, and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹See how my enemies have increased and how they look at me with violent hatred.

²⁰Deliver my life from them; let me not be put to shame, for it is to you that I look for rescue.

²¹Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for all my hope, O Lord, lies in you.

²²Redeem, O God, redeem Israel from her troubles!

PSALM 26 (25)

Prayer of the just man. – Let us adopt the prayer of this "just" confirming his faithfulness. We should pay no attention to our merits, as the Pharisees do, but to the new person we put on in baptism: Christ has purified and enriched us.

Vindicate me, O Lord, for with integrity have I lived; my trust in the Lord has never wavered.

²Prove me, O Lord, put me to the test; examine my soul and search my heart.

³For your love is ever before my sight, and I live my life in truth and faith.

⁴I do not associate with the deceitful nor do I enjoy the acquaintance of hypocrites;

⁵I hate to be in league with evildoers or come together with the wicked.

⁶I wash my hands free of guilt and walk in procession round your altar, ⁷singing in praise and proclaiming your wondrous deeds.

²⁵ Lord, remember all your kindness from of old, do not remember our sins. God's love for men has been sealed forever by Jesus' blood. God will never abandon his people. Every mass is a celebration of that covenant between God and men in the blood of Jesus.

²⁶ Following is a prayer of St. Anselm (11th century) asking for "justice":

Give me a pure and faithful soul, true and practi-

cal knowledge, with the love of your commandments and the ability to follow them in such a way. Lord, that I may walk with constant humility on the road to perfection and never go wrong.

Do not abandon me, Lord, to my own will, nor to human ignorance or weakness, nor to my merits, nor to anything other than your careful Providence.

That through me and in me, your holy will may be always followed.

"O Lord, I love the house where you dwell and the tabernacle of your glory.

⁹Let not my soul partake of the sinners' lot; let me not share the fate
¹⁰in whose hands are the guilt of their

crimes, whose right hands are weighed down with bribes.

¹¹But I will keep on living a life of integrity. Redeem me, O God, be gracious to me. ¹²I will praise you, O Lord, in your assemblies.

PSALM 27 (26)

Close to God, there is no fear. – "It is your face, O Lord, that I seek." "I hope to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." In the midst of the struggles of this life the fighter does not get discouraged because of the great hope the Lord has in store for him at the end of the struggle.

What I seek is to dwell in the house of the Lord. All the struggles, trials and temptations will not make us forget that the house of the Lord is at the end of the road.

He will shelter me in his home in the day of trouble. Those who have understood the countless riches of Christ's heart find in him a place of refuge always accessible.

"I will place the victor as a pillar in the Temple of my God. On him I will write the name of my God and my own new name" (Rv 3:12)

¹ The Lord is my light, my salvation
– whom shall I be afraid of?

the Lord is my battlement, my defender
– whom I shall I fear?

² When the wicked rush at me to eat up my flesh,
You make them stumble and fall.

³ Though a whole army encamp against me,
my heart will not fail;
though war break out against me,
I will still be confident.

⁴ One thing I ask of the Lord, one thing I seek –
that I dwell in his house all the days of my life,
that I may ever gaze at his beauty
and seek counsel in his sanctuary.

⁵ For he will keep me safe in his shelter
in times of calamity;
he will hide me beneath his roof
and find me a high place upon a rock.

⁶ Then my head will be lifted up
over the enemies round about me.
I will offer oblations at his tabernacle
together with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music in praise of the Lord.

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, O Lord,
have mercy on me and answer me.

⁸ You have said, "Seek my face"
and my heart says to you,
"Yes, Lord, your face I seek."

⁹ Do not hide your face from me
or turn away your servant in anger.
You have been my protector,
do not refuse or abandon me,
O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord in his love will yet receive me.

¹¹ O Lord, teach me your way;
lead me along a straight path.

¹² Save me from the will of my enemies;
false witness have gathered against me
to pin me down in their violence.

¹³ I hope to see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Trust in the Lord, be strong, be courageous
– yes, put your hope in the Lord!

PSALM 28 (27)

Do not be deaf to me, O my Rock.

To you I call, O Lord, be not deaf
to me, my rock.

For if you heed me not – like the
rest I go down to the pit.

² Hear my cry for compassion as I
call to you for protection, as I lift up
my hands toward your innermost
sanctuary.

³ Drag me not away with the
wicked, with those evil-scheming
men who mouth peace for neighbors
and nation, while they sow mischief
and confusion.

⁴ Punish them for their evil designs
and their wicked deeds; give them
their reward. Since they have no re-

gard for the works of the Lord, he will
tear them down and never let them
rise again.

⁶ Blessed be the Lord! He has heard
my cry for help.

⁷ The Lord is my strength, my
shield; in him my heart trusts. He
helps me and my heart exults, and
with my song I give him thanks.

⁸ The Lord is the strength of his
people, the saving refuge of his
anointed.

⁹ Save your people, and bless your
inheritance. Be their shepherd and
carry them forever.

PSALM 29 (28)

The storm: it is the Lord passing. – God speaks through the
storm: he manifests his power and his glory.

Give the Lord, O angels of God,
give the Lord glory and strength,
² give the Lord the glory due his name;
worship the Lord in sacred garments.

³ The voice of the Lord is over the
waters; the God of glory thunders, the
Lord thunders over vast waters.

⁴ How powerful, how majestic is
the voice of the Lord!

⁵ The voice of the Lord tears up the
cedars, the Lord shatters the cedars of
Lebanon.

⁶ He makes Lebanon skip like a
calf, and Sirion like a young wild bull.

⁷ The voice of the Lord breaks
forth with flashes of fire.

⁸ The voice of the Lord makes the
wilderness quake.

The Lord shakes the wilderness of
Kadesh.

⁹ The voice of the Lord makes the
oaks shudder, the Lord strips the for-
ests bare. And in his temple all cry,
"Glory!"

¹⁰ Over the flood the Lord sits enthroned; the Lord is king and he reigns for ever.

¹¹ May the Lord give his people strength; may the Lord bless his people with peace!

PSALM 30 (29)

I will praise you because you have freed me. —In this life, nothing is definitive. For each of us, the Lord alternates between joys and trials according to what we need to grow in faith. Often we are caught by surprise: trials depress us as if God no longer existed and when God's blessings come, we do not dare believe they are real.

² I extol you, O Lord, for having rescued me from the depths, for not allowing my enemies to gloat over me.

³ O Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.

⁴ O Lord, you brought me up from the grave and saved me from going down to the pit.

⁵ Sing to the Lord, O you saints of his, give thanks and praise to his holy name.

⁶ For his anger lasts a little while, but his kindness all through life.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but rejoicing comes with the dawn.

⁷ Once in my prosperity I said, "I shall not be troubled."

⁸ In your good will, O Lord, you

built my stronghold but when you hid your face, how greatly terrified I was!

⁹ To you, O Lord, I called; to the Lord I begged for mercy:

¹⁰ What good would there be in my destruction, in my going down to the pit? Would the dust give you praise?

Would it proclaim your faithfulness?

¹¹ Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; O Lord, be my protector."

¹² Since then, you have turned my mourning into rejoicing; you have taken off my sackcloth and wrapped me in the garments of gladness.

¹³ And so my soul, no longer silent, now sings praise without ceasing. O Lord my God, forever will I give you thanks.

PSALM 31 (30)

I seek refuge in you O Lord.

² In you, O Lord, I take refuge, never let me be disgraced; deliver me in your justice.

³ Give heed to my plea, and make haste to rescue me.

Be a rock for my refuge, ⁴a strong fortress for my safety. My rock and my stronghold, lead me for your name's sake; ⁵free me from the snare that they have set for me. Indeed you are my protector.

⁶ Into your hands I commend my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

⁷ You hate those who worship

worthless idols; but I put all my trust in the Lord.

⁸ I will rejoice and be glad in your love, for you have seen my affliction, you know the agony of my soul, ⁹and instead of handing me over to the enemy you gave me room to move freely.

¹⁰ Be merciful to me, O Lord, in my affliction; my eyes have grown dim with sorrow, my body emaciated, my soul weakened.

¹¹ For my life is wracked with grief, and my years worn out in anguish. My strength fails because of

my iniquity which consumes me to the very bones.

¹² I have become an object of reproach for my foes, and for my neighbours. I have become so horrible to my friends that they hurry away from me when they see me in the streets.

I am like the dead, unremembered; I have become like a broken pot, thrown away, discarded.

¹⁴ I hear the whispering among the crowd, rumors that frighten me from every side – their conspiracies, their schemes, their plot to take my life.

¹⁵ But I put my trust in you, O Lord. You are my God;

¹⁶ my days are in your hand. Deliver me from evil men, from those after my skin.

¹⁷ Make your face shine upon your servant; save me in your love.

¹⁸ Let not my honor be assailed, O Lord, for it is on you that I have called; but may the wicked lie dishon-

oured in their grave, dumb and baffled.

¹⁹ Let their lying lips close in silence for speaking against the just in malice and arrogance.

²⁰ How great your goodness which is stored for those who fear you, O Lord, for those who take refuge in you in the sight of men!

²¹ In the covert of your presence you hide them from men's wiles; you keep them in your dwelling, safe from the intrigues of wagging tongues.

²² Blessed be the Lord for his wonderful love! He has strengthened my heart.

²³ I said in my fright: "I have been cut off from your sight!"

But when I cried, you heard; when I called for mercy, you listened.

²⁴ Love the Lord, all you saints of his! The Lord preserves his faithful, But he fully requites the arrogant.

²⁵ Be strong and take courage, all you whose hope is in the Lord.

PSALM 32 (31)

When we pray that God will heal a sick person, we do not separate the health of the body from that of the soul. This is expressed in the following prayer from the Anointing of the Sick.

"O Jesus our Saviour, we beg you in virtue of the Holy Spirit, to cure this man's illness; cure his wounds; forgive his sins; discard everything torturing his body and soul; give him back, we pray, physical and spiritual health so that, healed by your goodness, he may again return to his work."

Relief of the person who confessed his sin. – Hidden sins ruin our conscience. Confession is already a liberation.

Blessed is the one whose sin is forgiven, whose iniquity is wiped away.

² Blessed are those to whom the Lord imputes no guilt and in whose spirit is found no deceit.

³ When I kept my sin secret, my body wasted away suffering all day.

⁴ Upon me lay your heavy hand; I felt its weight day and night, weakening me, parching my heart, as in the heat of a summer drought.

⁵ Then I made known to you my failings and uncovered before you my iniquity, saying to myself, "To the Lord I will now confess my wrong." And you, you forgave my sin, you removed my guilt.

⁶ So let the faithful ones pray

to you in the time of distress
and overflowing waters;
the flood will not reach them.

⁷ You are my refuge
you protect me from distress
and surround me with songs of salvation.

⁸ I will teach you and show
the way that you should follow.
I will watch over you and give you counsel.

⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule –
senseless and led by bit and bridle.

¹⁰ The woes awaiting the wicked are beyond
measure,
but the Lord's mercy and faithful love assure
the man whose hope and trust in God endure.

¹¹ Rejoice in the Lord, and be glad,
you who are upright;
sing and shout for joy,
you who are clean of heart.

PSALM 33 (32)

God's Providence looks after the world. – "Happy the people whose God is the Lord." The Lord looks upon those who fear him.

¹ Rejoice in the Lord, you who are just,
praise is fitting for the upright.

² Give thanks to him on the harp and lyre,
making melody and chanting praises.

³ Amid loud shouts of joy,
sing to him a new song
and play the ten-stringed harp.

⁴ For upright is the Lord's word
and worthy of trust is his work.

⁵ The Lord loves justice and righteousness;
the earth is full of his kindness.

⁶ By the word of the Lord were the heavens
made,
and all their starry host, by his mouth's breath.
⁷ He gathered the waters of the sea into a heap,
and stored the deep in cellars.

⁸ Let the whole earth fear the Lord,
let the inhabitants of the world
stand in awe of him.

⁹ For he spoke, and all were created;
and there they were, as he commanded.

¹⁰ The Lord frustrates the plans of the nations
and brings to nothing the people's designs.

¹¹ But his plan stands forever,
and his heart's design through all generations.

¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord –
the people he has chosen for his inheritance.

¹³ The Lord looks down from heaven
and he sees all the sons of men.

¹⁴ From where he sits he watches
all those who dwell on earth –

¹⁵ he who fashions the heart of each, observes all
their deeds.

¹⁶ A king is not saved by his large army,
nor a warrior rescued by his powerful strength.

¹⁷ In war, the horse is vain hope for glory;
its great strength gives no assurance of victory.

¹⁸ But the Lord's eyes are upon those who fear
him,

upon those who trust in his loving kindness

¹⁹ to deliver them from death
and preserve them from famine and distress.

²⁰ In hope we wait for the Lord,
for he is our help and our shield.

²¹ Our hearts rejoice in him,
for we trust in his holy name.

²² O Lord, let your love rest upon us,
even as we let our hope rest upon you.

PSALM 34 (33)

Taste and see how good is the Lord. – Let us listen to the experience of the poor and the humble: God becomes very close to those who have no other support except him.

² I will extol the Lord always;
on my lips will ever be his praise.

³ In the Lord my soul makes its boast;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

⁴ Oh, let us together glorify the Lord,
let us together glorify his name!

⁵ I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
from all my fears he delivered me.

⁶ Radiant with joy are those who look to him,
their faces never clouded with shame.

⁷ When the poor cry out, the Lord hears
and saves them from distress.

⁸ The Lord's angel encamps around those who
fear him, and he keeps them safe.

⁹ Oh, see and feel the goodness of the Lord!
Blessed is the one who finds shelter in him!
¹⁰ Oh, fear the Lord, all you his saints,
for those who fear him do not live in want.
¹¹ The mighty may be in hunger and wanting,
but those who seek the Lord lack nothing.
¹² Come and listen to me, my sons;
I will show you how to fear the Lord.
¹³ Those among you who desire long life
and enjoyment of prosperity,
¹⁴ keep your tongue from falsehood,
keep your lips from deceit;
¹⁵ turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
¹⁶ The eyes of the Lord are turned
towards the righteous;
his ears are inclined to their cries.
¹⁷ But his face is set against the wicked
to destroy their memory from the earth.
¹⁸ The Lord hears the righteous' cry for help
and rescues them from all their troubles.
¹⁹ The Lord is close to the brokenhearted
and helps those crushed in spirit.
²⁰ Many are the troubles of the just,
but the Lord delivers them out of them all.
²¹ He keeps intact all their bones,
and none of them will be broken.
²² Evil will slay the wicked;
the enemies of the just will be doomed.
²³ But the Lord redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who trust him will be doomed.

PSALM 35 (34)

Petition of a persecuted just one. – In many parts this psalm resembles psalm 22 which announces Christ's Passion in such a moving way.

O Lord attack those who attack me;
Battle those who battle me.
² Come to my aid with your sword and buckler;
³ stand with your lance and halt my pursuers. Say to my son, "I am your deliverer."
⁴ Let them be shamed and dishonored, they who seek my life. Let them

be routed and destroyed, they who plot my ruin.

⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the Lord's angel driving them away.

⁶ Let their escape path be dark and precipitous, with the Lord's angel always at their heels.

⁷ They set their net against me for

no cause, they dug a pit for me without reason.

⁸ Let ruin come upon them unexpectedly, let them be entangled in their own snare; let them fall into the trap of their own making.

⁹ Then will my soul rejoice in the Lord and exult in his salvation.

¹⁰ My whole being will exclaim, "O Lord, who is like you, who deliver the oppressed from stronger oppressors, who rescue the poor and the afflicted from their despoilers?"

¹¹ False witnesses take the stand, accusing me of crimes of which I am innocent.

¹² With evil they return my kindness, making my life forlorn.

¹³ When they were sick, I also felt afflicted; in commiseration, I wore sackcloth and fasted.

I prayed hard with head bowed, ¹⁴ as if I were bereft of a friend or brother; I shed tears in grief, as if I were mourning the death of my mother.

¹⁵ But when I stumbled they gathered in glee and, to my surprise, began attacking me; even cripples who were strangers to me came out with their fabricated charges.

¹⁶ Like the ungodly circle of mockers, they gnashed their teeth and made me the butt of their buffoonery.

¹⁷ How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, deliver my life from these lions.

¹⁸ Then I will thank you in the great assembly; I will praise you in the mighty throng.

¹⁹ Do not let them gloat over me – those who, unprovoked, have become my foes. Do not let them wink maliciously – those who hate me without cause.

²⁰ Sowing discontent with their tongue and mind, they devise false accusations against the peace-loving people of the land.

²¹ Against me they open wide their mouths: "Aha, aha!" they say, "We have seen it with our own eyes!"

²² But it is you, O Lord, who see the truth. Do not keep silent. Do not stand aside.

²³ Stir yourself up, stand for my right and for my cause, my God and my Lord!

²⁴ Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your justice. Do not give them the opportunity to gloat over me.

²⁵ Do not let them say to themselves, "Aha, just what we wanted!" Never give them the reason to say, "We have trampled him down!"

²⁶ Let them be utterly disgraced and confounded, who exult over my calamity. Let them be ashamed and dishonored, who rejoice at my distress.

²⁷ But let them be glad and rejoice, who are in sympathy with my cause. And may they ever say, "Great is the Lord, who gives his servant the deserved reward."

²⁸ My tongue will then proclaim your goodness, and sing your praises all day long.

PSALM 36 (35)

The wickedness of the sinner and the goodness of God.
– The very evil in men urges us to trust in God's goodness.

² Wickedness speaks to the wicked in the depths of his heart: there is no fear of God before his eyes. His eyes so blinded by conceit, he fails to see his guilt.

⁴ With a mouth full of malice and deceit; they no longer think of doing good.

⁵ Ever persistent in their crooked ways, they keep plotting mischief

even in bed; they are committed to a life of sin and know not how to reject evil.

⁶Your love, O Lord, rises to the heavens; your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁷Great is your justice like mighty mountains, and your judgment like the unfathomable deep. You preserve, O Lord, both man and beast.

⁸How precious, O God, is your constant love! The children of men, rich and poor alike, take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁹In your house they feast in abundance you give them drink from your spring of delight,

¹⁰for with you is the fountain of life. We see the light by your own light.

¹¹Bestow your love unfailingly on your faithful and your salvation upon the upright in heart.

¹²Let not the arrogant foot trample me down, nor the wicked hand drive me away.

¹³See how the evildoers lie fallen, battered and never to rise again.

PSALM 37 (36)

There will be happiness for the just and downfall for the wicked. – "Do not be scandalized or envious of the success of evildoers." This psalm develops the teaching of the wise men of Israel: neither power nor wealth give access to the inheritance that God promised to his children.

Do not get worried over evil people nor be envious of wrongdoers.

²For they will fade as any green herb and soon be gone like withered grass.

³Trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and be at ease.

⁴Make the Lord your delight, and he will grant your heart's desire.

⁵Commit your way to the Lord; put your trust in him and let him act.

⁶Then will your vindication come, beautiful as the dawn, and the justification of your cause, bright as the noonday sun.

⁷Keep calm before the Lord, wait for him in patience; do not fret if others succeed when they carry out evil schemes.

⁸Refrain from anger, turn away from wrath; fret not, for it only leads to evil.

⁹Remember this: the wicked will perish, but those who hope in the Lord will have the land for their inheritance.

¹⁰Just tarry for a little while, and the wicked shall be no more. Though

you look for them, they will not be found; ¹¹but the humble of heart will inherit the land and enjoy peace in abundance.

¹²The wicked plot against the virtuous and gnash their teeth at them; ¹³but the Lord derides the wicked, for he sees their day coming.

¹⁴The wicked draw their swords and bend their bows; they aim at the poor and the afflicted, they get ready to slay the righteous.

¹⁵But their bows will be shattered; they will be slain by their own swords.

¹⁶The little that the righteous possess is better than the abundance of the wicked.

¹⁷For the power of the wicked will be shattered, and the righteous will be upheld by the Lord.

¹⁸The Lord watches over the lives of the upright; forever will their inheritance abide.

¹⁹They do not suffer loss in times of calamity; when famine strikes, they still have plenty.

²⁰But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the Lord will vanish like

smoke, like the beauty of the fields.

²¹The wicked borrow and do not pay back, but the righteous generously give.

²²They will inherit the land – those whom the Lord blesses; but they will be cut off – those whom the Lord curses.

²³For those who delight in the Lord, he makes firm their steps.

²⁴They may stumble, but they will not fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.

²⁵From my youth to old age, I have yet to see a virtuous man forsaken or his children begging for alms.

²⁶The righteous always lend and give freely, and their children are a blessing to them.

²⁷Do good and shun evil, so that you will live secure forever.

²⁸For the Lord loves the just and the right and never forsakes his faithful ones. Forever will the righteous be protected, and the children of the wicked cut off.

²⁹The righteous will possess the land; they will make it their home forever.

³⁰The mouth of the virtuous tells of wisdom and their tongue speaks of what is right.

³¹Their steps have never faltered, for the law of God is in their heart.

³²The wicked spies on the just man and lies in wait to slay him.

³³But the Lord will never abandon the just to the power of his persecutor nor let him be condemned when he is tried.

³⁴Hope in the Lord and follow his way, for he will exalt you and give you the land as your inheritance. But the wicked will be destroyed – you can be sure of that.

³⁵I have seen a wicked one mighty, towering like cedars of Lebanon.

³⁶But when I passed by again, he was no longer there. I looked for him and he was nowhere.

³⁷Mark the blameless, watch the upright, and you will see that there is a future for the person of peace.

³⁸But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be shattered.

³⁹The Lord is the salvation of the righteous; in time of distress, he is their refuge.

⁴⁰The Lord helps and delivers them, and rescues them from the oppressor; he saves them for they seek shelter in him.

PSALM 38 (37)

Prayer in time of trouble. – At times of illness or misfortune, people begin to meditate and they discover that their greatest affliction is being sinners.

²O Lord, rebuke me not in your rage, punish me not in your fury.

³Your arrows have sunk deep into my flesh; your hand has come down heavily upon me.

⁴Your anger has spared no part of my body, my sin gives no peace to my bones.

⁵For my transgressions overwhelm me; they weigh me down like

¹²When we are patient and watchful, we shall see that "the tree which was not planted by the Father will be uprooted." History shows the final failure of those who persecute the Church or use lies and violence to dominate the world.

³⁸Here we add a few lines from a prayer by Pascal, which continues this psalm:

"Lord, as I am, make me conform to your will and being sick as I am, may I glorify you in my sufferings."

Without these, I cannot, come to Glory. You yourself, O my Saviour, did not want to reach Glory except through them.

Your disciples recognized you in the marks of your sufferings; and you recognize those who are your disciples in their sufferings.

Acknowledge me, then, as your disciple in the hurt that I suffer, in my body as in my spirit, because of the sins I committed.

an unbearable load. ⁶My wounds stink and fester within me, the outcome of my sinful folly.

⁷Stooped and bowed down, I go about mourning all day.

⁸My loins burn, my flesh is diseased, ⁹my body languid and utterly crushed; I groan in pain and anguish of heart.

¹⁰Before you, O Lord, all my longing lies open; from you my sighing is not hidden.

¹¹My heart pounds as my strength ebbs; even the light has deserted my eyes.

¹²My friends avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay afar off.

¹³Those who seek my life lay snares for me; those who wish my harm speak of my ruin and plot against me all the day long.

¹⁴But like a deaf-mute, neither do I hear nor open my mouth.

¹⁵I am like one whose ears hear not and whose mouth has no answer.

¹⁶For I put my trust in you, O Lord; you will answer for me, Lord God.

¹⁷I pray, "Don't let them gloat over me, nor take advantage of my helplessness when I miss a step or my foot slips."

¹⁸For I am about to fall, ever with me is my pain. ¹⁹I confess my transgression, I repent of my sin.

²⁰Many are my foes with no valid cause; many are those who hate me for no reason, ²¹those who pay me evil for good those who condemn me because I seek good.

²²Forsake me not, O Lord, stay not far from me, O my God.

²³Come quickly to my aid, O Lord, my saviour!

PSALM 39 (38)

Man is nothing before his God. – Although in giving us his Son, God has given us everything, we have nothing and we will continue to hope everything from his mercy. "Make me see how frail I am."

²I said: "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will muzzle my mouth in front of the wicked.

³So I did. But as I kept silent their happiness made my anguish grow.

⁴My heart began to burn within, and when I could no longer contain my searing thoughts, I blurted out:

⁵Lord, let me know when my end will come, let me know the number of my days; show me how frail and fleeting is my life.

⁶You allow me to live in but too short a span; before you, all my years are in vain. Human existence is a mere whiff of breath, ⁷mankind a shadow that goes about on earth.

Man is always in relentless pursuit, but all his labor leads to naught;

doggedly he toils to rake in wealth, not knowing who will amass it next.

⁸But now, O Lord, what do I await? All my hope rests in you. ⁹Rescue me from sins; I need your salvation. Do not allow me to be the fool's derision.

¹⁰I am mute and shall not open my mouth, since you have done this to me.

¹¹Only remove from me your scourge; for I am done in with your blows.

¹²You punish and cure a man from his sin; you bring to naught what he holds dear. Man is a mere whiff of wind!

¹³Hear, O Lord, my supplication, listen to my cry for protection; do not

be deaf to my lamentation. For I dwell with you as an alien – a pilgrim, as all my ancestors have been.

¹⁴Turn from me awhile, that I may find relief, before I depart and be no more.

PSALM 40 (39)

In the Bible I am told to do your will. – May the Lord give us authentic faith by which we listen and submit to his will. Obedience which is not frustration: on the contrary it leads to fullness, to truth: "blessed the one who places his trust in the Lord."

²With resolve I waited for the Lord; he listened and heard me beg.

³Out of the horrid pit he drew me, out of the quagmire in the bog. He settled my feet upon a rock and made my steps steady.

⁴He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and be awed and put their trust in the Lord.

⁵Blessed is the man who relies on the Lord and does not look to the proud nor go astray after false gods.

⁶How numerous, O Lord my God, are your wonderful deeds! In your marvelous plans for us you are indeed beyond compare! How many they are – if I were to declare, I would be at a loss to recount their number.

⁷Sacrifice and oblation you do not desire; but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you do not require.

⁸Then I said, "Here I come! as the scroll says of me.

⁹To do your will is my delight, O God. For your law is within my heart."

¹⁰In the congregation I have proclaimed the good news of salvation. My lips, O Lord, I do not seal – you know that very well.

¹¹I have not merely kept within my

heart your saving help, but have spoken about it – your deliverance and your faithfulness; I have made no secret of your truth and your kindness in the great congregation.

¹²Do not withhold from me, O Lord, your mercy; let your love and faithfulness preserve me constantly.

¹³For troubles beyond numbering have closed in on me; I am all covered by sins and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head – so numerous that I am losing courage.

¹⁴May it please you, O Lord, to rescue me, to make haste, O Lord, in helping me!

¹⁵May those who seek to put me to death be brought to shame and degradation; may those who desire to see me destroyed be turned back in confusion.

¹⁶May those who taunt me with "Aha, aha!" be filled with shame and consternation.

¹⁷But may all those who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; and may all who love your saving grace continually say, "The Lord is great!"

¹⁸Though I am afflicted and am poor, yet the Lord thinks of me.

You are my help and my saviour – O my God, do not tarry!

¹⁰ In this psalm we have two prayers put together

I have waited for the Lord with great trust. This first part is thanksgiving for unexpected salvation. A man's life develops in the midst of trials and liberations; these put us on the road to the final trial of death in order to be raised to life

He drew me out of the fatal pit – on seeing this, many will look in awe and trust in him. Several expressions in this psalm remind us of Christ's triumph in his Resurrection. If it is a fact that God demands of everyone inner obedience more than external sacrifices, it is only in Christ that *Then I said: behold I am coming* is perfectly fulfilled.

PSALM 41 (40)

Prayer of an abandoned sick person. – Sick, mocked, betrayed: this is the situation of the one who prays. Perhaps, we know him and he may be at our side awaiting consolation.

²Blessed is he who regards the poor;
the Lord delivers him in time of trouble.

³The Lord protects him, preserves his life,
and gives him happiness in the land;
he yields him not to the will of his foes.

⁴The Lord helps him when he gets sick,
and heals him of all his ailments.

⁵I have pleaded, "O Lord, have mercy on me;
heal me, in spite of all my iniquity."

⁶My enemies ask of me in malice,

⁷"When will he die and his name perish?"

When one of them pays me a visit,
he talks emptily with the hidden intent
of gathering slanderous gossip.

When he leaves, he goes to disseminate
his prattle abroad.

⁸Then all my enemies whisper together,
imagining the worst for me:

⁹"The vilest of diseases –
that is what his ailment is.
He will never get up again!"

¹⁰Even my most trusted friend,
with whom I have shared my food,
has lifted his heel against me.

¹¹But you, O Lord, have mercy on me;
lift me up to give them recompense.

¹²This will assure me that I enjoy your favor:
if my enemies do not triumph over me,

¹³if you uphold me in my integrity
and let me stand in your presence forever.

¹⁴Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
from all eternity and forever!
Amen. Amen!

PSALM 42 (41)

When shall I go to contemplate the face of the Lord? In exile the psalmist remembers the years of grace.

²As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

³My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I go and see the face of God?

⁴Day and night my tears have been my food;

men say to me, day after day,
"Where is your God?"

⁵Now as I pour out my soul,
I remember this all –
how I used to lead the faithful
in procession to the house of God,
amid shouts of joy and thanksgiving,
among the feasting throng.

⁶Why are you so downcast, my soul,
why are you so troubled within me?
Hope in God, for again
I will praise him –
my saviour and my God.

⁷So downcast is my soul, that I remember you:
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.

⁸Deep calls to deep as your cataracts thunder;
your waves and breakers have gone over me.

⁹By day the Lord directs his love;
by night his song is upon my lips –
a prayer to the God of my life.

¹⁰I say to God, my rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why should I go about mourning,
harassed by the enemy?"

¹¹My whole being suffers in mortal agony,
as my adversaries taunt me continually.
"Where is your God?"

¹²Why are you so downcast, my soul,
why are you so troubled within me?
Hope in God, for again
I will praise him –
my saviour and my God.

PSALM 43 (42)

The author of this psalm was a servant of the Jerusalem Temple, exiled in Babylon: with nostalgia, he recalls Solomon's magnificent sanctuary already destroyed and the splendour of the liturgies of past days, while the pagans of Babylon proudly show him their gods of gold and marble, and ironically ask him: "Where is your God?"

Fervent calls on God and cries of

Continuation of the previous psalm. – This is the fervent prayer which the believer – immersed in an adverse atmosphere – addresses to God in order not to waver in his faith.

¹Vindicate me, O God, and fight for my cause
against an ungodly people;
deliver me from the wicked and deceitful.

²You are my God, my stronghold.
Why have you cast me out,
when I take refuge in you?
Why should I go about mourning,

hope mark the entire psalm as a refrain repeated three times.

Which one of us cannot make this psalm his own? Human progress, however great and beneficial it may be, brings new evils, and besides, it sharpens our desires. We would like to have everything and right now; and we feel unhappy when we are disillusioned; above all, death is at the end of our earthly pilgrimage. So, in the same way as the psalmist, we are, in a way, imprisoned and exiled.

harassed and oppressed by the enemy?

³Send forth your light and your truth;
let them be my guide,
let them take me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you reside.

⁴Then will I go to the altar of God,
to God, my gladness and delight.
I will praise you with the lyre and harp,
O Lord, my God.

⁵Why are you so downcast, my soul,
why are you so troubled within me?
Hope in God, for again
I will praise him –
my saviour and my God.

PSALM 44 (43)

National lament. – The believing people feel vanquished and they complain to God.

²With our ears, O God, we have heard; our fathers have declared to us the works you did in their days of old –
³how you drove out the nations and put our ancestors in their land, how you battered down the peoples to make room for them.

⁴For it is not with their own sword that they have conquered the land nor have they been victors by their own hand; but it was by your right hand and arm and by the light of your countenance; for you truly loved them.

⁵It was you, my King and my God, who ordained victories for Jacob.

⁶Through you we battered down

our foes; through your name we shattered our enemies.

⁷For it is not in my bow that I trust, nor in my sword to make me victorious.

⁸But it is you who have given us victory, you who have brought our adversaries to shame.

⁹It is always in God that we find glory. Forever shall we praise your name.

¹⁰Yet you have now rejected and humbled us; you no longer go forth with our armies.

¹¹You let our enemies drive us back and our adversaries plunder us.

⁴⁴Everywhere and even in "Christian countries," authentic Christians are but a minority in the midst of a mass of people of other religions or having only some kind of vague religiosity. Perhaps, this is why there is a certain nostalgia in evoking other times when all the people as one professed the same faith and all took part in all the religious manifestations.

The situation of the Jews at the time this psalm was written was very similar. They were not in Jerusalem, but in exile in Babylon.

In a poetic contrast, the psalmist opposes that great national catastrophe with the triumphant conquest of Palestine, six centuries before, by the Israelites coming from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Joshua (2-9).

In 10-17, this humiliated people, express their grief for having not only lost their national independence, but even God himself: the pagans ridicule them in their

defeat and God seems to remain silent: he does not work wonders as he had done before to confuse Israel's enemies and to prove he is the only God. Nevertheless, this passionate complaint (24-25) is not desperate since the psalmist is convinced that God is the most powerful and that his love is faithful (27). In fact, God will respond: the Israelites will return to Jerusalem and their religious lives will be purer, more spiritual and more inspired by the hope of the only Saviour.

The same thing happens with us. Despite Christians' responsibility for the present situation, God can bring a greater good out of it. We are less numerous but our faith is more personal and freer and our concept of God is greater and also purer. The Church does not have the same influence in public life as it did in other times; but it is stripped of certain features which were more or less hiding its authentic face.

¹² You let us be driven for slaughter like sheep, scattered among nations as captives ¹³ You handed us over to them for nothing.

¹⁴ You have made us the butt of our neighbors' insult, the scorn and laughing-stock of those around us. ¹⁵ You have made us a byword among the nations, a fair game for peoples to shake their heads.

¹⁶ Before me all day long is my disgrace, shame is all over my face, ¹⁷ at the voice of the mocker and reviler, in the presence of the enemy and the avenger.

¹⁸ All this has happened to us, although we have not forgotten you, nor have we been untrue to your covenant.

¹⁹ Our heart has not turned back

nor have our steps faltered; ²⁰ yet you have reduced us into a miserable place and covered us completely with deep darkness.

²¹ Had we forgotten the name of our God and stretched forth our hands to an alien god,

²² God would have discovered this, for the secrets of the heart are not hidden from him.

²³ For your sake we are slain all day and accounted as sheep for slaughter.

²⁴ Awake, O Lord! Why are you asleep? Arise! Reject us not forever.

²⁵ Why hide your face from us? Why forget our misery and woes?

²⁶ Our souls are humbled in the dust, our bodies smashed to the ground.

²⁷ Arise! Come to our aid. Deliver us for your kindness' sake.

PSALM 45 (44)

For the King's wedding. – Human love involves a mystery which flows into the very mystery of God. God wants to reveal himself to mankind as a husband to his wife, and this is already fulfilled in the person of Christ.

This psalm may have been written on the occasion of the wedding of a king of Israel with a foreign princess.

But, it may be a figurative way of mixing Israel, the chosen people, to enter fully into the Covenant of their God and spouse, who manifests his presence through his Messianic King, anointed by him (v. 9). Israel comes to the divine wedding, followed by all the nations receiving their teaching about God and about salvation: this is what is expressed in a figurative way in verses 13-16 and also in Is 60-62.

All of this can be applied to the church and also to each and everyone of us. On our baptismal day we were united with Christ and we entered into intimacy with God.

Hear, O daughter, forget your people. When a man marries, he must leave behind previous customs. Those who proclaim the Gospel must let go of their own ways of seeing things and become everything to everyone. Your children will have the place of your fathers. This could be seen as Jesus' promises to

² My heart is moved by an exalted theme as I deliver my ode for the king, my tongue as nimble as a writer's pen.

³ You are the finest among the sons of men, your lips are anointed with grace, for God has blessed you forever.

⁴ Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty; array yourself with splendor and majesty.

⁵ Glorious and triumphant, ride on for the cause of truth, virtue and religion. Your right hand will teach you marvelous deeds

⁶ Sharp are your arrows aimed at the hearts of the king's enemies; nations fall beneath your feet.

⁷ Your divine throne will last forever and ever; a scepter of justice is your scepter.

⁸ You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness, above your fellow kings.

his apostles who left everything to serve him.

Some day God will be everything to everyone, but to come to that, people must forget "their people and their families," that is to say, they must change their thoughts and their customs for those of God.

⁹Your robes are all fragrant
with myrrh and aloes and cassia.
Music of strings gladdens your palace
adorned and glowing with ivory.

¹⁰Among your ladies of honor
are daughters of kings;
at your right hand, in gold of Ophir,
stands the queen.

¹¹Listen, O daughter, pay attention;
forget your father's house and your nation.

¹²The king is in love with you;
honor him, for he is your lord.

¹³The people of Tyre will come with gifts;
the wealthiest nations will seek your favor.

¹⁴All glorious as she enters
is the princess in her gold-woven robes.

¹⁵She is led to the king,
following behind is her train of virgins.

¹⁶Amid cheers and general rejoicing,
they enter the palace of the king.

¹⁷Forget your fathers and think of your sons,
you will make them prince throughout the land.

¹⁸I will perpetuate your name through
generations;
may you be praised forever by all nations!

PSALM 46 (45)

We will not be afraid if the mountains fall into the depths of the sea. The history of Israel has been quite tormented by inner crises and enemy invasions. Yet it is not a chaotic history, a mere outcome of chance, or of the power of human passions. This history has been guided by the invisible, powerful and loving hand of God.

The very name of Jerusalem in Hebrew includes "peace": the river running through it is a sort of earthly paradise, a symbol of life and fruitfulness. Above all, God dwells there, in the Temple, his dwelling place. Thus, Israel will never die, though the city and the Temple may be destroyed.

God puts an end to war in the whole world. The ancient empires have disappeared. On the contrary, the spiritual Israel, the Church, lives

God is with us. – "A river with its streamlets gladdens the city of God." To the troubles expressed in a figurative way in the first stanza, the psalmist opposes a vision of serenity, that of the Holy City, Jerusalem, the Church.

²God is our strength and protection
an ever present help in affliction.

³We will not fear, therefore,
though the earth be shaken
and the mountains plunge
into the deepest ocean,

⁴though its waters foam and roar,
though the mountains quake and totter.
For with us is the Lord of hosts,
the God of Jacob, our stronghold.

⁵There is a river whose streams
bring joy to the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

⁶God is inside, the city cannot fall,
for God's help is upon her at the break of day.

on throughout the world; to the end of time the People of God will keep proclaiming the wonders of the Almighty and his plan to love all people and to gather them into an eternal kingdom.

What refers to the church also concerns us. Beyond the troubles of our spiritual lives, the crises of faith, the sins and discouragement, there is God with his gift and his love.

⁷ Kingdoms totter, nations are in turmoil;
at the sound of his voice the earth melts away.

⁸ But with us is the Lord of hosts,
the God of Jacob, our refuge.

⁹ Come, see the works of the Lord –
the marvelous things he has done in the world.

¹⁰ He has put an end to wars,
broken the bows and splintered the spears,
set the shields and chariots afire.

¹¹ Keep still, know that I am God.
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted over the earth!

¹² With us is the Lord of hosts,
the God of Jacob, our refuge.

PSALM 47 (46)

On their yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Jews used to contemplate God's dwelling among men. The church is the new Jerusalem, the unshakable city, the center of the world and the pillar of truth. It is in the church that we receive every gift.

To the king of all the nations. – At the end of time the Lord comes to begin his kingdom. Here, he is shown going up to his Temple in Jerusalem. He is no longer the God of a small nation, of a minority church, but all the nations acknowledge him. In some way, this triumphal ascent began with the Ascension.

² Clap your hands, all you peoples;
acclaim God with shouts of joy and songs of
praise.

³ For the Lord, the Most High, is awe-inspiring;
all over the earth he is a great king.

⁴ He brought peoples under our dominion
and gave us authority over the nations.

⁵ He chose our inheritance for us –
the pride of Jacob whom he loves!

⁶ God has gone up amid joyful shouts,
the Lord amid trumpet blasts.

⁷ Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!

⁸ God is king of all the earth;
sing to him a hymn of praise.

⁹ God rules over the nations,
God reigns on his holy throne.

¹⁰ The leaders of the nations rally together
with the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God
who reigns supreme.

PSALM 48 (47)

The Church-Zion: the mountain of God. – Zion is the other name for Jerusalem, the Holy City. This psalm recalls how God favoured and protected it on several occasions. Let believers rejoice: the Lord looks after us.

² Great is the Lord, most worthy of praise in the city of God, his holy mountain.

³ Beautifully elevated, it is the joy of all the earth – Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King.

⁴ Here within her lines of defense, God has shown himself to be her fortress.

⁵ The kings assembled together, advanced toward the city.

⁶ But as soon as they saw it, they were astounded; they panicked and took to flight.

⁷ Seized with fear, they trembled, like a woman in travail, ⁸ or like the ships of Tarshish, shattered by a strong wind from the east.

⁹ Just as we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God, the city God founded forever.

¹⁰ We meditate on your unfailing love, O God, inside your temple.

¹¹ Your praise reaches to the ends of the earth, as does your name, O God. Your right hand is ever victorious.

¹² Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the villages of Judah be glad, in the fulfillment of your justice.

¹³ Walk around Zion, count her towers, ¹⁴ consider well her ramparts, examine her fortification, that you may tell the next generation ¹⁵ that such is God, our God who will always be our guide.

PSALM 49 (48)

The irresponsibility of the rich.

"Carefully avoid all sorts of greed because even when one has everything, it is not possessions which give life.

² Hear this, all you peoples!
Listen, all you inhabitants of the world

³ high and low together,
rich and poor alike!

⁴ Words of wisdom will come from my mouth,
an utterance of discernment from my heart.

⁵ To a proverb I will incline my ear,
and solve my riddle to the rhythm of my lyre.

⁶ Why should I fear when evil days come,
when wicked deceivers ring me round –

⁷ men trusting in their wealth
and boasting of their great riches?

⁸ For no one may redeem himself
or pay God the ransom for his life.

⁹ For redeeming one's life
demands too high a price
and no ransom will ever suffice

¹⁰ for him to remain forever alive
and never see the grave.

¹¹ For he can see that even wise men die,
the fool and the stupid alike pass away,

The Great City fell! All the rulers of the world sinned with her and the merchants of the earth became rich with her wild luxury. O my people, depart from her, for fear you might become an accomplice in her sins. In this city was found the blood of the prophets and the saints, the blood of all those who were murdered on the earth' (Rv 18:2-24).

leaving to others their fortune and wealth.

¹² Their graves are their eternal homes, from generation to generation, no matter how big the tracts of land they own.

¹³ People in wealth are like mute beasts, they understand nothing.

¹⁴ This is the fate of fools who trust in themselves, and those who follow them.

¹⁵ Like sheep led to the grave, they have death as their shepherd; quickly their form will be consumed in the world of the dead which is their home.

¹⁶ But God will rescue my soul from the grave by receiving me unto himself.

¹⁷ Fear not when a man grows rich, when his power becomes oppressively great.

¹⁸ for nothing will he take when he dies; his wealth and pomp he will leave behind.

¹⁹ Though in his lifetime he was counted blessed, having done well for himself,

²⁰ he will join the generation of his forebears, who will never again see the light.

²¹ People in wealth are like mute beasts, they understand nothing.

PSALM 50 (49)

Serve God with a sincere heart. – God is coming to judge his people. He condemns those who replace the obedience of the heart by offerings and material sacrifices and those who recite the commandments instead of putting them into practice.

² From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. ³ Our God comes, and is silent no more; before him is a devouring fire, round about him a raging storm.

⁴ He calls to the heavens above and to the earth below, that he may judge his people:

⁵ "Gather before me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." ⁶ The heavens proclaim his justice, for God himself has come to judge.

⁷ "Hear, O my people, listen. I will testify against you, O Israel. I am God, your God!

⁸ Not for your sacrifices do I reprove you, for your burnt offerings are ever before me.

⁹ I need not a bull from your stalls, nor a he-goat from your pens.

¹⁰ For I own all animals – all of them that dwell in the forest, all that roam my thousand hills.

¹¹ All the birds of the air I know; all that move in the fields are mine.

¹² I need not tell you if I were hungry, for mine is the world and all that it contains.

¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

¹⁴ Offer to God a sacrifice of

thanks, and fulfill your vows to the Most High.

¹⁵ Call on me in time of calamity; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me."

¹⁶ But God says this is to the wicked: "What right have you to mouth my laws or to talk cant about my covenant?"

¹⁷ You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you.

¹⁸ You join a thief when you meet one; you keep company with adulterers.

¹⁹ You have a mouth of evil and a

deceitful tongue. ²⁰ You speak ill of your brother, and slander your own mother's son.

²¹ Because I have been silent while you did all these things, you thought I was also like you. Now I am rebuking you; I am making this charge against you.

²² Give this a thought, you who forget God, lest I tear you to pieces and there be no one to help you.

²³ He who gives thanks and praise as his sacrifice honors me, and to him who prepares his way uprightly, I will show the salvation of God."

PSALM 51 (50)

For some people – including Christians – the word *sin* is outdated. Sin is seen only as a weakness in people or, something coming from evil social structures and thus those with the solution to sin are doctors, psychiatrists, sociologists, economists and the politicians.

Nevertheless, deep down at the center, we experience the presence of a negative force, a rejection of the light and of self-surrender. This force is not something external, it is part of our "self" and we are responsible for it. Whenever we are guided by it instead of following the call of the light, its power grows stronger and more demanding.

Have mercy on me, O Lord, in your kindness. This psalm which deals with David's adultery (2 Sam 11), expresses the feeling of personal guilt simply and clearly (5-6), even if it is toned down, granted man's deficient moral condition from the time of his birth (7). Moreover, we do not know ourselves: God alone can teach us self-knowledge.

Yet, with similar assurance, the psalmist proclaims his hope: men are not corrupt; purity of heart is not an impossible dream since beyond all evil there is God's forgiveness; beyond all evil forces, there is the Power of God. God who created man by giving him his spirit can also recreate and renew him (12-13): the only requirement is for man to acknowledge his sinfulness since God *wants the truth* (8). God can pound the heart

Have mercy on me, O Lord. – Let us admit to our sin before the God of truth. Our humiliation will not be lacking in hope since we know that God can create a new heart in us.

³ Have mercy on me, O God:

In your constant love,
in your great compassion,
blot out my sin.

⁴ Wash me thoroughly of my guilt;
cleanse me of my evil.

⁵ For I acknowledge my wrongdoings
and always have my sins in mind.

⁶ I have sinned against you alone;
what is evil in your sight I have done.

You are right when you pass sentence
and blameless in your judgement.

⁵ For indeed I was born guilt-ridden,
a sinner from my mother's womb.

⁸ Since you desire truth in the heart
teach me wisdom in my inmost part.

⁹ Cleanse me with hyssop,
wash me whiter than snow.

¹⁰ Fill me with joy and gladness;
let the bones you crashed find happiness.

¹¹ Turn your face away from my sins
and blot out all my offenses.

¹² Create in me, O God, a pure heart;
give me a new and upright spirit.

¹³ Do not cast me out of your presence
nor take your Holy Spirit away from me.

(18) to bring about tears of sorrow, just as Moses struck the rock in the desert, to provide the people with the water they were lacking. This is the sacrifice pleasing to God, much more than the external penitential practices.

This entire psalm breathes an atmosphere of serenity (10-14) because God does not wish the sinner to die, but to live. And the sinner, forgiven and assured of God's constant forgiveness, will be the witness of divine mercy to an embittered and pessimistic world.

The Gospel merely gives this admirable psalm a more precise content. Jesus' cross is both the sign that sin exists and that it is destroyed at the root. Jesus came for sinners: unfortunate is the one who believes he is just! Whenever we receive the sacrament of forgiveness in the Church, we encounter Jesus himself, the Saviour who intercedes and the Father who forgives. Every one of our confessions is a joyful celebration of the merciful God, and the source of renewal.

¹⁴ Give me back the joy of your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.
¹⁵ Then I will show your ways to wrongdoers and teach conversion to sinners.

¹⁶ Deliver me from the guilt of blood, and of your justice I shall sing aloud.

¹⁷ O Lord, open my lips, and I will declare your praise.

¹⁸ Sacrifice gives you no pleasure; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not take delight in it.

¹⁹ O God, my sacrifice is a broken spirit and a contrite heart which you will not despise.

²⁰ Shower Zion with your favor; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

²¹ Then you will take delight in fitting sacrifices, in whole burnt offerings, and bulls offered on your altar.

PSALM 52 (51)

¹ Why boast of your wickedness, strong man? Why make a boast of it all the day long ² that you are plotting destruction?

Your tongue is like a sharp razor; ³ you love evil more than the good, and falsehood more than the truth.

⁴ You love words that inflict harm. O you deceitful tongue!

⁵ But God will bring you down to ruin; he will tear you away from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living.

⁶ The good will take fear at the sight; they will say concerning his fate:

⁷ "This is the man who would not rely on God but put his trust in ill-gotten wealth and sought strength in others' destruction."

⁸ But I am as a green olive tree that thrives in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love forever and ever.

⁹ I will praise you forever for what you have done, and proclaim your good name before your faithful ones.

PSALM 53 (52)

² The fool says in his heart, "There is no

God." They are corrupt, their ways wicked; not one of them does good.

³ From heaven God looks down upon the sons of men, to see if there is anyone who seeks God and understands.

⁴ None! They have all fallen away. Depraved – they are all alike. There is no one who does good, no, not even one.

⁵ Will these evil doers never learn? They devour my people just as they devour food and never call on God.

⁶ And so there they are – afraid when there is nothing to be feared. For God will scatter their bones; they will be put to shame because God has rejected them.

⁷ Would that Israel's salvation came forth from Zion! When God restores his people's fortune, Jacob will be glad, Israel will rejoice.

PSALM 54 (53)

³ By your name, O God, save me; by your might vindicate me.

⁴ Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth.

⁵ Strangers are against me – ruthless men seeking my life, men without regard for God.

⁶See, God is my helper; the Lord upholds my life.

⁷May their evil plots rebound on them; in your faithfulness destroy them!

⁸I will offer sacrifice to you freely; I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good.

⁹You have delivered me from calamity and I look down on my foes.

PSALM 55 (54)

Prayer of the persecuted. – The supremacy of money, violence, luxury, prostitution, the exploitation of men. In the midst of a perverted society, the just one feels cornered and persecuted. **Cast your care upon the Lord.**

²Listen to my prayer, O God, do not be deaf to my pleading; ³give heed to me and answer me.

I am greatly troubled ⁴at the outcry of the enemy and the clamour of the wicked.

I am distraught with the way they revile me and persecute me in their fury.

⁵My heart is in agony within me; the terrors of death fall upon me. ⁶I tremble in fear – horror has got the better of me.

⁷I said, "If I had wings like a dove, I would fly away and be at rest;

⁸I would seek a home in the desert ⁹or hurry to find a cave for shelter from the tempest."

¹⁰O Lord, shatter their plans. In the city I see strife and violence; ¹¹day and night they prow about its walls, while inside evil prevails.

¹²Forces of tyranny and treachery are at work undermining the city.

¹³If it were a rival insulting me, I could bear with him; if it were a foe in pursuit of me, I could hide from him.

¹⁴But it is you, an equal of mine, my bosom friend, my companion ¹⁵whose fellowship I have enjoyed as we walked together in the house of the Lord.

¹⁶Let death come to them suddenly, let them go down to the grave alive, for within them evil and mischief thrive.

¹⁷But in God I seek refuge; the Lord will rescue me.

¹⁸Morning and evening, even at noon, I cry out my grievance and moan; surely he will hear my voice.

¹⁹He will deliver me in safety from the battle waged against me, no matter how strong my opponents are:

²⁰God who is enthroned forever will hear me and humble them, for they never change their ways nor do they stand in awe of God.

²¹My friend has attacked his associates and has violated his pact with them.

²²His words were smoother than butter, yet war was in his heart; his utterances were more soothing than oil yet they were swords ready and drawn.

²³Place your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you, for he never lets the upright fall.

²⁴But you, O God, will cast the wicked into the pit of corruption; blood thirsty men and traitors will not live out half their days. But for my part, in you alone, O Lord, I trust.

PSALM 56 (55)

The just one will not fall. – Prayer of the millions of oppressed whose lives have not been shining with hope: "You, O Lord, have gathered our tears."

²O God, show your mercy to me, for my foes are in hot pursuit of me; they press their attack on every side.

³My accusers pursue me all day long, many people attack me.

⁴But when I am afraid, O Mighty One, I put my trust in you,

⁵With God whose word I praise, with God whom I trust without fear – what can mortal men do against me?

⁶All day long they hatch their evil plans, plotting mischief to injure my cause.

⁷They conspire and lurk around, watching my every move, bent upon taking my life.

⁸They must not be allowed to go un-

punished; therefore, O God, in your fury, bring the nations down.

⁹You have a record of my lament; my tears are stored in your wineskin. Are they not written in your scroll?

¹⁰My enemies will turn back when I call on you for help; by this I will know that God is with me.

¹¹With God whose word I praise, ¹²with God in whom I trust without fear – what can mortal men do against me?

¹³I am bound to you by my vows, O God; accept then my thanksgiving. ¹⁴For you have rescued my soul from death and even my feet

from stumbling, that I may walk in God's presence in the light of the living.

PSALM 57 (56)

²Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy, for my soul takes refuge in you; I will shelter in your wings' shadow till disaster has passed away.

³I call on God the Most High, on God who has done everything for me, ⁴to send from heaven a saviour and put my oppressors to shame. May God send me his kindness and love.

⁵I lie prostrate in the midst of lions that greedily devour the sons of men, their teeth pointed as spears and arrows, their tongues as sharpened swords.

⁶Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Your glory be over all the earth!

⁷They have set a snare for my steps; my soul was bowed down in distress. They have dug a pit along my path, but they themselves have fallen in it.

⁸My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and make music.

⁹Awake, my soul, awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.

¹⁰I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praise to you among the nations.

¹¹For great is your love as the heavens, and your faithfulness beyond the clouds. ¹²Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Your glory be over the earth!

PSALM 58 (57)

God judges rulers. – God denounces the leaders who establish and preserve a corrupt order instead of being the instruments of his justice.

²Rulers of men, are your decrees just, and are your judgments upright?

³No, you willfully commit crimes; you deal in violence and corruption.

⁴Even from the womb the wicked go astray; even from birth they are wayward liars.

⁵They are venomous like deadly adders, deaf as the snake ⁶that stubbornly stops its ear so as not to hear the charmer's voice casting spells.

⁷Break the teeth in their mouths, O God; tear out the fangs of the lions, O Lord.

⁸Let them vanish like spilled water; let them be trodden down like grass that withers.

⁹Let them be like snails that sink into slime, like untimely births that never see the

sun.¹⁰ Before your pots can feel the heat of burning thorns, green or dry – let them be swept away!

¹¹The upright will rejoice when they are avenged; they will bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked.

¹²Then will men say, "Surely the righteous are rewarded; surely there is a God who gives judgment on earth."

PSALM 59 (58)

²Deliver me from my enemies, O God, from those who rise up against me.

³Deliver me from evildoers; rescue me from the bloodthirsty.

⁴Look, they lie in wait for my life – fierce men conspiring against me, for no fault of mine, O Lord.

⁵I have done them no wrong, yet they have prepared to attack me. Rise and help me, look on my plight, ⁶O lord God of hosts, God of Israel! Arise and punish all the pagans; have no mercy on wicked traitors.

⁷Each evening they return, howling like dogs, prowling about the city, ⁸saying that not even God hears or sees their wicked deeds.

⁹But you, O Lord, laugh at them; you look down upon the wicked.

¹⁰O my Strength, I look up to you, for you, O God, are my fortress.

¹¹My loving God will come to my aid and show me how my enemies fall.

¹²But slay them not, lest my people forget; just shake them by your power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield.

¹³For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their arrogance.

For the curses and lies they utter, ¹⁴destroy them in your vengeance, destroy them till they are no more. Then it will be known that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth.

¹⁵Each evening let them return, howling like dogs, prowling about the city, ¹⁶roaming about for food, growling and never filled.

¹⁷But I will sing of your might; in the morning I will sing of your love. For you have been to me a fortress, a refuge in time of distress. ¹⁸O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my stronghold; you are a loving God.

⁵⁸The rulers and those in charge of social justice are called "gods" because they represent God himself in the exercise of their functions.

PSALM 60 (59)

Petition after a defeat.

³O God, you have rejected us and broken our defenses; you have been angry, but restore us.

⁴You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its cracks for it totters.

⁵You have made your people suffer; you have given us wine that makes us stagger.

⁶You set the banner behind us and your own fled from bow and arrow.

⁷Help us and listen to us, that your beloved may be rescued.

⁸God has spoken in his sanctuary: "In triumph I will divide up Shechem and parcel out the Valley of Succoth.

⁹Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my sceptre.

¹⁰Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph."

¹¹Who will take me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?

¹²Have you not rejected us, O God? You no longer go with our armies.

¹³Give us aid against the foe, for the help of man is not worth a straw.

¹⁴With God we will attain victory; he will crush the enemy for us.

PSALM 61 (60)

²Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.

³I call to you from the ends of the earth; I call to you as my heart grows faint. Lead me to the rock too high for me, ⁴for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

⁵Let me dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in your wings' shelter.

⁶Indeed you have heard my vows, O God, and the wish of those who fear your name.

⁷Increase the days of the king's life: prolong his years for many generations.

⁸May he be ever enthroned in God's presence; let your love and truth watch over him.

⁹So I will ever sing praises to your name and fulfill my vows day after day.

PSALM 62 (61)

God spoke once; twice I heard him. This is a Hebrew expression for a stronger affirmation. God has appeared as the permanent truth, as a power above all human resources. Our century has witnessed the collapse of many myths, systems, deceptive values and empires. The one who created man to share his own life and happiness with him forever, knows the way man must follow to come to the end of his path.

My soul rests in God alone. – Believers themselves feel the attraction of money, power and pleasure. But, in pretending to respond to our hopes, all these things are deceptive since they cannot fill our hearts. They are powerless and fleeting, while God is the ultimate fullness and no one can destroy him.

²My soul finds rest in God alone; from him comes my salvation.

³He alone is my rock, my protection; with him as my stronghold, I shall not be overcome.

⁴How long will you assault a man, all of you, to bring him down – like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?

⁴Indeed they plan to topple me. They take pleasure in telling lies; with their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse.

⁶My soul finds rest in God alone; from him comes my hope.

⁷He alone is my rock, my protection; with him as my stronghold, I shall not be overcome.

⁸On God rests my salvation and my honour; he is my refuge, my mighty rock.

⁹Trust in him at all times, my people;

before him pour out your hearts;
God is our refuge.

¹⁰Men of low rank are only a breath,
important men, merely an illusion.
If weighed together they are nothing,
even lighter than a puff of wind.

¹¹Do not set your heart on extortion,
nor your hopes upon corrupt gains.
Even if your wealth accumulates,
keep your heart detached.

¹²God has spoken once,
but I have heard it twice:
that you, O God, are powerful,
and only with you, O Lord, does man succeed.
you reward each one according to his deeds.

PSALM 63 (62)

There are more suicides and rebellious youth in the richest and most developed countries: men grow tired of everything. Even the most profound, pure and lasting human love does not fully satisfy because the shadow of death looms over it. Only he who is the fountain of living water and not "broken cisterns" (Jer 2:13) can satisfy men's fundamental thirst. St. Augustine expressed it in this famous phrase: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts will not rest until they rest in you."

The psalmist uses suggestive images to express his desire for communion with God: *he wants to embrace God; to be in the shadow of his wings; to lean on his right hand.* This desire is the basic spiritual feeling. Jesus, and Mary also in the "Magnificat", proclaim blessed those who hunger and thirst for God, and cursed those who have their fill.

This marvelous psalm has many spiritual applications. Alas for us if we stop being pilgrims, always going further, and looking for more! True love is limitless and this is precisely why it always leaves us unsatisfied. Blessed are we, if at certain times in our lives, in meditating on God's Word, praying or worshipping, in generously responding to divine calls, in loving our neighbor unselfishly, we experience God through the feelings revealing him: peace, joy, security and inner conviction, fullness. And we are even more blessed if, because of our serenity and hope in the midst of the difficulties and trials of life, we give to others the love and desire for God.

My soul thirsts for you. – However desirable all the riches of the world may be, men will always find themselves in the desert until they have discovered the fountain of living water. God himself.

²O God, you are my God, it is you I seek;
for you my body longs and my soul thirsts,
as a dry and weary land without water.

³Thus have I looked upon you in the sanctuary,
observing your power and your glory.

⁴Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.

⁵I will bless you as long as I live,
lift up my hands and call on your name.

⁶As with the richest food my soul will feast;
my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.

⁷When I remember you on my bed
I think of you throughout the night,

⁸for you have been my help;
I sing in the shadow of your wings.

⁹To you my soul clings
as your right hand upholds me.

¹⁰Those who are after my life
will go down to the depths of the earth;

¹¹they will be delivered over to the sword,
and become prey for jackals.

¹²But the king will rejoice in God.
All who swear by God's name will glory,
but all mouths that speak falsely
will be silenced.

PSALM 64 (63)

Slanderers will be punished.

²Hear, O God, my voice in lament;
protect my life from the enemy's
threat.

³Hide me from the scheming of the
wicked, from the corrupt designs of
evil-plotters, ⁴who sharpen their
tongues like swords and aim their bitter
words like arrows, ⁵shooting at the
innocent from cover, shooting suddenly
without fear.

⁶Determined to carry out their evil
purpose, they discuss how to lay their
snares, saying, "No one will see us."

⁷So they contrive a wicked

scheme, and hide the plot they hatch.
How cunning are men's mind and
heart!

⁸But God will shoot his arrows at
them; suddenly they will be struck
down ⁹and brought to ruin by their
own tongue; all who see them will
shake their heads.

¹⁰All mankind will stand in awe;
they will proclaim the works of God
and ponder on what he has done.

¹¹The upright will rejoice and take
refuge in the Lord; the upright of heart
will glory in him

PSALM 65 (64)

You visit the earth and fill it with abundance. – The psalmist gives thanks for the rich harvest of a fruitful year. This earthly prosperity reminds us of another one which God lavishes upon his friends. For the Church as well, there are spring rains, summer harvest and songs of happiness.

²Praise belongs to you in Zion, O God;
here people come to fulfil their vows.

³All mortals ascend to you,
O God, who answers prayers.

⁴Though our evils prevail over us,
you forgive our sins.

⁵Blessed is the man you choose
and take to dwell in your courts.
satisfy us with the goodness
of your house, your holy temple.

⁶With awesome deeds of righteousness
you answer us, O God our saviour,
hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the distant islands.

⁷By your power the mountains were formed.

⁸By your strength the seas are becalmed;
you lull their roaring waves
and the turmoil of the nations.

⁹Those who dwell at the ends of the earth
stand in awe of your marvelous deeds.
You make joyful the dawn
and the coming of dusk.

¹⁰You water the land and care for it,
enriching it with natural resources.
God's streams are filled with water;

people are provided with grain;
for it is you who have ordained it so.

¹¹ You drench the furrows in the land;
you level the ridges,
you soften the soil with showers
and bless its crops.

¹² You crown the year with your goodness;
abundance is to be seen everywhere.

¹³ The deserts have become pasture land,
the hills are clothed with gladness,

¹⁴ the meadows covered with flocks,
the valleys decked with grain –
shouting and singing together with joy.

PSALM 66 (65)

The psalmist knows that God is not only the creator of nature, but he also protects his people in the midst of a hostile world, and he remembers his saving wonders.

We give you thanks, Lord, Almighty God, because you have begun your reign. The nations had become furious, but then came your anger, the moment to judge the dead, to reward your servants the prophets, the saints and all those who honor your Name, and to destroy those who were destroying the earth. (Rv 11:17-18).

Thanksgiving after the struggle. – On behalf of everyone, the community leader gives thanks to God who freed his people from their trials.

Shout with joy to God, all you on earth;
² sing to the glory of his name;
proclaim his glorious praise.

³ Say to God, "How great are your deeds!
How formidable is your power
that makes your enemies cower!"

⁴ All the earth bows down to you,
making music in praise of you,
singing in honour of your name,"

⁵ Come and see what God has done,
how great his works for men.

⁶ He has turned the sea into dry land,
and men passed through the river on foot.
Let us therefore, rejoice in him.

⁷ He rules by his might forever,
his eyes keeping watch on the peoples,
his arm holding the rebels in check.

⁸ Praise our God, O nations,
let the sound of his praise be heard,
⁹ for he has preserved us among the living
and kept our feet from stumbling.

¹⁰ You have tested us, O God;
you have refined us like silver.

¹¹ You have given us into the snare;
you have burdened us with disgrace

¹² and allowed a wicked man to rule over us
and we have gone through fire and water,
but you have brought us to safety at last.

¹³ I will bring offerings to your house
in fulfillment of the vows
¹⁴ I made when assailed by troubles.
¹⁵ I will offer holocausts of fatlings,
sending up smoke of burning rams,
and a sacrifice of goats and bulls.
¹⁶ All you who fear God, come and listen;
let me tell you what he has done.
¹⁷ I cried aloud to him,
extolling him with my tongue.
¹⁸ If in my heart I had nurtured wickedness,
then he would not have heard.
¹⁹ But truly God has listened;
to my prayer he has given heed.
²⁰ May God be blessed!
He has not rejected my prayer;
nor withheld his love from me.

PSALM 67 (66)

All the nations will know you.

² May God be gracious and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
³ May your way be known on earth
and your salvation among the nations.
⁴ May the peoples praise you, O God,
may all the peoples praise you!
⁵ May the nations rejoice and sing gladly,
for you rule the peoples justly
and guide the nations with equity.
⁶ May the peoples, praise you, O God,
may all the peoples praise you!
⁷ The land has given its harvest;
God, our God, has blessed us.
⁸ May God always bless us,
and may he always be feared
to the very ends of the earth.

PSALM 68 (67)

Triumphal procession of God, the victor. – To believers, the history of the Church seems like a new triumphal procession. The Risen Christ, present in her midst through his Spirit, leads her to heaven, where he has prepared a place for her.

² Arise, O God, scatter your enemies;
let your foes flee before you.
³ As smoke is blown by the wind,
so blow them away; as wax melts

before the fire, so let the wicked perish
before you.
⁴ But let the righteous be glad and
exult before God;

let them be full of joy.

⁵Sing to God, sing praises to his name; extole him who rides upon the clouds; the Lord is his name. Rejoice in his presence.

⁶Father of orphans and protector of widows – such is our God.

⁷He gives shelter to the homeless, leads out prisoners to prosperity, but lets the rebels live in an aridland.

⁸O God, when you went forth to lead your people through the desert, ⁹the earth trembled, the heavens poured down rain, at the presence of God, the God of Israel, the One of Sinai.

¹⁰You gave rain in abundance to comfort your weary children.

¹¹Your people found a dwelling, and from your bounty, O God, you provided for the needy.

¹²The Lord has sent good news; he tells his numerous army, ¹³"The kings and their armies flee, yes, they flee, they flee!"

¹⁴Women at home divide the spoils, the wings of a dove are covered with silver, its pinions with shining gold.

¹⁵When the Lord routed the kings, snow fell on the Dark Mountain.

¹⁶O mighty mountain of Bashan, high and rugged mountain, ¹⁷why look with envy upon the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the Lord will dwell forever?

¹⁸With myriads of his powerful chariots, the Lord came from Sinai into his sanctuary.

¹⁹He ascended the high mountain, leading captives in his train, taking men as tributes, even rebels, to his dwelling.

²⁰Blessed be the Lord, God our saviour, who daily bears our burdens!

²¹Ours is a God who saves; our Lord lets us escape from death.

²²But he crushes the heads of his enemies, the hairy crowns of the criminals. ²³The Lord said, "I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea, ²⁴that you may bathe your feet in blood, and the tongues of your dogs may have their share of your foes."

²⁵I will remember the procession of my God, as they came into the sanctuary: ²⁶the singers in front, the musicians last, between them maidens playing tambourines.

²⁷Praise God in the great congregation, praise the Lord, fount of Israel.

²⁸There in the lead is the least of them, the little tribe of Benjamin; the princes of Judah in their throng; the princes of Naphtali, and of Zebulun.

²⁹Summon your power, O God; show the strength you have wielded for us.

³⁰At your temple in Jerusalem, kings will come to you with gifts.

³¹Rebuke the beast that dwells in the reeds, the herd of bulls and calves of any people. Humble them; let them bring gold and silver. Scatter the nations who delight in war.

³²Let wealth come from Egypt; let Ethiopia extend its hands to God.

³³Sing to God, O kingdoms of the world; sing praises to the Lord, ³⁴to him who rides the ancient heavens and speaks in the voice of thunder.

³⁵Proclaim the might of God; his majesty is over Israel, his power is in the skies.

⁶⁶This psalm used to be sung in the processions going up to the Jerusalem temple. The faithful know that God is among them, and the procession becomes the entrance of the triumphant God in his temple. This explains the images we find in his hymn.

The Lord God crosses the desert from Sinai to the Holy Land and his wonders touch nature itself. Enemy

kings are defeated: this refers to Deborah's victory at the torrent of Kishon (see Jgs 4). Then, the psalmist recalls the choosing of God's Mountain, Jerusalem. It concludes with a vision of the future filled with hope: the God who rides on the clouds will be revealed to all the nations.

³⁶ Awesome is God in his sanctuary. The God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!

PSALM 69 (68)

The waters reach up to my neck. – The servant of God, almost sinking in the waters of suffering and death, asks the Lord for help. Christ applied various words of this prayer to himself. After being liberated from death, he will be the happiness of all those who look for God.

² Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. ³ I am sunk in the miry depths where there is no foothold; into deep waters I have come, swept and engulfed by the flood.

⁴ I am weary from calling for help; my throat is hoarse and parched. My eyes have grown dim looking for my God.

⁵ More than the hairs of my head are those who hate me for no reason; mighty are those who attack me, many are my enemies without cause. What I did not steal I am forced to restore.

⁶ O God, you know my folly; my faults are not hidden from you.

⁷ Let me not bring disgrace to those who hope in you, O Lord God of hosts; may I cause no dishonour to those who seek you, O God of Israel – ⁸ since I am held in contempt for your sake, and shame has covered my face.

⁹ I have become a stranger to my brothers, a foreigner to my own mother's sons.

¹⁰ Zeal for your house consumes me as a fire and those who insult you insult me as well.

¹¹ When I humbled myself with fasting, I was scorned for it.

¹² When I put on sackcloth, I was made a laughing-stock.

¹³ I have become the talk of those who sit at the gates, the topic of the drunkards' songs.

¹⁴ But I pray to you, O Lord, at a time most favourable to you. In your

great love, O God, answer me with your unfailing help.

¹⁵ Rescue me lest I sink in the mire; deliver me from my enemies and from the deep waters.

¹⁶ Let not the flood engulf me, nor the deep suck me in, nor the pit close its mouth upon me.

¹⁷ In your unfailing love, O Lord, answer me; in the abundance of your mercy, turn to me.

¹⁸ Hide not your face from your servant; answer me at once for I am in distress.

¹⁹ Come and rescue me; from the snares of my enemies, set me free.

²⁰ You know the disgrace I suffer, and you know all my oppressors.

²¹ Dishonour has driven me to despair; I looked for sympathy and there was none, for comforters and there was no one.

²² They gave me poison for food; they gave me vinegar to drink.

²³ Let their own table be a snare for them; let their sacrificial feasts be a trap.

²⁴ Let them be blind so they will not see; let their loins be stricken with palsy.

²⁵ Pour out your fury upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them.

²⁶ Make their camp desolate; let no one dwell in their tents,

²⁷ for they persecute the one you have wounded.

²⁸ Charge them with crime upon crime, and do not acquit them.

²⁹ Blot them out of the book of life,

and do not enroll them among the upright.

³⁰ But I myself am wounded and in pain; let your salvation, O God, lift me up.

³¹ I will praise the name of God in song; I will glorify him with thanksgiving.

³² This will please the Lord more than an ox or a bull with horns and divided hooves.

³³ Let the oppressed witness this

and be glad. You who seek God, may your hearts be revived.

³⁴ For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise those in captivity.

³⁵ Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and whatever moves in them.

³⁶ For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah.

People will settle there and possess it; ³⁷ the children of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell in it.

PSALM 70 (69)

During persecution.

² Be pleased, O God, to rescue me! Make haste, O Lord, to help me!

³ Let those who seek my destruction be put to shame and confusion. Let those who desire my fall be turned back like fools.

⁴ Let those who say "Aha, Aha!" to me feel shame and anxiety.

⁵ May all who seek you be glad and rejoice in you. May those who love your saving power say ever more, "Great is God!"

⁶ But I am afflicted and needy; hasten to me, O God, my help and my deliverer. O Lord, do not delay!

PSALM 71 (70)

Prayer of an old man. – We will have a better knowledge of the mercy of God at the end of our lives and it will be easy for us to remember the wonders he worked for us. Let us implore God to grant us true consolation when our present lives end.

¹ In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; let me not be disgraced.

² In your justice deliver me, turn your ear to me and save me! ³ Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to give me safety, for you are my rock and my fortress.

⁴ Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the cruel and violent.

⁵ For you, O Lord, have been my hope, my trust, O God, from my youth.

⁶ I have relied on you from birth; from my mother's womb you brought me forth. My praise is of you continually.

⁷ I have become like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge.

⁸ My mouth is filled with your praise, announcing your glory day by day.

⁹ Do not cast me off in my old age, do not desert me when my strength fails.

¹⁰ For my enemies speak ill of me; those after my life hatch their conspiracy.

¹¹ They say, "God has forsaken him; let us pursue and seize him, for there is no one to rescue him."

¹² O God, be not far from me; my God, make haste to help me!

¹³ Let my accusers be destroyed in shame; let those who seek my ruin be covered with disgrace and scorn.

¹⁴ But I shall always hope and praise you more and more.

¹⁵ My lips will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation day by day, though its greatness is beyond me.

¹⁶ I will come to your strength, O Lord, and announce justice that is yours alone.

¹⁷ You have taught me from my younger days and I proclaim your marvels still.

¹⁸ So when I grow old and have grey hair, do not leave me, O God; give me enough time to declare your might to the next generation, your power to all who come.

¹⁹ Your justice, O God, reaches to heaven; you have done great things. Who is like you, O God?

²⁰ You have sent me hardship and misery, but once more you will revive me; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again.

²¹ You will increase my honour, and comfort me more and more.

²² I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; will sing your praise with the lyre, C. Holy One of Israel.

²³ My lips will rejoice, and like wise my soul which you have rescued.

²⁴ I will sing of your justice the whole day long, for those who sought to do me harm have been confused and put to shame.

PSALM 72 (71)

The King of Peace. – The ideal kingdom described here will never be achieved here below, but the Risen Lord will inaugurate it at the end time. Yet, we Christians must discover the signs of the coming of the Kingdom in this world: humankind is moving toward its unification while the longing for justice and peace for all men and all nations, becomes stronger.

This psalm is the joyful manifestation of the King of Peace who "brings good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). He will defend the right of the little people, he will free the humble, help the weak and there will be an abundance of wheat for all. These words reflect universal longings and speak to our times. We are a long way from the Universal Charter of Human Rights being a reality: many people do not have a standard of living and culture enabling them to be free and responsible for themselves.

He will free the poor when he cries out. This, obviously, does not mean that men should passively wait for the beginning of this Rule in our world. God is so considerate of men, created in his image, that he wants to associate us to all his works, including the realization of the eternal city. This will, naturally, be a gift from God, but not purely a gift as was the appearance of the universe, for it will be the crowning of all that men have begun to achieve on earth, through their efforts to build a more fraternal society. In order to believe in the possibility of this eternal city, men must already see here, in the earthly city, an outline of the other one.

O God, endow the king with your justice, the royal son with your righteousness.

² May he rule your people justly and your afflicted ones compassionately.

³ Let the mountains bring prosperity, and the hills peace and integrity.

⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor, deliver the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor.

⁵ May he endure as the sun and as the moon through all generations.

⁶ May he be like rain falling on the fields, like showers watering the earth.

⁷ May justice flower in his days, and peace abound till the moon be no more.

⁸ May he reign from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.

⁹ May his foes be crushed before him, and his enemies lick the dust.

¹⁰ May the kings of Tarshish and the islands render him tribute, the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts,

¹¹ all kings bow down to him,
and all nations serve him.

¹² He delivers the needy who call on him,
the afflicted with no one to help them.

¹³ His mercy is upon the weak and the poor,
to whom he is a protector.

¹⁴ He rescues them from oppression and strife
for their life is precious to him.

¹⁵ May he live long,
may gold from Sheba be given him.
May people always pray for him,
and blessings be invoked for him all day.

¹⁶ May grain abound throughout the land,
waving and rustling as in Lebanon;
may cities teem with people.

¹⁷ May his name endure forever;
may his name be as lasting as the sun.
All nations will be blessed through him,
and he will be blessed by all people.

¹⁸ Praised be the Lord, God of Israel,
who alone works so marvelously.

¹⁹ Praised be his glorious name forever;
may the whole earth be filled with his glory!
Amen. Amen.

^a This concludes the prayers
of David, son of Jesse.

PSALM 73 (72)

Wait for the end says the psalmist. Why have I been honest? asks the father of a family who cannot rise above poverty and who feels insulted by the luxury of those who became rich at the expense of others.

Suddenly, they are destroyed! The wicked will vanish while God leads his friends to share in his glory.

These are the ones who survived the great persecution. The one sitting on the throne will protect them: never again will they suffer from hunger or thirst, nor will they be burdened by the blazing sun or wind. Because the Lamb who is sitting on the throne will take them to the fountain of living waters and God will wipe away their tears' (Rv 7:14-17)

Why are the wicked successful? – Our faith almost weakens when we see the wicked succeed in all aspects of life: the violent, those without scruples, those who have the money to corrupt, those who are masters of deceit.

¹ Surely God is good to the virtuous,
to the clean of heart.

² But, as for me, I almost stumbled,
I nearly lost my foothold,

³ because I was envious of the arrogant,
when I saw them prosper in their wickedness.

⁴ For they suffer no pain;
they are strong and sound of body,

⁵ free from troubles common to mortals;
they are not stricken by human ills.

⁶ That is why pride becomes their necklace,
and violence the robe that covers them.

⁷ Evil comes from their callous hearts,
boundless evil from their corrupt minds.

⁸ They scoff and speak with malice,
and in their arrogance they threaten oppression.

⁹ Their mouths defy the heavens
 and their tongues dictate on earth.
¹⁰ People, therefore, look up to them
 and lap up every word they utter.
¹¹ "How will God ever find out?" they say.
 "Is everything known to the Most High?"
¹² Such are the wicked – always carefree
 while they rake in riches.
¹³ In vain have I kept my heart clean
 and washed my hands in innocence.
¹⁴ All day long I have been stricken
 and punished every morning."
¹⁵ Had I spoken as they do,
 I would have been unworthy
 of belonging to your children.
¹⁶ Although I tried to understand this,
 it seemed to me a difficult task,
¹⁷ until I entered the sanctuary of God.
 Only then was I enlightened
 and I perceived their approaching doom.
¹⁸ You place them on slippery ground
 to ensure their ruin.
¹⁹ How suddenly they are destroyed,
 how completely swept away by terror!
²⁰ As one awakes from a nightmare,
 so when you get up, O Lord,
 you discard them as insignificant.
²¹ But my heart had been so embittered,
 my spirit so distraught
²² that I failed to understand;
 I was like a stupid beast in your presence.
²³ Yet I shall always remain with you.
 You take hold of my right hand,
²⁴ you guide me with your counsel,
 and in the end, you will take me to glory.
²⁵ I have no one in heaven but you;
 I desire nothing on earth but you.
²⁶ My flesh and my heart waste away
 for you, my beloved and my rock.
 God is my portion forever.
²⁷ For those who abandon you will perish;
 you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
²⁸ But as for me, my joy is to be near God;
 so I have made the Lord my refuge,
 and I will proclaim all his works.

PSALM 74 (73)

Arise, O God and defend your cause! This psalm reminds us of the persecution during the time of the Maccabees.

O God, have you rejected us forever? Why vent your anger on the sheep of your own fold?

²Remember the people you have formed of old, the tribe you have redeemed as your inheritance. Remember Mount Zion where you once lived.

³Retrace your way to the sanctuary, and see the ruins left by the enemy.

⁴In your shrine your foes roared triumphantly and set up their banner in victory.

⁵Like men cutting down a clump of trees, ⁶they smashed at all the carved panelling with their hatchets, hammers and axes.

⁷They defiled your sanctuary and set aflame the dwelling place of your name.

⁸Furiously they said, "Let us destroy them." They razed to the ground all the shrines of God in the land.

⁹With no signs and no prophets, no one can tell how long this will last.

¹⁰How long, O God, will the foe blaspheme? How long will the enemy revile your name?

¹¹Why do you hold back your right hand? Why keep your hand hidden?

¹²Yet O God, my king since birth,

you have brought salvation to earth.

¹³You split the sea in two by your power; you broke the monster's heads in the water; ¹⁴you crushed the heads of Leviathan and fed him to the dolphins.

¹⁵You opened up rivers and springs and dried up ever-flowing streams.

¹⁶You own the day as well as the night; you made the sun and all that gives light.

¹⁷You fixed the earth's borders and created the seasons.

¹⁸Remember, O Lord, how the lawless scoff at your name and cast you off.

¹⁹Do not betray your turtledove to the beast, do not forget the life of the poor whom you love.

²⁰Have regard for your covenant, for violence lurks in the dark of the land.

²¹Do not let the oppressed be put to shame; let the poor and needy praise your name.

²²Arise, O God, and defend your cause against the blasphemy of evil-doers.

²³Do not forget the clamour of your foes, the continuous uproar of your enemies.

PSALM 75 (74)

We thank you, Lord, because you are the judge. – God already judged the world by the cross and resurrection of Christ and he gave the just the assurance they would triumph.

²We give you thanks, O God, we give thanks, for your name is near. Men recount your wonderful deeds.

³At a set time I will judge fairly.

⁴The earth totters, all who dwell in it tremble; but it is I who hold its pillars firm.

⁵To the proud I say, "Be proud no more." And to the wicked, "Raise not

your head. ⁶Do not lift yourself so high, do not insult God."

⁷God comes, though not from the east or from the west, or the mountains, or the desert;

⁸God comes to judge, putting down one and lifting up another.

⁹In the hand of the Lord is a cup

filled with spiced and foaming wine;
he pours it out for the wicked who
drain it to the dregs.

¹⁰ As for me, I will rejoice forever

and sing praises to the God of Jacob.

¹¹ I will break the power of the
wicked, but the power of the virtuous
will be exalted.

PSALM 76 (75)

After a victory. – God has defeated the kings who were attacking the Holy City, Jerusalem. This announces another final victory when the humble will be saved. "As the lightning flashes across the sky from East to West, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

² God is now famous in Judah
in Israel his name is great.

³ Salem is indeed his tent;
he has made Zion his dwelling place.

⁴ There he has broken the flashing arrow,
the shield and sword, the spear and bow.

⁵ You are glorious and majestic,
enthroned on mountains of plunder.

⁶ Valiant men lie despoiled,
sleeping their last sleep,
not one of them able to lift a hand.

⁷ At your rebuke, O God of Jacob,
both rider and horse lay stunned.

⁸ But you – how terrible you are!
Who can stand the fury of your onslaught?

⁹ You uttered judgment from the heavens;
while the earth trembled and lay still,

¹⁰ as you, O God, arose to judge
and to save all the humble of the earth.

¹¹ Pagan nations will bring you praise,
their survivors will celebrate your name.

¹² Make vows to the Lord, your God,
and fulfill them; let the peoples
bring offerings to the Fearsome One

¹³ who breaks the spirit of rulers,
and is formidable to the kings of the earth.

PSALM 77 (76)

I recall the deeds of the Lord. – We easily look upon the past as more wonderful than it actually was. With the passing of time we will see better that God was present and at work in the present moment.

² I cry aloud to God – aloud that he
may hear me.

³ When in trouble I seek the Lord, I
stretch out my hand untiringly, my
soul refusing to be consoled.

⁴ When I think of God I sigh; when
I meditate my spirit weakens.

⁵ You keep me awake and my eyes
watchful; I cannot speak for I am so
troubled, ⁶ I remember the days of old.

⁷ At night I consider the years of long ago and my spirit wonders.

⁸ "Will the Lord reject us forever? Will he never show his favour again?"

⁹ Has his love vanished and his promise ended for all time?

¹⁰ Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

¹¹ This is what makes me distraught – that the Most High no longer acts as before.

¹² I remember the deeds of the Lord; I recall his marvels of old.

¹³ I meditate on all your work, and consider your mighty deeds.

¹⁴ Your way, O God, is most holy. Is there any god greater than you, our God?

¹⁵ You alone are the God who

works wonders, who has displayed your power to all.

¹⁶ With power you have redeemed your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.

¹⁷ When the waters saw you, O God, they were afraid and the deep trembled.

¹⁸ The clouds poured down rain; the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed from every side.

¹⁹ Your thunder rolled with the whirlwind; your lightning lit up the world; the earth shook and trembled.

²⁰ Your path led through the sea, your way through the great water, but your footprints were nowhere to be seen.

²¹ You led your people as a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

PSALM 78 (77)

How many times did they tempt God! This psalm draws a lesson from Israel's history: God's gifts and the ingratitude of his people.

Give heed, O my people, to my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth!

² I will speak in parables, I will talk of old mysteries ³ which we have heard and known, which our fathers have told us.

⁴ We will not keep them hidden from our children; we will announce them to the coming generation: the glorious deeds of the Lord, his might and his wonders.

⁵ He decreed statutes for Jacob and set up a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach their children.

⁶ so the next generation would learn and in turn teach their own offspring.

⁷ They would then put their trust in God, remembering his deeds and his commands.

⁸ They would not be like their fathers who were stubborn and rebellious, disloyal and unfaithful to God.

⁹ The Ephraimites, well armed with bow, took flight when the time came to do battle.

¹⁰ They did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law.

¹¹ They forgot the marvels he had done ¹² what their fathers had seen in

²² God no longer works as in the past. The psalmist meditates on God's wonders in the past and compares them with his own time: it seems that God leaves his people in the midst of insoluble problems and difficulties.

Similarly, the present crisis in the Church may appear as its collapse; but in the next generation it will have turned out to be a resurrection. Also, in a believer's life, there are moments when God reveals himself and lifts us off our feet and times when he asks us to be faithful, without offering us any incentives.

I remember the deeds of the Lord and his wonders. Let us say with Paul, "God who gave his Son for our sakes, how would he not give us everything else with him?"

It is up to us to remember the past in our lives, our people, our Christian community in order to discover God's patience and to see in our misfortunes the deserved result of our sins. The division of Christians in various churches, in particular, must appear as the proof that we were not faithful to Christ's teaching.

the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.

¹³ He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand like a wall.

¹⁴ By day he led them with a cloud, and by night with a fiery light.

¹⁵ In the desert he split rocks to give them abundant drink.

¹⁶ He made streams come out of a rock and caused water to flow like a river.

¹⁷ Yet they sinned against him even more and rebelled against the Most High, ¹⁸ testing God in the desert, demanding the food they craved.

¹⁹ They blasphemed against God, saying: "Can God spread a table in the desert?"

²⁰ He made water flow out of the rock; can he also give his people bread or meat?"

²¹ When the Lord heard this he was enraged; his fire broke out against Jacob, his anger flared up against Israel, ²² for they had no faith in God nor trust in his deliverance.

²³ Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven; ²⁴ then he rained down manna upon them and fed them with the heavenly grain.

²⁵ They ate and had more than their fill of the bread of angels.

²⁶ Then from heaven he stirred the east wind, and by his power let loose the south wind, ²⁷ to rain down meat on them like dust.

Birds as thick as the sand on the seashore ²⁸ came falling down inside their camp, lying all around their tents.

²⁹ They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved.

³⁰ But even before they were satisfied, while the food was still in their mouths,

³¹ God's anger rose against them; he slew the strongest among them and laid low the young men of Israel.

³² In spite of this and all his wonders, they kept on sinning and not believing,

³³ so he swept away their days suddenly as a storm, and their years in terror. ³⁴ Whenever he slew them, they repented and sought him again in earnest.

³⁵ They remembered that God was their rock, that the Most High was their redeemer.

³⁶ They flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues, ³⁷ while their hearts were unfaithful; they were untrue to his covenant.

³⁸ Even then, in his compassion, he forgave them their offenses and desisted from destroying them.

Many a time he restrained his anger and did not fully stir up his wrath.

³⁹ He considered that they were but flesh, a breeze that passes and never returns.

⁴⁰ How often did they rebel against him in the wilderness, how often did they grieve him in the desert!

⁴¹ Again and again they tested him, and provoked the Holy One of Israel.

⁴² They did not remember his power and their redemption from the oppressor; ⁴³ neither his marvels shown in Egypt nor his wonders in the region of Zoan, ⁴⁴ when he turned the rivers to blood so the oppressors had nothing to drink.

⁴⁵ He sent swarms of flies that devoured them, frogs that devastated them.

⁴⁶ He gave their crops to the caterpillar and their produce to the locust.

⁴⁷ He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamores with frost.

⁴⁸ He struck their herds with plague and their flocks with thunderbolts.

⁴⁹ He unleashed his fury against them, his wrath, indignation and strife — a band of destroying angels.

⁵⁰ Giving vent to his anger, he did not spare them from death, but gave them over to the plague.

⁵¹ He struck down all Egypt's firstborn, manhood's firstfruits in the tents of Ham.

⁵² Then he led forth his people like a flock, and guided them like sheep through the desert.

⁵³ He led them safely, so they were unafraid as they saw the sea engulfed their enemies.

⁵⁴ He brought them to his holy land, to the mountain his right hand had won.

⁵⁵ He gave them as inheritance the land of the peoples he drove out before them, and they pitched their tents in it.

⁵⁶ But they challenged and rebelled against God the Most High, and disobeyed his decrees.

⁵⁷ They were unfaithful like their fathers, deceitful and crooked as a twisted bow.

⁵⁸ They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols.

⁵⁹ Filled with wrath, God rejected Israel.

⁶⁰ He abandoned the tabernacle at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among men.

⁶¹ He lead his glory into captivity, his ark into the hand of the enemy..

⁶² He gave his people over to the sword, so furious was he at his inheritance.

⁶³ Fire devoured their young men; their maidens were deprived of wedding songs.

⁶⁴ As their priests fell by the sword, no lament was heard from their widows.

⁶⁵ Then the Lord awoke, shouting, as from sleep induced by wine; ⁶⁶ he struck his enemies on their back and put them to everlasting shame.

⁶⁷ He rejected the house of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, ⁶⁸ but the tribe of Judah and Zion, his beloved mountain.

⁶⁹ He built his sanctuary like heaven, like the earth he founded forever.

⁷⁰ He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; ⁷¹ from tending the sheep and their young, he brought him to shepherd Jacob, the people of Israel, his inheritance.

⁷² And with upright heart David pastured them; with skillful hands he led them.

PSALM 79 (78)

How long will you be upset? Let God do justice to his people. The Lord does not owe us anything since we are sinners. However, let him consider his own honour, let him liberate and vindicate the "just."

O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple and reduced Jerusalem to rubble.

² They have given to the birds your servants' corpses, and the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth.

³ They have poured out the blood of your faithful like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury them.

⁴ Mocked and reviled by those around us, we have been scorned by our neighbours.

⁵ How long will this take, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath always burn like fire?

⁶ Pour out your anger on the nations that do not acknowledge you; pour it out on the kingdoms that do not call on your name.

⁷ For they have devoured Jacob

and laid waste his homeland. Remember not against us the sins of our fathers.

⁸ Lift us up in your compassion, for we have been brought very low.

⁹ Help us, God of our salvation, for the glory of your name.

¹⁰ Give not to the nations a chance to say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes let them know that you avenge the spilled blood of your servants.

¹¹ Listen to the groans of the imprisoned; by the strength of your arm, deliver those doomed to die.

¹² To our neighbours, O Lord, return sevenfold the taunts with which they have taunted you.

¹³ Then we, your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; we will recount your praise from generation to generation.

PSALM 80 (79)

Manifest yourself, O Lord! - God is our shepherd; has he forgotten his people and his Church? When the church seems discredited, it is Christ's salvation which seems to have failed. Lord. "Restore us and convert us."

² Listen, O shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock, you who sit enthroned between the cherubim.

³ Shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might and come to save us.

⁴ Restore us O God of hosts: make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

⁵ O Lord of hosts, how long will your anger burn against the prayer of your peoples?

⁶ You have fed them with the bread of woe, and gave them tears to drink in their sorrow.

⁷ You have made us the scorn of our neighbours and the laughing-stock of our oppressors.

⁸ Restore us, O God of hosts; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

⁹ You drove the nations out, and in their land you planted a vine which you brought from Egypt.

¹⁰ On the ground that you cleared, it took root, and filled the land.

¹¹ Its shade covered the mountain: as it towered over the mighty cedars ¹² its branches reached out to the sea and its shoots to the River.

¹³ Why, then, have you broker down its walls, so that all who pass by pluck its fruits,

¹⁴ the beast from the forest ravage it and all creatures of the field feed on it?

¹⁵ Turn again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven and see; care for this vine,

¹⁶ the stock planted by your right hand.

¹⁷ Let those who burned it down perish before you at your rebuke.

¹⁸ But lay your hand upon your instrument, upon the son of man whom you make strong for yourself.

¹⁹ Then we will never turn our back on you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

²⁰ Restore us, O Lord, God of hosts; make your face shine upon us that we may be saved.

PSALM 81 (80)

Open your mouth and I will fill it. God speaks and recalls the message he gave on Sinai. He promised to fill the mouths of the faithful with nourishment and wisdom.

I will feed my people with the best of wheat. This is the time to remember all that Jesus, "the bread of life," says in John 6.

"Israel, why do you stay in the land of your enemies and grow old in a strange nation where you live with impure people and are among those going to the nether world? It is because you abandoned the fountain of Wisdom. If you had followed God's way, you would have lived with enduring peace" (Baruch 3:10-13).

Open your mouth and I will fill it. – "If my people would hear me, then I would subdue their enemies." We are weak and we lack dynamism to evangelize and change the world. This is because we do not completely let go of our false gods.

² Joyfully sing to God, our strength; acclaim aloud the God of Jacob.

³ Start the music, strike the timbrel, play the harp and the lyre sweetly.

⁴ Sound the trumpet at the new moon, and on our feast day when the moon is full.

⁵ This is a decree for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob,

⁶ a statute he wrote for Joseph when he went out of Egypt.

⁷ They heard a voice they did not know:

"I relieved your shoulder of the burden; I freed your hands from the basket.

⁸ You called in distress, and I saved you; unseen, I answered you in thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

⁹ Hear, my people, as I admonish you.
 If only you would listen, O Israel!
¹⁰ There shall be no strange god among you,
 you shall not worship any alien god,
¹¹ for I the Lord am your God,
 who led you forth from the land of Egypt.
 Open wide your mouth, and I will fill it.
¹² But my people did not listen;
 Israel did not obey.
¹³ So I gave them over to their stubbornness
 and they followed their own counsels.
¹⁴ If only my people would listen,
 if only Israel would walk in my ways,
¹⁵ I would quickly subdue their adversaries
 and turn my hand against their enemies.
¹⁶ Those who hate the Lord would cringe before
 him,
 and their punishment would last forever.
¹⁷ I would feed you with the finest wheat
 and satisfy you with honey from the rock."

PSALM 82 (81)

God gathers the rulers of the world called "gods" because to judge and rule men is God's prerogative and those who are in charge of this function do this in the name of God.

God reminds them of the sacred right of the people. Rulers are mortal too and they are accountable.

God judges the judges

God presides in the divine council;
 he gives judgment among the gods:
² "How long will you judge unjustly
 and show partiality to the wicked?
³ Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
 defend the poor and the oppressed.
⁴ Rescue the helpless and the needy;
 deliver them from the hand of the wicked."
⁵ Without knowledge and understanding,
 they walk about in darkness;
 all the earth's foundations are shaken.
⁶ "You are gods," I said
 "you are all sons of the Most High;
⁷ but you will all die like other men;
 you will all fall like any ruler.
⁸ Rise, O God, judge the earth,
 you who rule over all the world.

PSALM 83 (82)**Everyone is against us.**

² Do not keep silent, O God, hold
 not your peace, be not unmoved! ³ See how your enemies are astir,
 those who hate you rear their heads.

⁴ Craftily they plot against your people, they conspire against your protected ones.

⁵ They say, "Let us destroy them as a nation. Let the name of Israel be forgotten!"

⁶ With one heart they devise a scheme and form an alliance against you: ⁷ the people of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the progeny of Hagar,

⁸ Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, with the people of Tyre.

⁹ In league with them are the Assyrians who lend support to Lot's descendants.

¹⁰ Deal with them as you did with Midian, with Sisera and Yabin at the river Kishon;

¹¹ they perished at Endor and became dung on the ground.

¹² Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their chiefs like Zebah and Zalmunna, ¹³ who said, "Let us take possession of the pasture lands of God."

¹⁴ O my God, make them like leaves caught in a whirlwind, like chaff helpless before the wind.

¹⁵ As fire consumes the forest, as flames set the mountains ablaze, ¹⁶ so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm.

¹⁷ Cover their faces with shame, O Lord, that they may seek your name:

¹⁸ Let them be dismayed and abashed forever; let them perish in disgrace.

¹⁹ Let them know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the world.

PSALM 84 (83)

I want to see the living God. – The man who is far from Jerusalem is thinking of the happiness of those who go there on a pilgrimage to take part in the Temple celebrations. Let us kindle our yearning for our eternal home even when we are happy to be able to celebrate the Eucharist in our churches.

² How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!

³ My soul yearns, pines even,
for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my flesh
cry out for the living God.

⁴ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for its young,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God!

⁵ Happy are those who live in your house,
singing continually of your praise!

⁶ Happy are the pilgrims whom you strengthen
encouraging them to make the ascent to Zion.

⁷ As they pass through the Valley,
they make it a place of springs,
the early rain covers it with blessings.

⁸ They go from strength to strength
till they appear before God in Zion.

⁹O Lord of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob!
Look upon our shield, O God;
¹⁰look upon the face of your anointed!

¹¹One day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper
in the house of my God
than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.

¹²For the Lord God is a sun and a shield;
he bestows favour and glory.
The Lord withholds no good thing
from those who walk in uprightness.

¹³O Lord of hosts,
blessed is the man who trusts in you.

PSALM 85 (84)

This psalm, written when the Israelites returned from captivity in Babylon, is filled with the most basic and universal words in the human language: freedom, life, joy, salvation, love, justice, peace, happiness.

Yet, the return of the exiled Jews was only one more step toward authentic liberation. Nothing is forever, and each stage in the realization of God's plan is the image of another stage. The people of God were always going forward.

Even the present rule of the risen Christ and the work of salvation achieved through the church are nothing more than the figure of the eternal kingdom: when man will be definitively liberated from suffering and from death, totally reconciled with himself, with nature and with other men, when God will be "all in all."

This psalm has two very relevant local points for today.

In the first place, it is said that, in spite of everything, our earth is loved by God. When we are upset and disheartened by so many ugly things, the injustice and violence taking place in the world, we should come back to the statements of this psalm: O Lord, how good you have been with your land. God has looked upon us, *the Glory of God dwells in our land*.

All of this has been achieved in Jesus Christ. In him, heaven and earth are radically and profoundly reconciled. The river of human history, in spite of all its curves and rubbish,

Justice and peace have embraced each other. – This psalm describes Christ's work as a kind of marriage between heaven and earth, the cooperation between God and men. He is the fullness of God and the fruit of our earth.

²You have favoured your land, O Lord;
you have brought back the exiles of Jacob.

³You have forgiven the sin of your people;
you have pardoned their offenses.

⁴You have done away with your wrath
and turned from your burning rage.

⁵But restore us to wholeness, God our saviour;
put away altogether your indignation.

⁶Will your anger be always with us
and carried over to all generations?

⁷Will you not give us life anew,
that your people may rejoice in you?

⁸Show us, O Lord, your unfailing love
and grant us your saving help.

⁹I will listen to God's proclamation,
for he promises peace to his people,
his saints – that they renounce their folly.

¹⁰His salvation is near to those who fear him,
and glory will dwell in our land.

¹¹Love and faithfulness have met;
righteousness and peace have embraced.

¹²Faithfulness will reach up from the earth
while justice leans down from heaven.

flows into the infinite ocean of God. Salvation comes from God, but it is achieved through a man of flesh and bones. Christ, freely welcomed by a woman in the name of all humanity. Starting with the Incarnation, it is not possible to believe in God without trusting men; we cannot love God without loving men and all that is connected with human life.

¹³ The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.
¹⁴ Justice will go ahead of him,
and peace will tread along his path.

PSALM 86 (85)

Prayer in affliction. – The Servant of God, oppressed by sin and anguished by death, implores the help of the One who is pure goodness.

Listen, O Lord, and answer me, for I am afflicted and needy.

² Preserve my life for I am God-fearing; save your servant for you are my God.

³ Bring joy to the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ⁴ Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all day.

⁵ You are good and forgiving, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call on you.

⁶ Listen, O Lord, to my prayer, hear the voice of my pleading.

⁷ I call on you in my calamity for I know you will answer me.

⁸ None is like you among the gods, and your works are beyond compare.

⁹ All the nations you have made will come; they will worship before you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name.

¹⁰ For you are great, and wonderful are your deeds; you alone are God.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord, teach me to walk in your truth; instruct my heart to fear your name.

¹² I heartily thank you, O Lord my God; I will glorify your name forever.

¹³ Your love for me has been great, you have saved me from the grave.

¹⁴ Up against me, are ruthless men, O God; a band of cut-throats, evildoers who do not hold you in reverence.

¹⁵ But you, O Lord God, are merciful, slow to anger, loving and faithful.

¹⁶ Turn to me, take pity on me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your handmaid.

¹⁷ Give me a sign of your grace, that my foes may see to their disgrace, that you, O Lord, are my help and comfort.

PSALM 87 (86)

My God loves the gates of Zion. – The psalmist recalls that God has chosen Jerusalem-Zion, that is the Church, as the capital of his people and the mother of all the nations.

On the holy mountain is the city he built;
² the Lord prefers the gates of Zion

⁸⁶ Here we present a few verses of the Imitation of Christ: Christ calls us to share his anguish:

I have many people in love with my kingdom; but few are concerned about carrying my cross.

Many wish for my consolation, but few my tribulations. I have many companions at my table, but few in my deprivation.

They all want to rejoice with me, but few want to suffer on my account.

Many follow me to the breaking of the bread, but few to the drinking of the cup of my passion.

Many revere my miracles; but few cling to the ignominy of my cross.

Many love me as long as they are not put to the test.

Many praise and bless me as long as they receive some favours.

But if I hide and leave them for one instant, they complain and fall into the worst depression.

On the contrary, those who love me for myself and not because of some particular interest, bless me in trials and anguish of heart, as well as in the greatest joys.

These were also born there. God looks on all the people of the world and inscribes them in his book as if they were children of his Holy City.

But of Zion, they will say: Mother. The New Jerusalem is the Church, the mother of all the peoples. The living image of the church is Mary, the mother of all believers. Because she is also the mother of all the faithful

to any of Jacob's towns.

³Great things have been foretold of you, O city of God:

⁴I will have Egypt and Babylon among those who know me; and also Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia; of them people say in pride, "So and so was born here."

⁵But of Zion it shall be said, "All men are born in her."

For the Most High himself has founded her.

⁶And the Lord notes in the people's register: "All those were also born in Zion."

⁷And all will dance and sing joyfully for you.

PSALM 88 (87)

Prayer of the sick person close to death. – It seems that those of us who know Christ should never sink into despair. Yet, we have days when heaven is hidden to us as it was for Christ in his agony.

²O Lord, my God, I call for help by day; before you I cry out by night.

³May my prayer come to you; incline your ear to my cry for help.

⁴My soul is full of trouble; my life draws near to the grave. I am a man without strength.

⁵Counted among those going down the pit – I lie forsaken, among the dead, like the slain deprived of any grave, like those you remember no more, cut off from your care.

⁶You have plunged me into the lowest and darkest depths of the pit.

⁷With your wrath heavy upon me, you have buffeted me with all your waves.

⁸You have taken away my closest friends; you have made me repulsive to them. I cannot escape from my confinement.

⁹My eyes have grown dim with grief; spreading out my hands to you, I call upon you every day, O Lord.

¹⁰Are your wonders meant for the dead? Will ghosts rise to give you thanks?

¹¹Is your love and faithfulness remembered among those gone to the netherworld?

¹²Are your wonders known in the dark, your salvation in the land of forgetfulness?

¹³But to you, O Lord, I cry for help; every morning I pray to you.

¹⁴O Lord, why do you reject me, why do you hide your face?

¹⁵Afflicted and close to death from youth, I have suffered terrors and helplessness.

¹⁶Your wrath has swept over me; your assaults have destroyed me.

¹⁷Now they surround me like a flood; and completely engulf me.

¹⁸Bereft of loved ones and now alone, I have only darkness as my companion.

⁸⁸ On the cross the Lord entrusted us to his mother so that she would alleviate our pain in days of anguish.

PSALM 89 (88)

Your favour and your faithfulness. – God is faithful: he is in charge of history and he guides our lives according to his promises which never fail.

²I will sing forever, O Lord, of your love and proclaim your faithfulness from age to age.

³I will declare how lasting is your love, how firm your faithfulness in heaven.

⁴You said, "I have made a covenant with David, my chosen one; I have made a pledge to my servant⁵ to establish his descendants forever and to build his throne for all generations."

⁶The heavens proclaim your wonders, O Lord; the assembly of the holy ones recalls your faithfulness.
⁷Who in the skies can compare with the Lord; who of the heaven-born is like him?

⁸A God feared in the council of holy ones, awesome to those who approach him.

⁹O Lord God of hosts, who is like you, clothed in might and faithfulness?

¹⁰You reign over the surging sea; you pacify its raging waves.

¹¹You crushed Rahab like a carcass; with your strong arm you routed your foes.

¹²Yours are the heavens and the earth; you founded the world and everything in it.

¹³You created the north and the south – Tabor and Hermon rejoice at your name.

¹⁴What a powerful arm you have – a mighty hand, an exalted right hand!

¹⁵Your throne is founded on justice and virtue; love and faithfulness go before you.

¹⁶Blessed are the people who know your praise. They walk in the light of your face.
¹⁷They rejoice all day in your presence and are exalted by your protection.

¹⁸You are our glory and power; and your favour lifts us up.

¹⁹Our king is in the hands of the Lord, the God of Israel provides us with a saviour.

²⁰In the past you spoke in a vision; you said to your faithful people: "I have set the crown upon a mighty one; from among you I have chosen a young man."

²¹I have found my servant David, and with my holy oil I have anointed him.

²²Since my hand will be ever with him and my arm will constantly sustain him,
²³no enemy shall outwit him nor wicked man oppress him.

²⁴I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries.

²⁵My faithful love will be with him, and my powerful help will lift him up.

²⁶I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers.

²⁷Of me he will say, "You are my Father, my God, my Rock, my Saviour."

²⁸I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

²⁹I will keep my covenant forever firm, and my love for him will endure.

³⁰His dynasty will last forever, and his throne endure as the heavens.

³¹If his sons forsake my law and fail to follow my decrees,
³²if they

⁸⁹ *Favour and faithfulness* are the theme of this psalm. These two outstanding qualities of God appear throughout the Bible: *Favour*, or grace, goodness, tenderness, mercy; *Faithfulness*, that is to say: loyalty, truth.

In the bitter days of the Exile, the author of this psalm

recalls God's promises: Where is the saving King who was to give glory and prosperity to his people? At times the modern believer feels driven to ask: "Lord, what happened to your promises? Why is there no bread for your children? Where is your justice? Why does the Church not live according to the Gospel?"

violate my statutes and keep not my commandments,

³³ I will punish their crime with the rod and their offences with the scourge; ³⁴ yet I will not withdraw my love from him, nor will I betray my faithfulness.

³⁵ I will keep my covenant and be true to my promises.

³⁶ I have sworn by my holiness and I will not lie to David.

³⁷ His dynasty will last forever, and his throne endure as the sun.

³⁸ Like the moon it will shine forever and stand firm as the skies.

³⁹ But now you have rejected, disowned and raged at your anointed.

⁴⁰ You have disregarded your covenant and cast off the crown of your servant.

⁴¹ You have destroyed his walls and reduced his strongholds to rubble. ⁴² Taken advantage of by despoilers, he has become the scorn of his neighbours.

⁴³ You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴⁴ You have turned the edge of his sword, and have not stood by him in battle.

⁴⁵ You have wrenched the sceptre from his hand and flung his throne to the ground.

⁴⁶ You have shortened the time of his splendour and covered him with shame.

⁴⁷ How long, O Lord? Will you hide forever? How long will you be angry?

⁴⁸ Consider how short my life span is, how shadowy the destiny of man.

⁴⁹ What mortal can live and never see death? What man can evade the netherworld?

⁵⁰ O Lord, where is your former great love, which in faithfulness you pledged to David?

⁵¹ Remember how your servant is despised, how I suffer the scorn of the peoples, ⁵² the taunts with which your enemies have mocked every step of your anointed.

⁵³ Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen, Amen.

PSALM 90 (89)

Our days pass away like a sigh. – Our earthly life is short and frail before the eternal and unchanging God. He is our refuge and he can give meaning to our existence. Let us ask him to fill it with his wisdom, which is to love, praise and serve him.

Lord, you have been our refuge through all generations.

² Before the mountains were formed, before you made the earth and the world, from eternity to eternity – you are God.

³ You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return, O sons of men!"

⁴ A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has passed, or like a watch in the night.

⁵ You put an end to men's existence like a dream, like grass in the morning, ⁶ springing up anew at dawn, but fading and withering in the evening.

⁷ Your fury consumes us like fire, and we are helpless before your anger.

⁸ Our evils lie before you who scrutinize our hidden sins.

⁹ Our days pass away under your wrath; our years are gone in no time.

¹⁰ Seventy years is our life's length, or eighty if we have the strength, yet most of them are sorrow and trouble; speeding by, they sweep us along.

¹¹ Who knows the extent of your anger? Who has seen the end of your wrath?

¹² So teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.

¹³ How long will you be angry, O Lord? Have mercy on your servant.

¹⁴ Fill us at daybreak with your love, that we may be glad the whole day.

¹⁵ Make our future just as happy as our past was sad.

¹⁶ Let your work be seen by your servants and your glorious power by their children.

¹⁷ May the favour of the Lord be upon us; may he prosper the work of our hands.

PSALM 91 (90)

This psalm is addressed to the pilgrims who have come to spend the night in the patios of the Temple. There, they are the Lord's guests: he will keep on sheltering them.

Night prayer. – A prayer which the believer prays with assurance: God protects the one who trusts in him.

¹ You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who rest in the shadow of the Almighty,

² say to the Lord, "My stronghold, my refuge, my God in whom I trust!"

³ He will rescue you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his pinions and give you refuge under his wings; his faithfulness is your shield.

⁵ You shall not fear the terror of the night nor the arrows that fly by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks by night, and the plague that destroys at noonday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but nothing shall befall you.

⁸ Look and see how the wicked are repaid.

⁹ If you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your stronghold,

¹⁰ no harm will come upon you, no disaster will draw near your tent.

¹¹ For he will command his angels to guard you in all your ways.

¹² They will lift you up with their hands so that your foot will not hit a stone.

¹³ You will trample under foot the lion and the snake.

¹⁴ "Because he clings to me in love, I will rescue him," says the Lord.

"I will protect him for he knows my name.

¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will answer; in time of trouble I will be with him; I will deliver and honour him.

¹⁶I will satisfy him with long life
and show him my salvation."

PSALM 92 (91)

The holy man will grow like the palm tree. – Great human achievements deserve admiration, of course, but they must not make us "senseless," that is, insensitive to the workings of divine grace. However ordinary the latter may be, their fruitfulness is greater and their reach more in depth. The saints are the ones who leave the most profound and lasting impression on human history.

²It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praise to your name, O Most High,

³to proclaim your love in the morning,
to declare your faithfulness at night,
⁴accompanied by music from the lyre
and melody from the lute and harp.

⁵For you make me glad with your deeds, O Lord,
and I sing for joy at the work of your hands.

⁶How great are your works,
O Lord, how deep your thoughts!

⁷The senseless will not know,
nor will the stupid understand them.

⁸For although the wicked prosper
and the evildoers flourish like grass,
they are doomed to eternal destruction.

⁹But you, O Lord, are forever exalted.

¹⁰Your enemies will perish,
evildoers will be scattered.

¹¹You have made me stronger than the wild ox
you have poured fresh oil on me.

¹²I have seen the downfall of my enemies;
I have heard the doom of my assailants.

¹³The virtuous will flourish like palm trees,
they will thrive like the cedars of Lebanon.

¹⁴Planted in the house of the Lord,
they will prosper in the courts of God.

¹⁵In old age they will still bear fruit
they will stay ever fresh and green,

¹⁶to show that the Lord is upright,
that he is my Rock,
and there is no injustice in him.

PSALM 93 (92)

The Lord rules dressed in splendour. – God rules as the creator of the universe. God rules in the person of the risen Christ.

¹The Lord reigns, robed in majesty;
the Lord is bound with strength.

Firmly founded, the world cannot be moved.

² Since then your throne stands,
from all eternity you are.

³ The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
the floods have lifted up their roaring,
the floods have lifted up their pounding waves.

⁴ Mightier than the thunder of great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea,
the Lord on high is mighty!

⁵ Your statutes stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for days without end, O Lord.

PSALM 94 (93)

Against evil rulers.

¹ O Lord God, to whom vengeance
belongs, O God who avenges, show
yourself!

² Arise, O judge of the earth; repay
the proud with what they deserve.

³ How long shall the wicked, O
Lord, how long shall the wicked
exult?

⁴ Pouring out words of arrogance,
evildoers make a show of their insolence.

⁵ They crush your people, O Lord,
they oppress your inheritance.

⁶ They murder the widow and the
guest they massacre the helpless;
⁷ and they say, "The Lord does not
see; the God of Jacob does not care."

⁸ Remember this, you stupid men!
When will you understand, you fools!

⁹ He who made the ear, does he not
hear? He who formed the eye, does he
not see?

¹⁰ He who rebukes nations and
teaches man knowledge.

¹¹ The Lord knows the thoughts of
men, that they are a puff of wind.

¹² Blessed is the man you chasten,
O Lord, the man you teach your law;

¹³ you give him relief from distress
until a pit is dug for the wicked.

¹⁴ The Lord will not abandon his
people nor will he forsake his heri-
tage.

¹⁵ Justice will be restored, and the
upright will follow in its wake.

¹⁶ Who will rise up for me against
the wicked?

Who will stand by me against the
evildoers?

¹⁷ Had not the Lord given me help,
I would have fallen into the silence of
death.

¹⁸ I need only think, "My foot is
slipping," and your love, O Lord,
holds me up at once.

¹⁹ In the midst of anxiety and
trouble your consolation comes,
cheering my soul.

²⁰ You do not agree with wicked
rulers who bypass the law through
corrupt decrees.

²¹ They plot together against the
virtuous and condemn the innocent to
death.

²² But the Lord is my stronghold,
my God, my rock of refuge.

²³ He will repay them for their evil and destroy them for their wickedness; the Lord, our God, will blot them out.

PSALM 95 (94)

*A prayer by P. Teilhard de Chardin is quite fitting here:

In the distance, the sun has just illuminated the remote outline of the first Orient. Once again, under the changing cascade of its rays, the live surface of the earth awakens, shudders and begins again its amazing labor. O my God, I will offer you the desired harvest of this first effort. In my cup, I will present to you the sap of all the fruits which will be crushed today.

O Lord, I will bring to your presence the depths of my soul widely open to all the forces which, within a moment, are going to go up to every point in the world and converge toward the Spirit. In former times, the first fruits of the harvest and the best of the flocks were brought to your temple. The offering which you really seek, what you mysteriously need daily to satisfy your hunger, to quench your thirst, is nothing less than the development of the world urged by universal progress.

Receive, Lord, this whole Host which Creation, moved by your attractiveness, offers you in the new dawn. The bread, our effort, is not in itself. I know, more than immense decay. The wine, our grief, is only a dissolving drink. But in the heart of this formless mass, you placed – I am sure of it because I feel it – an irresistible and sanctifying desire which, from the wicked to the faithful, makes us all shout: "Lord, make us one."

PSALM 96 (95)

Come, let us sing to the Lord. – When we come to praise God, let us be disposed to listen to his words and let us attempt to follow his will in our daily lives.

¹ Come, let us sing to the Lord,
let us make a joyful sound
to the Rock of our salvation.

² Let us come to him with thanksgiving,
let us extol him with music and song.

³ For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth
and the mountain heights.

⁵ the sea is his, for he made it,
giving shape to the dry land.

⁶ Come and worship; let us bow down,
kneel before the Lord, our Maker.

⁷ He is our God, and we his people;
we are the flock of his pasture.

⁸ If today you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as in the desert, on that day at Massah,

⁹ when your fathers tested me
even though they had seen my work.

¹⁰ For forty years they wearied me and I said,
"They are a people of unreliable heart;
they have not known my ways."

¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger,
"Never shall they enter my rest."

God loves justice. – More than the splendour and beauty of the universe, what gives glory to God, is the human society founded on justice. Therefore, all of creation rejoices when God establishes his kingdom among men. Joy of the universe which until now was wasted by man's unbounded ambition. Joy of the nations that discover their reason for being in God.

¹ Sing to the Lord a new song,
sing to the Lord, all the earth!

² Sing to the Lord, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.

³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his wonderful deeds among the peoples.

Here we present a medieval prayer: Christ rules from his cross.

The thief said: "Remember me, Lord, when you come to your kingdom." He might have seen you give sight to the blind or raise the dead. He might not have adored you then. But, when he sees you hanging from the tree, he adores you: "Remember me, Lord, when you come to your kingdom." What your miracles could not have done, your cross did. He recognized you more surely and perfectly on the cross than in your preaching and miracles. Power of the cross, triumph of the crucified!

Excellent Lord, what answer do you give the imploring thief? "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

⁴How great is the Lord and worthy of praise!
above all gods he is to be feared.

⁵For all other gods are worthless idols,
but the Lord himself made the heavens.

⁶Before him are splendour and majesty;
in his sanctuary are strength and glory.

⁷Give to the Lord, O families of nations,
give to the Lord glory and strength.

⁸Give to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts.

⁹Worship the Lord in his holy place
stand in awe of him, all the earth.

¹⁰Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!"
He has made the world firm, immovable;
he will judge the people with justice.

¹¹Let the heavens be glad, the earth rejoice;
let the sea resound and all that is in it;

¹²let the fields exult and everything in them.
then all the forest trees will sing for joy.

¹³They will sing before the Lord
who comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with justice
and the people with his truth.

PSALM 97 (96)

God rules and the idols disappear. – "The light already dawns for the just." It already rules in the person of the risen Christ. We already contemplate the success of his rule in the midst of the difficulties and trials we encounter and which his Church suffers daily.

¹The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice;
let the distant islands be glad.

²He whose throne is founded
on justice and righteousness
is surrounded by clouds and thick darkness

³Before him a fire goes
right and left, which consumes his foes,

⁴His lighting lights up the world,
while the earth watches and trembles.

⁵Like wax the mountains melt
before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶The heavens proclaim his integrity,
and all the peoples see his glory.

⁷Image worshippers who make a vain show
of their worthless idols stand in awe.

All you gods, bow down as he passes!

⁸Zion hears and rejoices,

and the towns of Judah exult,
because of your judgments, O God.
⁹For you are the Master of the universe,
exalted far above all gods.

¹⁰You who love the Lord, hate evil,
for he preserves the lives of his faithful,
he delivers them from their foes.

¹¹He sheds light upon the upright,
and gladness upon the virtuous.

¹²Rejoice in the Lord, you who are blameless,
and give praise to his holy name.

PSALM 98 (97)

Sing a new song to the Lord. – Mankind has found the way
to liberation and salvation:

- in the coming of Christ, God become man.
- in his resurrection .

¹Sing to the Lord a new song, for
he has done wonders; his right hand,
his holy arm, has won victory for him.

²The Lord has shown his salva-
tion, revealing his justice to the na-
tions.

³He has not forgotten his love and
his faithfulness to Israel. To the far-
thest ends of the earth all have seen
God's saving power.

⁴All you lands, make a joyful
noise, break into song and sing praise,

⁵with the melody of the lyre and with
the music of the harp.

⁶With trumpet blast and sound of
horn, rejoice before the King, the
Lord!

⁷Let the sea resound and every-
thing in it, the world and all that dwell
in it.

⁸Let rivers and lakes clap their
hands, hills and mountains sing with
joy ⁹before the Lord, for he comes to
give judgment to the earth. He will
judge the world uprightly and the
peoples with justice.

PSALM 99 (98)

Holy is the Lord. – Who rises up against me?

It is I, says Christ. I am the one who
destroyed death.
who triumphed over the enemy, conquered hell.
I am the Passover of salvation.
I am the Lamb offered for you.
I am the one who purifies.
I am life for you.

¹The Lord reigns – let the nations
tremble. He is enthroned upon the
cherubim; let the earth quake.

²Great is the Lord in Zion; he is
exalted over all the nations.

³May they give glory to your great
name, "Holy is he, and mighty!"

⁴You are a king who loves justice,
teaching virtue and righteousness, as
you did for Jacob.

⁵Extol the Lord, our God; worship
at his footstool. Holy is he, and
mighty!

⁶Among his priests were Moses
and Aaron, and Samuel among those
who called on his name. They cried to
the Lord, and he answered them.

⁷In the pillar of cloud he spoke to
them, and they kept his statutes and
the decrees he handed to them.

⁸O Lord God, you responded to them; you were a forgiving God to them, but you punished their wrongs

⁹Extol the Lord our God; worship at his holy mountain. Holy is the Lord; our God!

PSALM 100 (99)

Acclaim the Lord, all you lands. – Let all the lands sing to the Lord! "Serve him with joy."

¹All you lands, acclaim the Lord!

²Serve the Lord joyfully; come into his presence with joyful songs.

³Know that the Lord is God; he created us and we are his, his people, the sheep of his fold.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name.

⁵For the Lord is good; his love endures forever and his faithfulness through all generations.

PSALM 101 (100)

A king examines his conscience. – "I will follow the path of justice, when will you come to me?" When he begins his daily work, the believer intends to live according to the truth, to fight for justice, while hoping for the coming of the Lord.

I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O Lord, I will sing praise.

²I will walk the way of integrity – O Lord, when will you come to me? With a blameless heart I will walk within my house.

³I will not set before my eyes anything that is vile. I hate the deeds of faithless men; they shall not come near me.

⁴Depart from me, you wicked hearts, for I disown your evil.

⁵He who deals with others treacherously, I will seek to destroy. He who

talks and acts arrogantly, I will not endure.

⁶I will regard the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; only he who walks in integrity shall be honoured as my servant.

⁷No man of deceit and lies shall dwell in my house; no man who utters falsehood shall stand before my eyes.

⁸Each morning I will destroy all the wicked of the land; I will uproot all the evildoers from the city of the Lord.

PSALM 102 (101)

Prayer of the afflicted.

²O Lord, hear my supplication; listen to my cry for protection.

³Hide not your face from me when I am in trouble. Incline your ear to me; answer me at once when I call.

⁴My days are passing away like smoke, my bones burning like a furnace.

⁵Like withered grass, my heart is blighted, and I forget to eat my bread.

⁶Because of my grief and loud moans I have been reduced to skin and bones.

⁷I am like an owl in the wilderness, like a vulture among the ruins.

⁸On the housetop I am like a homeless lonely bird.

⁹All day I am taunted by my mockers; my enemies use my name for a curse.

¹⁰I eat ashes as if they were my food, and mix my drink with tears.

¹⁰²Two poems are combined in this psalm: the prayer of an abandoned sick man and a prayer for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

¹¹ for your wrath has thrown me aside.

¹² My days are like the shadows of night; I am like grass that withers with blight.

¹³ But you, O Lord, are forever enthroned; your name endures through all generations.

¹⁴ Arise, have mercy on Zion; the appointed time has come to show her your compassion.

¹⁵ For your servants cherish her stones, and are moved to pity by her dust.

¹⁶ O Lord, the nations will revere your name, and the kings of the earth your glory.

¹⁷ For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in all his splendour; ¹⁸ he will answer the prayer of the needy and will not despise their plea.

¹⁹ Let this be recorded for a future time, that the Lord may be praised by a people yet unborn:

²⁰ "From his holy height in heaven, the Lord has looked on the earth ²¹ to

hear the prisoners groaning, and free those condemned to death."

²² Then the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem, ²³ when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship him.

²⁴ My strength has already run out, he has cut short my days.

²⁵ I cry to him, "My God, do not take my life away in mid-course before it matures, whereas your own endures forever."

²⁶ In the beginning you laid the earth's foundation, you made the heavens by your own hands.

²⁷ Although they perish, you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment, you change them like raiment: they pass away ²⁸ but you remain the same, your years unending.

²⁹ Your servants' children will dwell secure; their posterity will endure without fail.

PSALM 103 (102)

The Lord showers his blessings upon you. – This psalm looks on God, man, and God's mercy toward men: from these three, praise is born.

¹ Bless the Lord, my soul; my inmost being, bless his holy name!

² Bless the Lord, my soul, and do not forget all his kindness; ³ he forgives all my sins and heals all my sickness; ⁴ he redeems my life from

destruction and crowns me with love and compassion; ⁵ he gives fulfilment to my years, and renews my life like the eagle's.

⁶ The Lord restores righteousness and shows justice to all the oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to

¹⁰³ By his origin and inconsistency, man is "dust." He is feeling like the grass in the fields. But, he is also the work of God and his son. God is the transcendent and almighty Being, but his authentic greatness is his power to love without limits, to nourish the flame of his love with his own fire. What is peculiar to God is "to have mercy and to forgive."

To that effect, the psalmist uses a simple but majestic image: the vast distance separating heaven from earth, the East from the West is not so much a figure of the vastness of the divine Being as it is a figure of his merciful love.

The Christian discovers many a resonance in this psalm:

– God is lenient since he not only knows that we are "dust," but he, himself, wanted to experience this by

becoming man, enduring suffering, death and even temptation.

– His forgiveness took a tangible form: the cross of Jesus Christ raised above the world and history until the end of time.

– His Covenant with Israel which became definitive and universal.

– The blessings which came to us through Christ go far beyond what the psalmist hoped for: the truth of the Gospel and the gift of Redemption will take us to eternal life.

The permanence of the Church, the "cloud of witnesses" of Jesus Christ – those of yesterday and those of today – and finally, the experience of God that we have in our own lives: these are some of the reasons why we believe and hope in God, why we celebrate his great glory.

Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel.

⁸The Lord is gracious and merciful, abounding in love and slow to anger; ⁹he will not remain resentful nor will he be angry forever.

¹⁰He does not treat us according to our sins, nor does he punish us as we deserve.

¹¹As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his love for his faithful; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove the sins of his people.

¹³As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.

¹⁴For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵The days of man are like grass; he blooms like a flower in the fields;

¹⁶But the wind passes, and he is gone, never to be seen there again.

¹⁷But eternal and everlasting is the Lord's love for those who fear him, his justice for their children's offspring, ¹⁸for those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his commandments.

¹⁹The Lord has set his throne in heaven; his eternal kingdom reigns over all.

²⁰Praise the Lord, all you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, you who obey the word he speaks.

²¹Praise the Lord, all his hosts, all his servants who do his will.

²²Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his kingdom. Bless the Lord, my soul!

PSALM 104 (103)

The universe praises its creator. – In contemplating the universe, God's work, the believer is filled with admiration and optimism. Everything comes from God, but it also exists for men, and now, God is completing his creation through men's work and the radiance of his witnesses. "Send your Spirit **who renews** the face of the earth."

Not only does everything come from God, but everything belongs to him. This universal dominion is expressed through some simple but majestic comparisons: the light is God's *garment*; the clouds, his *chariot*; the firmament, his *tent* above which he has his dwelling place. Still more, this psalm shows God constantly supporting all beings whom he holds in the palm of his hand. If for a single instant he withdrew his *spirit*, his breath from them, they would not only fall into chaos, but into nothingness. Let us think of what happens when there is a power failure: there is no light, no energy no movement; it is almost as if the world stopped living.

¹Bless the Lord, my soul!

Clothed with majesty and splendour;
My God, how great you are!

²You wrap yourself in light as with a garment;
you stretch out the heavens like a tent,

³you build your house above the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot
and ride on the wings of the wind;
⁴you make the winds your messengers,
and fire and flame your ministers.

⁵You set the earth on its foundations,
and never will it be shaken.

⁶Like a garment you covered it with ocean,
and waters spread over the mountains.

⁷But at your rebuke the waters fled,
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.

⁸Brought to the mountains, they flow down
again
to settle in the valleys.

Optimism is another characteristic of this psalm. All the creatures are good and they relate among themselves in an harmonious way. The psalmist named them one by one, from the great cosmic forces to the birds, the wild beasts and the fish, in admiring and almost tender way. But, above all, this psalm has a deeply human touch: everything exists for the benefit of men.

Although today we have a scientific vision of the world very different from what people thought twenty-five hundred years ago, this psalm preserves all its value. The world we know is much larger, much more diversified and marvelous.

How can we think that it emerged by itself, or that it is the product of a blind accident? With regard to the universe, man is called to be the consciousness which understands and admires it, the voice praising the Creator, the artisan who must adorn it and organize it "for the service of man and of all men" (Paul VI in "The Development of the Nations"). Our psalms and songs of praise would be in vain if they did not express man's efforts to build a world reflecting the infinite purity and richness of God, day by day.

"The Lord formed me from the beginning, at the start, before the earth. When he built the foundations of the earth, I was seated at his side as the architect of his works, and I was his delight day by day, always playing in his presence; I delighted in going through his creation and I found delight in the sons of men." (Pv 8:23-31).

- ⁹ You set a limit they could not cross,
so as never again to flood the earth.
¹⁰ You make springs flow in ravines
winding among mountains and hills,
¹¹ giving drink to the beasts of the field,
quenching the thirst of donkeys.
¹² Birds build their nests close by
and sing among the branches of trees.
¹³ You water the mountains from your abode
and fill the earth with the fruit of your work.
¹⁴ You make grass grow for the cattle
and plants for man to cultivate,
that he may bring forth food from the earth:
¹⁵ wine to gladden his heart,
oil to make his face shine,
and bread to strengthen him.
¹⁶ The Lord waters his trees,
the cedars of Lebanon which he planted.
¹⁷ The birds build their nests,
the stork has its home in the pine trees.
¹⁸ High mountains are for wild goats,
the cliffs a refuge for badgers.
¹⁹ You made the moon to mark the seasons,
and the sun that knows when to set;
²⁰ when you bring the darkness of the night,
all the beasts of the forest begin to prowl:
²¹ the lions roaring for their prey
claiming their food from God.
²² When the sun rises, the beasts steal away,
returning to rest in their dens.
²³ Man then goes out to his work,
and toils till evening comes.
²⁴ How varied O Lord, are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all –
the earth full of your creatures.
²⁵ Behold the sea, wide and vast,
teeming with countless creatures,
living things both great and small,
²⁶ a strange world reserved for the ships
and the monster Leviathan, your pet.
²⁷ They all look to you
for their food in due time.
²⁸ You give it to them,
and they gather it up;
you open your hand,
they are filled with good things.

"You are beautiful, my beloved. Turn your eyes from me for they captivate me. Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down the slopes of Gilead: your teeth are like a flock of ewes coming up from the water: your cheeks, like a half-pomegranate behind your veil. - I belong to my lover and his desire is for me" (Sg 6).

²⁹ When you hide your face,
they become afraid;
you take away their breath
and they return to dust.

³⁰ When you send forth your spirit,
they are created,
and the face of the earth is renewed.

³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works!

³² He looks on the earth, and it quakes;
he touches the mountain, and it smokes.

³³ I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to God while I live.

³⁴ May my words give him pleasure,
as the Lord gives me delight.

³⁵ May sinners vanish from the earth,
and may the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, my soul!
Praise the Lord!

PSALM 105 (104)

The beginning of Sacred History. - Recalling the past can be a prayer: when we try to see the work of God and to give him thanks. Here, we are dealing with the beginning of Israel, from Abraham to Moses: all the events were prophetic, that is, they were announcing the favours of God in which we delight now.

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his works among the nations.

² Sing to him, sing his praise, proclaim all his wondrous deeds.

³ Glory in his holy name; let those who seek the Lord rejoice.

⁴ Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

⁵ Remember his wonderful works, his miracles and his judgments,

⁶ O descendants of his servant Abraham, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!

⁷ He is the Lord our God; his judgments prevail on earth.

⁸ He remembers his covenant forever, his promise to a thousand generations, ⁹ the pact he made with Abraham, the promise he swore to Isaac.

¹⁰ He confirmed his decree to

Jacob, to Israel his eternal covenant.

¹¹ "To you I will give the land of Canaan as part of your inheritance."

¹² When they were few in number, strangers in the land, ¹³ wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another, ¹⁴ he allowed no one to oppress them, and for their sake he rebuked kings:

¹⁵ "Touch not my anointed ones," he warned, "do my prophets no harm!"

¹⁶ Then he sent a famine and ruined the crop that sustained the land; ¹⁷ he sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave;

¹⁸ his feet in shackles, his neck in irons ¹⁹ till what he foretold came to pass, and the Lord's word proved him true.

²⁰ The king sent for him, set him free, ²¹ and put him in charge of his

household and made him ruler of all his possessions, ²² so that he would train their princes and teach wisdom to the elders.

²³ Then Israel came to Egypt, Jacob settled in the land of Ham. ²⁴ The Lord made his people fruitful and much stronger than their foes, ²⁵ whose hearts he turned to hate and conspire against his people.

²⁶ Then he sent Moses his servant, and Aaron whom he had chosen.

²⁷ They performed his signs among them, his miracles in the land of Ham.

²⁸ He sent darkness to the land, but they rebelled against his words.

²⁹ He turned their waters into blood, causing their fish to die.

³⁰ Their land teemed with frogs, invading even the king's bedroom

³¹ He spoke, and flies and gnats swarmed throughout the country.

³² He gave them hail for rain, and lightning flashed over the land.

³³ He blighted their vines and fig trees, shattered the trees in the countryside.

³⁴ He spoke and locusts came, grasshoppers without number; ³⁵ they devoured all the vegetation, and ate the produce of the soil. ³⁶ Then he smote all the firstborn, the firstfruits of their manhood.

³⁷ He led Israel out of the alien land, laden with silver and gold, and none was left behind.

³⁸ Egypt was glad when they departed, so filled were they with dread.

³⁹ He spread a cloud as covering, and fire to give them light at night.

⁴⁰ They asked for food; he gave them quails and fed them with bread from heaven.

⁴¹ He opened the rock, and water gushed out, flowing like a river through the desert.

⁴² For he remembered his covenant with Abraham, his servant.

⁴³ So he led forth his people with joy, his chosen ones with singing.

⁴⁴ He gave them the lands of the nations, and let them take the fruit of peoples' toil,

⁴⁵ that they might keep his statutes and remain obedient to his laws.

PSALM 106 (105)

Another look at the history of Israel. – Like psalm 78, this psalm contrasts the mercy of God and Israel's rebellions. God punishes, but he always gives his grace again.

Alleluia!

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his love endures forever.

² Who can count the Lord's mighty deeds, or declare his praises enough?

³ Blessed are they who remain just and act at all times in righteousness.

⁴ Remember me, O Lord, when you show favour to your people: rescue me when you deliver them; ⁵ let me see the triumph of your faithful. let me share the joy of your nation, and join your inheritance in praising you.

⁶ We have sinned like our fathers; we have done wrong and acted wickedly.

⁷ When they were in Egypt, our fathers had no regard to your wondrous deeds; they forgot the abundance of your love; they rebelled against the Most High by the Sea of Reeds.

⁸ Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known.

⁹ He rebuked the sea, and it dried up; he led them through the deep as on dry land.

¹⁰ He saved them from hostility, freeing them from the hand of the enemy.

¹¹ Waters covered their pursuers, and none of them was left alive.

¹² Then they believed his promises and all at once sang his praises.

¹³ But soon they forgot his works and did not wait for his counsel.

¹⁴ They gave way to wanton craving and tempted God in the desert.

¹⁵ He gave them what they wanted, then sent them a wasting disease.

¹⁶ In the camp they grew envious of Moses and Aaron, the holy one of the Lord.

¹⁷ So the earth opened, swallowed Dathan, and buried the company of Abiram; ¹⁸ fire broke out, burning up the wicked.

¹⁹ They made a calf at Horeb and worshipped the molten image.

²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God for the image of a bull that eats grass.

²¹ They forgot their Saviour God, who had

done great things in Egypt, ²²wonderful works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Sea of Reeds.

²³So he decided to destroy them, had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to shield them from destruction.

²⁴Yet they despised the promised land, for they had no faith in his word.

²⁵They grumbled in their tents and would not listen to the voice of the Lord.

²⁶So he swore to them with his hand raised that he would let them perish in the desert, ²⁷scatter their descendants among the nations and disperse them throughout the lands.

²⁸They joined the rites of Baal-peor and ate sacrifices to lifeless gods.

²⁹Their deeds provoked the Lord to anger, and a plague broke out among them.

³⁰But Phineas stood up and intervened, and the plague came to an end.

³¹This was credited to his uprightness, making him remembered for all ages.

³²Angered by them at Meribah's waters, the Lord took it out on Moses ³³for the rash words he uttered, when they rebelled against God.

³⁴They dared not destroy the pagans, as the Lord commanded; ³⁵they mingled with these nations and learned to do as they did.

³⁶In serving the idols of the pagans, they were trapped ³⁷into sacrificing children to demons, ³⁸shedding the innocent blood of their sons and daughters to the idols of Canaan, polluting the country with blood. ³⁹They defiled themselves by what they did, playing the harlot in their worship.

⁴⁰The anger of the Lord grew intense and he abhorred his inheritance.

⁴¹He handed them over to the nations, and their foes ruled them with arrogance.

⁴²Brought by the enemy into subjection, they suffered the agony of oppression.

⁴³He delivered them many a time, but they went on defying him and sinking deeper into their sin.

⁴⁴But he heard their cry of affliction and looked on them with compassion.

⁴⁵Remembering his covenant, he relented for their sake, because of his great love.

⁴⁶He let them be pitied by all those who held them captive.

⁴⁷Save us, O Lord, our God, gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to you and praise your holy name.

⁴⁸Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord!

PSALM 107 (106)

Third look at the history of Israel. - Like the two previous psalms, this one recalls the past, drawing another lesson from it: whenever they cried to the Lord, he listened to them. "Give thanks for his love for the sons of men."

¹Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his love endures forever.

²Let the redeemed of the Lord say this, those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, ³those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

⁴Some strayed in the wilderness and were lost, far away from the city.

⁵They wandered about hungry and thirsty, their lives ebbing away.

⁶Then they cried to the Lord in anguish, and he rescued them from their distress.

⁷He led them by a straight way to a city where they could dwell.

⁸Let them thank the Lord for his love and wondrous deeds for men.

⁹He quenches the thirst of the soul and satisfies the hunger of the heart.

¹⁰They lived in the darkness of death like prisoners suffering in chains, ¹¹for they rebelled against the word of God and despised the counsel of the Most High.

¹²Their backs bent in hard labour, they fell down, and there was no one to help.

¹³Then they cried to the Lord in anguish, and he rescued them from their distress.

¹⁴He brought them out of the dark and gloom, and he tore asunder their bonds.

¹⁵Let them thank the Lord for his love and wondrous deeds for men.

¹⁶For he breaks open gates of bronze and batters down bars of iron.

¹⁷They were sick because of their wrongs, they were afflicted for their iniquities.

¹⁸Unable to take any food they drew near the gates of death.

¹⁹Then they cried to the Lord in anguish, and he rescued them from their distress.

²⁰He sent forth his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.

²¹Let them thank the Lord for his love and wondrous deeds for men.

²²Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his deeds in joyful song.

²³Those who went to the sea in ships,

merchants on the mighty waters, ²⁴saw the marvels of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep.

²⁵For he spoke and stirred up a storm whipping up the waves of the sea.

²⁶Flung upward and plunged to the depths, they lost courage in the ordeal; ²⁷reeling like drunkards, they were adrift, in spite of all their sea-manship.

²⁸Then they cried to the Lord in anguish, and he rescued them from their distress.

²⁹He stilled the storm to a gentle breeze and hushed the billows to silent waves.

³⁰How glad they were! He brought them safe and sound to the port where they were bound.

³¹Let them thank the Lord for his love and wondrous deeds for men.

³²Let them extol him in the congregation, praise him in the assembly of the people.

³³Sometimes he turned rivers into wastelands, flowing springs into parched grounds,

³⁴and fruitful valleys into salt-flats, because of the wickedness of their inhabitants.

³⁵Yet he also turned deserts into water-sheds and parched land into flowing springs.

³⁶There he let the hungry settle and found a city where they could dwell.

³⁷They planted vineyards, they sowed fields, and from them got fruitful yields.

³⁸By his blessing their numbers increased, and their herds and flocks did not diminish.

³⁹But then they dwindled and were humbled through oppression, sorrow and distress.

⁴⁰And he who pours contempt upon princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes ⁴¹rescued the needy from their affliction and made their families flourish like flocks.

⁴²The virtuous see it and are glad, but the wicked shut their mouths.

⁴³Let the wise consider all this and understand the Lord's great love.

PSALM 108 (107)

Song of victory. – This psalm combines part of psalm 57 and of psalm 60.

²My heart is ready, O God! I will sing praise and make music. Awake my soul!

³Awake, harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.

⁴I will thank you, O Lord, among the nations. I will sing praise to you among the peoples.

⁵For great is your love above the heavens, your faithfulness beyond the skies.

⁶Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over the earth.

⁷Give help and save us by your right hand, and rescue those you love.

⁸God has spoken in his sanctuary: "In

triumph I will divide up Shechem and parcel out the Valley of Succoth.

⁹Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter.

¹⁰Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph."

¹¹Who will take me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?

¹²O God! have you really rejected us? You no longer go with our armies.

¹³Give us aid against the foe, for the help of man is not worth a straw.

¹⁴With God we will gain victory; he will crush the enemy for us.

PSALM 109 (108)

Have no pity for them. – A person who had only words of friendship has been accused and slandered. He asks justice from God who remains at the side of the poor. God will show no mercy toward those whose hearts are merciless.

Break your silence, O God whom I praise, ²now that wicked and deceitful men hurl their false accusations at me.

³They assail me with words of hate; they attack me for no valid cause.

⁴They return my friendship with slander, and yet I pray for them.

⁵They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my love.

⁶Appoint a wicked man against him; find an accuser to repeat this curse:

⁷"Let him be found guilty when tried; let his own plea condemn him.

⁸May his days be numbered, his office be taken by another.

⁹May his children lose a father and his wife a husband.

¹⁰May his children go begging, driven out of their ruined homes.

¹¹May the creditor seize all his belongings and strangers plunder the fruits of his toil.

¹²Let no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his orphaned children.

¹³May his posterity be destroyed, their names blotted out in the next generation.

¹⁴May his father's evil be remembered before the Lord; may his mother's sin never be effaced.

¹⁵May their sins be ever before the Lord, and their memory cut off from the earth."

¹⁶For he did not remember to show kindness, but hounded the poor and the needy, and the brokenhearted to their death.

¹⁷He loved to curse; may he be cursed. He loathed blessing; may it be far from him.

¹⁸He wrapped himself in cursing; may it soak into his body like water, penetrate his bones like oil.

¹⁹May it be like a garment he wears, like the belt he ties around himself.

²⁰May the Lord reward my accusers with this, and others who speak evil of me.

²¹But as for me, O God my Lord, for your name's sake, act on my behalf, deliver me, in the goodness of your love

²²For I am poor and needy, my heart is stricken within me.

²³Like an evening shadow, I fade away; like a locust, I am swept away.

²⁴My knees have become weak from fasting, my body is gaunt and thin.

²⁵I have become the butt for the scorn of my foes; people shake their heads at me in derision.

²⁶Help me, O Lord my God, and save me for the sake of your love.

²⁷Let them know that this is your hand, that it is you, Lord, who do this.

²⁸They may curse, but you will bless; when they attack, they will be disgraced; but may your servant rejoice!

²⁹Let my accusers be clothed with dishonour; let them be wrapped in their own shame.

³⁰To the Lord, I will give my thanks; I will praise him in the great assembly.

³¹He stands at the right hand of the needy, to save him from those who condemn him.

PSALM 110 (109)

Word of the Lord to my Lord. - The fundamental force ruling the destiny of mankind, the world and of history, is the victory of Jesus Christ, Son of God, made man in order to bring us close to him, and to share his eternal glory with us.

Word of the Lord to my Lord. At times we have the impression of being locked in life's problems as if we were in jail. This psalm is like a flash of lightning illuminating the jail and it shows us an unexpected exit door leading above.

In spite of obscure expressions - because they are ancient - the general meaning is quite clear: from Zion, there will come a man who, as the warlike expressions of verses 5-6 indicate, will victoriously overcome all hostile powers. It will be a difficult struggle; he will have to drink water from the torrent, that is to say, he will be overwhelmed with suffering. But God will seat him at his right hand and will subject everything to him.

Thus we have a sketch of the figure of Christ, a man in whom there is something beyond what is human, like Melchizedek, the mysterious character of Genesis, "without father or mother, to whom Abraham offered the tenth part of his possessions" (Heb 7).

¹The Lord says to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand
till I make your foes your footstool."

²From Zion, the Lord will extend
your mighty scepter and you will rule
in the midst of your enemies.

³Yours is royal dignity
from the day you were born in holy majesty.
From the womb of the dawn, like dew,
I have begotten you.

⁴The Lord has sworn,
and he will not take back his word:

"You are a priest forever
in the order of Melchizedek."

⁵The Lord is at your right hand;
he will crush kingdoms on his day of wrath.

⁶He will judge the nations,
heaping up corpses,
crushing the rulers of the earth.

⁷Pausing for a drink by the wayside,
he will lift up his head in triumph.

PSALM 111 (110)

This is an "alphabetical" psalm, namely, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet (in order) begin the twenty-two verses. Other psalms are written this way, with twenty-two verses or twenty-two stanzas (for example: 34; 37; 119).

God creates, saves and guides us.

¹*Alleluia!*

I thank the Lord with all my heart
in the council of the upright,
in the assembly of the just.

²The wonders of the Lord are great
and pondered by all who delight in them.

³Glorious and majestic are his deeds,
his righteousness endures forever.

⁴He lets us remember his wonders;
the Lord is merciful and kind.

⁵Always mindful of his covenant,
he provides food for those who fear him.

⁶He shows his people the power of his arm
by giving them the lands of other nations.

⁷The works of his hands are faithful and just,
trustworthy are all his precepts,

⁸ordained to last forever,
to be performed in faith and uprightness.

⁹He provided deliverance for his people
and enacted his covenant forever.

His holy name is to be revered!

¹⁰The fear of the Lord is the beginning of
wisdom;

prudent are those who live by his precepts.
To him belongs everlasting praise.

PSALM 112 (111)

This is how the just man is. – Similarly to the previous one, this psalm is also alphabetical. It uses the same words, but this time it is to praise the just man, the image of God.

¹*Alleluia!*

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,
who finds delight in his word.

²His children will be powerful on earth;
the upright generation will be blessed.

³Wealth and riches are for his family;
he will be revered for his generosity.

⁴In the darkness, light dawns for the virtuous,
for the gracious, merciful and righteous.

⁵It will be well with him who lends freely,
who leads a life of justice and integrity.

⁶For the righteous will never be moved;
he will be remembered and loved forever.

⁷He will have no fear of evil news,
for his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.

⁸He need not fear since his life is secure,
he shall triumph over his foes.

⁹Since he has given generously to the poor,
his virtue will endure forever
and his head will be raised in honour.

¹⁰The wicked will see this and be furious:
he will gnash his teeth in seething envy.
The evil man's desires will fail.

PSALM 113 (112)

You poor and humble people, praise the Lord! What differentiates God from men – even great ones – is not only the vast work of his Creation, but his way of being with us, his preference for what men despise. God likes to choose weak instruments to achieve his deeds of grace.

¹*Alleluia!*

Praise, O servants of the Lord,
praise the name of the Lord!

²Blessed be the name of the Lord
henceforth and forever!

³From east to west,
may the name of the Lord be praised!

⁴The Lord is exalted over the nations,
his glory above the heavens.

⁵Who is like the Lord our God,
who sits enthroned on high,

⁶who looks over the heavens
and down upon the earth?

⁷He lifts up the poor from the dust
and the needy from the ash heap.

⁸He makes them sit with princes,
with rulers of his people.

⁹He gives a home to the barren woman,
and makes her a joyful mother.
praise the Lord!

PSALM 114 (113 A)

The power of the Saving God manifests itself in the first Passover, the departure from Egypt. In a different way, the resurrection of Christ touches the universe.

The departure from Egypt.

¹*Alleluia!*

When Israel came out of Egypt,
the family of Jacob
from a people of alien tongue,

²Judah became his sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.

³At his sight the sea fled
and the Jordan retreated;

⁴ the mountains skipped like rams,
the hills frolicked like lambs.

⁵ Why is it, sea, that you flee?
Jordan, that you turn back?

⁶ Mountains, that you skip like rams?
Hills, that you frolic like lambs?

⁷ Tremble, O earth, at the Lord's presence,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,

⁸ who turned the rock into a stream,
and the flint into a spring.

PSALM 115 (113 B)

The people of God have no idols. – Since we have received the knowledge of the only true God, let us leave aside everything which is not God.

We must constantly denounce the idols of ordinary people as well as of those who pretend to be free from all prejudices. Below is a thought of the poet, Paul Claudel:

*"Blessed are you, O my God,
who freed me from all the idols and
who made me adore you alone, and
not Isis or Osiris, or Justice, Pro-
gress, Truth, Divinity, Humanity,
the Laws of nature, of art or of
beauty."*

*And who has not permitted
these things to exist, that are not,
or are the vacuum left by your
absence. I know that you are not
the God of the dead, but of the
living."*

*Lord, I found you! The one who
finds you no longer tolerates
death."*

¹ Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
but to your name be the glory,
for the sake of your love and faithfulness.

² Why should the pagans say,
"Where is their God?"

³ There in heaven is our God;
whatever he wishes, he does.

⁴ Not so the man-made idols,
crafted in silver and gold.

⁵ They have mouths that cannot speak,
eyes that cannot see,

⁶ ears that cannot hear,
noses that cannot smell.

⁷ They have hands but cannot feel,
feet, but cannot walk;
neither can they make
a sound in their throat.

⁸ Their makers will be like them,
so will all who trust in them.

⁹ O Israel, trust in the Lord;
he is our help and shield!

¹⁰ O family of Aaron, trust in the Lord;
he is our help and shield!

¹¹ You who fear the Lord, trust in him;
he is our help and shield!

¹² The Lord remembers us and will bless us;
he will bless the family of Israel;
he will bless the family of Aaron;

¹³ he will bless those who fear the Lord,
both the small and the great.

¹⁴ May the Lord increase your numbers,
yours and your children's as well.

¹⁵ May you be blessed by the Lord,
Maker of heaven and earth.

¹⁶ Heaven belongs to the Lord,
but the earth he has given to man.

¹⁷ It is not the dead who praise the Lord,
for they have gone down to silence;

¹⁸ but it is the living who bless him,
from this time forth and forever.
Praise the Lord!

PSALM 116 (114-115)

Jesus prayed this psalm at the beginning of his passion. Some words of these verses take on a different meaning if we relate them to Jesus: *I love the Lord, he saved me from death; I will raise the cup of salvation; the death of his faithful ones is precious in the eyes of the Lord.*

The mass represents Christ's sacrifice and it is called Eucharist, meaning: Thanksgiving. Following we offer one of the prayers accompanying the celebration in the early church; it is found in the *Didache*:

Like this broken bread – once spread over the hills – was gathered to form a single whole, may your church also be gathered from all the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

To you, Glory forever!

Holy Father, we give you thanks, for your holy Name, which you have made to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge, the faith and the immortality which you revealed to us through Jesus, your Servant.

You are the all-powerful Master who created us for the praise of your Name, who gave food and drink to men for their delight, so they would give you praise. But you have granted us spiritual food and drink and eternal life, through your Servant, Jesus. Before all else, we thank you for your power.

Remember your church, O Lord; free her from all evil; make her perfect in loving you. From the four cardinal points, gather your holy church in the kingdom you have prepared for her.

Glory to you forever. Amen!

You have freed me from death. – "I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living." With all the people whom God saved from death, with our Saviour Jesus Christ, we offer our gratitude.

¹ *Alleluia!*

I love the Lord, for he has heard
my voice in supplication.

² Because he has not been deaf to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.

³ When the cords of death entangled me,
the snares of the grave laid hold of me,
when affliction got the better of me,

⁴ I called upon the name of the Lord:
"O Lord, save my life!"

⁵ Gracious and righteous is the Lord;
full of compassion is our God.

⁶ the Lord protects the simple:
he saved me when I was humbled.

⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest,
for the Lord has been good to you.

⁸ He has freed my soul from death,
my eyes from weeping,
my feet from stumbling;

⁹ I will walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁰ I have kept faith even when I said,
"I am greatly afflicted."

¹¹ I have said in my dismay,
"To hope in man is vain."

¹² How can I repay the Lord
for all his goodness to me?

¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.

¹⁴I will fulfil my vows to the Lord
under the eyes of his people.

¹⁵It is painful to the Lord
to see the death of his faithful.

¹⁶O Lord, I am your servant,
truly your servant, your handmaid's son.
You have freed me of my bonds.

¹⁷I will offer you a thanksgiving sacrifice;
I will call on the name of the Lord.

¹⁸I will carry out my vows to the Lord
under the eyes of his people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord!

PSALM 117 (116)

¹*Alleluia!*

Praise the Lord, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.

²How great is his love for us!
His faithfulness lasts forever.
The Lord be praised!

PSALM 118 (117)

I will not die, I will live! – "The stone which the builders rejected became the cornerstone." Jesus applied to himself the image of the rejected stone (Mt 21:42; 1 Pt 2:4). And when he enters the Temple, children sing: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

This psalm was sung when the processions entered the Jerusalem Temple. The people and their leader alternated with the choir of Levites.

What does Israel sing? Their thanksgiving to God who saves them from death or who raises them; to God who chooses the poor and the despised of this world to build his kingdom with them.

In its own way, this psalm already proclaimed Christ's resurrection.

¹Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
his love endures forever.

²Let Israel say,
"His love endures forever."

³Let the house of Aaron say,
"His love endures forever."

⁴Let those who fear the Lord say,
"His love endures forever."

⁵In anguish I cried to the Lord;
he answered by setting me free.

⁶With the Lord beside me I need not fear.
What can man do to me?

⁷The Lord is with me, ready to help;
I can look in triumph upon my enemies.

⁸It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in the help of man.

⁹It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in the might of princes.

¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me;
in the name of the Lord I crushed them.

¹¹ They surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the Lord I crushed them.

¹² Like swarms of bees they encircled me,
but were extinguished like burning thorns;
in the name of the Lord I crushed them.

¹³ I was pressed and about to fall,
but the Lord came to my help.

¹⁴ The Lord is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Joyful shouts of victory
are heard in the tents of the virtuous:

"The right hand of the Lord strikes mightily,

¹⁶ the right hand of the Lord is lifted high,
the right hand of the Lord strikes mightily!"

¹⁷ I shall not die, but live
to proclaim what the Lord has done.

¹⁸ The Lord has punished me severely,
but he has delivered me from death.

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of justice,
and let me enter to give thanks.

²⁰ _ "This is the Lord's gate
through which the righteous enter." _

²¹ I thank you for having answered me,
for having delivered me.

²² The stone rejected by the builders
has become the keystone.

²³ This was the Lord's doing
and we marvel at it.

²⁴ This is the day the Lord has made;
so let us rejoice and be glad.

²⁵ Save us, O Lord, grant us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the Lord's name!
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷ The Lord is God; he has made his light shine
upon us."

*With leafy boughs, join in procession
up to the horns of the altar.*

²⁸ You are my God, and I give you thanks.
You are my God, and I give you praise.

²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

PSALM 119 (118)

Psalm about the Law. – Again and again, the longest psalm in the Bible says that to follow the words of God is life and happiness.

¹Blessed are they whose ways are upright, who follow the law of the Lord.

²Blessed are they who cherish his word and seek him with all their heart.

³They do no wrong; they walk in the ways of righteousness.

⁴You have laid down precepts to be obeyed. ⁵Oh, that my ways were steadfast in observing your statutes!

⁶Then I would not be put to disgrace, having paid attention to your decrees.

⁷I will praise you with an upright spirit when I learn your precepts by heart.

⁸I mean to observe your commandments. Oh, never abandon me.

⁹How can a young man remain pure? By living according to your word.

¹⁰I seek you with my whole heart; let me not stray from your commands.

¹¹In my heart I have kept your word, that I may not sin against my Lord.

¹²Praise be to you, O God; instruct me in your statutes, ¹³that with my lips I may declare all the ordinances from your mouth.

¹⁴I delight in following your decrees, more so than in all riches.

¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts and concentrate on your ways.

¹⁶In your laws I will rejoice and will not neglect your words.

¹⁷Be kind to your servant, that I may live to observe your word.

¹⁸Open my eyes that I may perceive the marvelous truths in your law.

¹⁹From me, a wanderer on earth, hide not your commandments.

²⁰My soul is consumed with desire for your ordinances at all times.

²¹You reprove the accursed ones who stray arrogantly from your commands.

²²Remove from me their scorn and contempt, since I have followed your precepts.

²³Although princes conspire against me, your servant will observe your decrees.

²⁴Your laws are my delight, my counselors who uphold me.

²⁵In the dust I lie prostrate; lift me up, as promised by your word.

²⁶When I explained my ways, you responded; instruct me then in your precepts.

²⁷Explain to me all your ordinances, and I will meditate on your wondrous deeds.

²⁸My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.

²⁹Keep me away from deceitful paths; be gracious and teach me your law.

³⁰I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart upon your laws.

³¹Since I cling to your decrees, O Lord, save me from disgrace.

³²I will run in the way of your commands, for you have freed my heart at last.

³³Explain to me, O Lord, your commandments, and I will be ever faithful to them.

³⁴Give me understanding, that I may keep and observe your law with all my heart.

³⁵Guide me in obeying your instructions, for my pleasure lies in them.

³⁶Incline my heart to follow your will and not my own selfish desire.

³⁷Turn my eyes away from vani-

ties and direct them to your life-giving word.

³⁸Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that others may revere you.

³⁹Ward off the reproach I fear, for the good of your law and order.

⁴⁰Oh, how I long for your precepts! Renew my life in your righteousness.

⁴¹Give me your unfailing love, O Lord, your salvation as you have promised.

⁴²Strengthened by my trust in your words, I can answer my enemy's reproach.

⁴³Take not the word of truth from my mouth, for you would take also my hope in your word.

⁴⁴I desire to cherish your word continually, for ever and ever; ⁴⁵and I shall walk about in freedom, having sought out your laws.

⁴⁶I will proclaim your word before kings, and I will not be confused or ashamed.

⁴⁷For I delight in your word, which I fear. ⁴⁸I revere your word, which I hold dear; and I meditate on your commandments.

⁴⁹Remember your word to your servant, your word which has given me hope.

⁵⁰My consolation in suffering is this: that your promise renews my life.

⁵¹The arrogant mock me without end, but to your word I faithfully cling.

⁵²Remembering your ordinances of old, I find comfort in them, O Lord.

⁵³I feel indignant at the wicked who have forsaken your law.

⁵⁴Your decrees are the theme of my song, in this my place of exile.

⁵⁵Each night I call on your name, O Lord, and renew my vow to keep your word.

⁵⁶This has been my practice, and I have kept your precepts.

⁵⁷You are my portion, O Lord; I have promised to obey your word.

⁵⁸With all my heart I have sought your face; be gracious to me according to your promise.

⁵⁹I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your paths.

⁶⁰I will hurry and no longer delay in keeping your commands.

⁶¹The wicked have me trapped in their snares, but I have not forgotten your laws.

⁶²At midnight I rise to praise you for the justice of your ordinances.

⁶³I am an ally for those who fear you, for those who keep your precepts.

⁶⁴The earth is full of your love, O Lord! Teach me your decrees.

⁶⁵Be good to your servant, O Lord; in accordance with your words.

⁶⁶Give me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commandments.

⁶⁷Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

⁶⁸You are good, and good are your works; teach me your decrees.

⁶⁹I am slandered by the arrogant, but I keep your precepts within my heart.

⁷⁰Their hearts have grown callous with pride, but I delight in your laws.

⁷¹It is good for me to have been afflicted, for I have deeply learned your statutes.

⁷²Your law is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

⁷³Give me discernment to know your commands, since I have been formed by your hands.

⁷⁴Those who fear you will be glad, seeing that I hope in your word.

⁷⁵I know, O Lord, that your laws are just, and there is justice in my affliction.

⁷⁶ Comfort me then with your un-failing love, as you promised your servant.

⁷⁷ Let your mercy come to give me life, for your law is my delight.

⁷⁸ Humble the arrogant who oppress me as I meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹ Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may understand your statutes.

⁸⁰ May my heart be blameless in your decrees, that I may not be held in disgrace.

⁸¹ My soul longs for your protection; your word is my hope of salvation.

⁸² I have kept watch for your promise. "When will you comfort me?" I ask.

⁸³ I have become as dry as a wine-skin, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.

⁸⁴ How long must your servant endure? When will you judge my persecutor?

⁸⁵ The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me in defiance of your law.

⁸⁶ Your law indeed is trustworthy, but my persecutor's cause is blame-worthy.

⁸⁷ They have almost put an end to me on earth, and yet I have not forsaken your precepts.

⁸⁸ In your kindness preserve my life, that I may keep the decrees of your mouth.

⁸⁹ O Lord, your word stands forever, firmly fixed in the heavens.

⁹⁰ Your truth endures throughout all generations – as long as the earth that you established.

⁹¹ Your ordinances endure to this day for all things are made to serve you.

⁹² If your law had not been my

pleasure, I would have perished in my affliction.

⁹³ Never will I forget your precepts, for by them have I been given life.

⁹⁴ Save me for I am yours, for I have sought your statutes.

⁹⁵ The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I look to your word for salvation.

⁹⁶ I saw that all perfection is limited but your commandment has no limit at all.

⁹⁷ How I have learned to love your law, meditating on it all day!

⁹⁸ Your commandment ever with me has made me wiser than my enemy.

⁹⁹ I have more insight than my teachers for I meditate on your decrees.

¹⁰⁰ I have more discernment than the elders for I abide by your precepts.

¹⁰¹ I have held back my feet from evil paths, that I may keep step with your word.

¹⁰² I have not departed from your decrees for you yourself have instructed me.

¹⁰³ How sweet are your promises to my taste, sweeter than honey to my taste!

¹⁰⁴ Your precepts have enriched my perception, and made me hate all deceptive ways.

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path.

¹⁰⁶ I have taken an oath to observe and keep your righteous ordinances.

¹⁰⁷ I have suffered much, O Lord; renew my life according to your word.

¹⁰⁸ Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your decrees.

¹⁰⁹ I am ready to sacrifice my life for your Law that is always in my heart.

¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me but I do not stray from your precepts.

¹¹¹ Your statutes are my heritage forever, they are the joy of my heart.

¹¹² From age to age, I am determined to fulfil your decrees until the end.

¹¹³ I detest double-dealing men, but I treasure the truth of your law.

¹¹⁴ You are my shield, my refuge; my hope is in your word.

¹¹⁵ Leave me alone, you evildoers; let me keep the commandments of my God.

¹¹⁶ Uphold me, O Lord, that I may live according to your promises; let me not be disappointed in my hope.

¹¹⁷ Support me and I shall be safe, and faithfully keep your decrees.

¹¹⁸ You spurn all who stray from your decrees, for vain is their deceit.

¹¹⁹ You discard all the wicked as dross; that is why I love your statutes.

¹²⁰ My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe before your laws.

¹²¹ I have done what is just and right; do not leave me to my oppressors.

¹²² Ensure the well-being of your servant; let not the arrogant oppress me.

¹²³ I strain my eyes looking for your salvation, watching for the fulfilment of your promise.

¹²⁴ Treat your servant with compassion, and instruct me in your decrees.

¹²⁵ Give me discernment; I am your servant who desires to understand your statutes.

¹²⁶ It is time for you, O Lord, to act, for they have broken your law.

¹²⁷ Because I love your commandments more than gold, no matter how pure it may be,

¹²⁸ because my steps are guided by

your precepts, I hate and shun all deceitful paths.

¹²⁹ So wonderful are your decrees that my soul cannot but keep them.

¹³⁰ As your words unfold, light is shed, and the simple-hearted understand.

¹³¹ I gasp in ardent yearning for your commandments that I love.

¹³² Turn to me then and be gracious as you do to those who love your name.

¹³³ You promised to direct my steps; free my path from evil.

¹³⁴ Rescue me from man's oppression, and help me keep your precepts.

¹³⁵ Favour me with your smile and teach me your statutes.

¹³⁶ I shed tears for men who disobey your law.

¹³⁷ O Lord, you are just, and your judgments proper.

¹³⁸ You have pronounced your decrees in justice and faithfulness.

¹³⁹ I am filled with unwearied zeal, seeing how my foes ignore your words.

¹⁴⁰ Your promises have been tested, and in them rests your servant's hope.

¹⁴¹ Though I am lowly and despised, I do not forget your precepts.

¹⁴² Your justice is eternal and your Law is trustworthy.

¹⁴³ In calamity and in anguish, your ordinances are my delight.

¹⁴⁴ Your commandments are forever just; give me discernment, that I may live by them.

¹⁴⁵ Sincerely I call; answer me, O Lord: help me observe your statutes.

¹⁴⁶ I call upon you, save me and I will keep your decrees.

¹⁴⁷ Before dawn I rise and cry for help, putting all my hope in your words.

¹⁴⁸ I lie awake through the night meditating on your promises.

¹⁴⁹ Hear my voice, in your unfailing love; in your justice, O Lord, preserve my life.

¹⁵⁰ My persecutors close in with their evil intent; they have gone far from your Law.

¹⁵¹ But you, O Lord, are closer still, and all your commandments are true.

¹⁵² Long have I known that your decrees were founded to last forever.

¹⁵³ Look upon my suffering and rescue me, for I have not forgotten your Law.

¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause and redeem me; and, as you promised, give me life anew.

¹⁵⁵ Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.

¹⁵⁶ Great is your compassion, O Lord; renew my life according to your word.

¹⁵⁷ Many foes persecute me, but I have not turned away from your law.

¹⁵⁸ I look upon the faithless with loathing, because they do not obey your ruling.

¹⁵⁹ See how I love to follow your precepts; give me life, O Lord, in your kindness.

¹⁶⁰ The essence of your word is truth, everlasting are your just ordinances.

¹⁶¹ Rulers persecute me for no cause, yet my heart stands in awe of your words.

¹⁶² I rejoice because of your promise, as one who has found great riches.

¹⁶³ I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.

¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise you for your just ordinances.

¹⁶⁵ Lovers of your Law have found great peace; nothing can make them stumble, not even distress.

¹⁶⁶ O Lord, I wait for your salvation, and I keep your commands in faith.

¹⁶⁷ My soul clings to your words for I truly cherish them.

¹⁶⁸ I obey your precepts and your decrees, for my ways are always before you.

¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come to you, O Lord; give me discernment according to your word.

¹⁷⁰ May my prayer come before you; rescue me as you have promised.

¹⁷¹ Let my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees.

¹⁷² Let my tongue sing of your good news, for all your utterances are true.

¹⁷³ Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

¹⁷⁴ I long for your salvation, O Lord; my delight is in your law.

¹⁷⁵ Long may I live to sing your praise, may your ordinances ever be my help!

¹⁷⁶ Like a stray sheep I wander about – come and look for your lost servant. I always have your commandments in mind.

PSALM 120 (119)

Pilgrims often came to the Temple with many preoccupations: some were not at peace with their neighbours; others were complaining of not living with believers, but with pagans. They were longing for the peace which God gives those who come close to him.

Psalms 120 to 134 have the same title: 'Song of Ascents.' They were, no doubt, sung by the Jewish pilgrims walking up to the temple of Jerusalem. This is why, we often find

¹ I call to the Lord in my distress, and he answers me.

² Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues.

in them, an antiphon which the crowd of pilgrims used to repeat.

³How shall he pay you back,
O deceitful and lying tongue?
⁴He will punish you with sharp arrows
with glowing coals of the broom tree!
⁵This is worse than exile in Meshech,
much worse than dwelling in Kedar.
⁶Long have I dwelt
among those who hate peace;
⁷but when I speak of peace,
they all talk of war.

PSALM 121 (120)

God is faithful: night and day, he neither sleeps nor dozes. He is concerned, attentive to what is happening.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus walks along with them and they do not recognize him.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

This can be the prayer of Christians who undertake a difficult task: a convert: a new home: a future priest: someone with an important commitment in society (unions, politics, the common good).

God will not fail you. – The pilgrim on the way to Jerusalem is thinking about the hardships of the journey: the difficulty of the road, the heat of the day, perhaps the dangers from thieves. But he knows that God is with him and that he accompanies him on the way.

¹I lift up my eyes to the mountains –
from where shall come my help?
²My help comes from the Lord,
maker of heaven and earth.
³He will not let your foot slip.
He watches over you and will not slumber.
⁴Look, he who keeps Israel
neither slumbers nor sleeps.
⁵The Lord is your guardian;
the Lord is your shade.
⁶The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
⁷The Lord will guard you from evil;
he will protect your life.
⁸The Lord will watch over
your coming and going
both now and forever.

PSALM 122 (121)

The Temple was the symbol of God present among his people.

Jesus admired, especially, the kingdom of God in the hearts of believers: "Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when they will neither adore the Father in Jerusalem... The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:21).

We will go to the house of the Lord. – A hymn filled with the enthusiasm and happiness of a pilgrim upon arriving at the Jerusalem Temple. Admiration for the building. Pride in seeing the crowd arriving. And something even more profound: an experience of sharing life with other believers.

¹I rejoiced with those who told me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
²And now we have set foot
within your gates, O Jerusalem!
³Jerusalem, built as a city,
firmly bound together!

"You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19).

This may be the prayer of the believer who admires the presence of God in the church, as well as of the person who doubts and seeks ways to believe.

⁴There the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
to give thanks to the Lord's name,
as was decreed for Israel.

⁵There stand the courts of justice
where judgment is given by the sons of David.

⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May those who love you prosper!"

⁷May peace be within your walls
and security within your citadels!"

⁸For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be with you!"

⁹For the sake of the house of our Lord,
I will pray for your good.

PSALM 123 (122)

Prayer of the afflicted.

The cry of petition and hope of the Jews who, upon returning from the exile, are humiliated and despised by their pagan neighbors.

How often we hear, in the Gospel, this same cry of the afflicted. Think especially about the persistent attitude of the Cannanite woman: "Lord, have pity on me." She pursues Christ with desperate insistence: he is her only salvation.

Lord, with all the people who, today, suffer from lies and evil, the humiliated, the marginalized, we beg you to manifest your goodness.

Psalm of hope. – We know that our good Father always listens to us. We must keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord, without growing tired, until he tells us: "See, your faith has saved you."

¹To you I lift up my eyes,
to you whose throne is in heaven.

²As the eyes of servants look
to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of maids look
to the hand of their mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,
till he shows us his mercy.

³Have mercy on us, O Lord,
have mercy on us,
for we have our fill of contempt.

⁴Too long have our souls been filled
with the scorn of the arrogant,
with the ridicule of the insolent.

PSALM 124 (123)

Thanksgiving for overcoming trials

With admiration and gratitude, the people of God remember the trials which they have overcome because the Lord was with them.

Call to give thanks. From the ten lepers who were healed, in the Gospel, only one comes back to thank the Lord. "Were not ten healed? Where are the other nine?" (Lk 17:17).

We forget to give thanks because we do not know how to discover the

We escaped from the hunter's snare. – "The very hairs of your head are numbered, you are worth much more than the birds."

¹Had not the Lord been on our side –
let Israel say –

²had not the Lord been on our side,
when men rose up against us,

³then they would have swallowed us alive.

When their anger flared up against us,

⁴then the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,

⁵the raging waters would have swept us away.

wonders of God in our lives and in the world.

⁶Blessed be the Lord,
who did not hand us over to their jaws.
⁷Like a bird we were rescued
from the snare of the fowler;
the snare was broken and we were freed.
⁸Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

PSALM 125 (124)

This psalm helps us understand the Lord's promise: "Know that I am with you until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20). "I will not leave you orphans. I will come back to you" (Jn 14:18).

Prayer for the dark moments of life, when things do not turn out right, when the fruit of our actions is not seen.

When we feel helpless in the face of injustice and organized violence, before the corruption and the complacency which perhaps penetrated within the church.

Trust in the Lord. – The pilgrim could admire the walls of Jerusalem, almost inaccessible to enemies. This is an image of God's protection.

¹Those who trust in the Lord
are like Mount Zion,
which is immovable and stands forever.
²As mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the Lord encompasses his people,
now and forever.
³The sceptre of the wicked will not remain
over the land allotted to the upright,
for then the upright might learn
to put their hands to evil deeds.
⁴Be good, O Lord, to those who are good,
to those who are upright in heart.
⁵But those who turn to crooked ways,
the Lord will drive out with the evildoers.
May peace remain upon Israel.

PSALM 126 (125)

Prayer upon returning from the exile which was the great trial of the people. It shows the happiness over the end of captivity, something which seemed incredible to them: *We were like men dreaming.*

We cannot help recalling the thanksgiving of the Virgin Mary: "The Lord has done great things for me. Holy is my God" or Peter's prayer when he left the jail (Acts 12:9-11).

In a world seeking economic independence and access to culture, it would be good to pray this psalm to strengthen our hope and to stimulate our persevering efforts.

They go in tears and they will come back with their sheaves. – This psalm expresses the mystery of life springing up from death. It refers to the afflicted and to those who are disappointed because they do not see the fruit of their labor.

¹When the Lord brought the exiles back to Zion,
we were like those moving in a dream.
²Then our mouths were filled with laughter,
and our tongues with songs of joy.
Among the nations it was said,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
³The Lord has done great things for us,
and now we are glad indeed.
⁴Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like fresh streams in the desert.
⁵May those who sow in tears
reap with songs and shouts of joy.
⁶May those who go forth weeping,
bearing the seeds for sowing,
come home with joyful shouts,
bringing their sheaves of harvest.

PSALM 127 (126)

The believer lives his life day by day.

He does not eliminate the time of prayer, of family fellowship, participation in the Christian community, nor does he waste away his health in overwork. He knows that families with the largest incomes are not always the ones who best make ends meet, and that the richest home is not where people are the happiest. The Father asks us to work, but he also gave us the law of the Sabbath.

What is built without God will fail. – It is useless to spend our days and years in search of a thousand things, innovations and comfort if, with these, we pass through so many events and joys which the present moment was preserving for us, as if we were blind and insensitive.

¹Unless the Lord builds the house,
in vain do its builders labour.
Unless the Lord guards the city,
in vain does the guard stay awake.

²It is in vain that you rise early
and stay up late, putting off your rest,
toiling for your hard-earned bread;
for he provides for his loved ones
even when they are asleep.

³Sons are a gift from the Lord;
the fruit of the womb is a reward.

⁴Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are the sons of one's youth.

⁵Blessed is the man who has filled
his quiver with arrows of this kind,
for he will not be put to shame
when he contends with his foes at the gate.

PSALM 128 (127)

This psalm celebrates the happiness God grants the just man in his home, his wife and his children: *It will go well for him.*

“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice and the rest will be given to you besides” (Mt 6:33).

The blessing of the home. – Contrasting with those who are anxious and impatient, the believer tries to see the good side of life and of the world. He recognizes the blessings God granted his home and the Christian community.

¹Blessed are you who fear the Lord
and walk in his ways.

²You will eat the fruit of your toil;
blessed will you be, and favoured.

³Blessed be your wife
the fruitful vine of your house;
blessed be your children,
the olive shoots around your table.

⁴Such are the blessings bestowed
upon the man who fears the Lord. “

⁵May the Lord bless you from Zion
at every moment of your life.

⁶May you live long to see the children
of your own children.
Peace be upon Israel!

PSALM 129 (128)

From its youth in the desert, the people of God were persecuted. – In the end, their enemies were dispersed while they remained. May the Lord grant us “to produce the fruits of constancy.”

Happy are those who are humble of heart. What pleases God is not selfish tranquility, but the trust of a child who knows he can rely on his father's support to act, to serve: "I did not come to be served, but to serve."

Prayer of the concerned and generous man who needs to know that God is with him. "Do not be distressed by anything, but always say everything to God in prayer."

¹They have oppressed me hard from my youth – let Israel say –

²They have oppressed me hard from my youth – but have not put me down.

³Upon my back the plowmen have plowed long and deep furrows

⁴But the Lord, who is just, has shattered the yoke of the wicked.

⁵May all who hate Zion be thrown into confusion.

⁶May they be like grass on the housetop, which withers before it springs up.

⁷No reaper sets his hands on it, no one gathers it to fill his arms.

⁸Never shall the passers-by say of them; "The blessing of the Lord be upon you!" We bless you in the name of the Lord!

PSALM 130 (129)

When man is crushed is when he most feels his condition as a sinner. He addresses God who, for a moment, hides from him. He knows that with persistent and loud cries, he will succeed in being heard by the one who always forgives.

I wait for the Lord; I trust in his word. This, which the Jews prayed while hoping for liberation by God, is valid for us as well, since we continue to live by Christ's promises. We have everything in hope. We do not travel the path of faith in the midst of God's favors and carried away by enthusiasm, but instead, after the easy fervor of the beginnings, we must grope along, in the dark. Just like the sentinel waits for the dawn, the believer waits for the second coming of Christ.

From the depths I cry to you. – Penitential psalm, but above all, a prayer of trust in God.

¹Out of the depths I cry to you,

²O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears pay attention to the voice of my supplication.

³If you should mark our evil,
O Lord, who could stand?

⁴But with you is forgiveness, and for that you are revered.

⁵I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and I put my hope in his word.

⁶My soul waits for the Lord more eagerly than watchmen wait for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with him is unfailing love and fullness of redemption.

⁸He will deliver Israel from all its transgression.

PSALM 131 (130)

Childlike trust in the Lord. – A simple and humble prayer filled with trust. It reminds us of the calm of a little child in his mother's arms. Is not this the attitude which Jesus praises?

¹O Lord, my heart is not proud nor do I expect too much.

I am not engrossed in ambitious matters,
nor in things too great for me.

²I have quieted and stilled my soul
like a weaned child on its mother's lap;
like a contented child is my soul.

³Hope in the Lord, O Israel,
now and forever.

PSALM 132 (131)

Do not forget the descendants of your servant David.

¹Remember David, O Lord, and
all the hardships he endured. ²how he
swore an oath to the Lord, to the
Mighty One of Jacob.

³"I will not enter my house nor get
into bed.

⁴I will give no sleep to my eyes, no
slumber to my eyelids, ⁵until I find a
place for the Lord, a dwelling for the
Mighty One of Jacob."

⁶We heard of his Ark in Ephrathah
we found it in the fields of Jaar:

⁷Let us go where he dwells and
worship at his footstool!

⁸Arise, O Lord, and come to your
rest, you and the ark of your might.

⁹May your priests be arrayed in
righteousness; may your faithful ones
shout in gladness.

¹⁰For the sake of your servant,
David, do not turn away the face of
your anointed.

¹¹The Lord swore to David a

promise, and he will remain true to it:
"I promise that a son of yours will sit
upon your throne.

¹²If your sons keep my covenant
and the decrees I have taught them,
their sons, too, will sit forever upon
your throne."

¹³For the Lord has chosen Zion; he
has desired it for his dwelling:

¹⁴"This is my resting place for-
ever; here I will dwell, for that is my
desire.

¹⁵I will bless her fruits, her bread,
and the poor will be satisfied.

¹⁶I will clothe her priests with
glory and her faithful will sing in
gladness.

¹⁷From here a saviour shall come
forth, a son of David; here shall shine
forever the lamp of my anointed.

¹⁸In shame will I clothe his ene-
mies, but upon his head a crown shall
flourish.

PSALM 133 (132)

What a great thing fraternal life is! The sweetness and intimacy of fraternal life are a gift of God and they come from above through the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts. The example of the early Christian communities contributed to the spreading of the faith. "May they all be one so that the world may believe."

¹How good and delightful to see
brothers living together in unity!

²It is like precious oil poured
upon Aaron's head,
running down his beard
onto the collar of his robes.

³It is like the dew of Hermon
coming down the mountains of Zion,
where the Lord confers his blessing:
life everlasting.

PSALM 134 (133)

A song of praise: it may have been used in the Temple during a night ceremony when the priests would take turns to assure God of unceasing praise.

Christ spent a lot of time, and on occasions entire nights, praying for his disciples: "Jesus went up the hill to pray alone."

We may think about our companions at work, whose turn it is to work nights, about the sick people who do not sleep, so that their work, their fatigue, their sufferings may be a song of praise to the Lord.

¹Come, bless the Lord,
all you servants of the Lord,
who minister by night
in the house of the Lord,
in the courts of the house of our God.

²Raise your hands to the sanctuary
and bless the Lord.

³May the Lord bless you from Zion,
he who made heaven and earth.

PSALM 135 (134)

Praise the Lord who chose us for himself.

¹Alleluia! Praise the name of the Lord. O servants of the Lord, praise him, ²you who serve in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God.

³Praise the Lord, for he is good, praise his name, for it is beautiful ⁴for the Lord has chosen Jacob as his own, Israel as his possession.

⁵I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is above all gods.

⁶Whatever the Lord pleases, he does – in heaven and on earth, in the seas and in their depths.

⁷He raises clouds from the ends of the earth; he hurls down lightning with the rain; and from his vaults he lets loose the wind.

⁸It was he who slew the firstborn in Egypt, both of man and of beast.

⁹It was he who sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his officers.

¹⁰He destroyed mighty nations and kings –

¹¹Sihon, king of the Amorites, Og,

king of Bashan, all the kings of Canaan.

¹²He gave their land as inheritance to Israel, his people.

¹³Your name, O Lord, endures forever; your renown, O Lord, throughout the ages.

¹⁴For the Lord will vindicate his people and show mercy to his servants.

¹⁵The nations' idols of gold and silver are the work of human hands.

¹⁶They have mouths that cannot speak, eyes that cannot see, ¹⁷ears that cannot hear; neither is there breath in their mouths.

¹⁸Their makers will be like them, so will all who trust in them.

¹⁹Bless the Lord, house of Israel; bless the Lord, house of Aaron; ²⁰bless the Lord, house of Levi; bless the Lord, all you who fear him.

²¹Blessed be the Lord from Zion, he who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 136 (135)

Give thanks to the Lord. Thanksgiving hymn, used for the Passover feast, the feast of the liberation of God's people. "Your love is everlasting" and in eternity, we will never stop, nor grow tired of discovering it.

¹Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
his love endures forever.

²Give thanks to the God of gods,
his love endures forever.
³Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
his love endures forever.
⁴He alone does great marvels,
his love endures forever.
⁵In wisdom he made the heavens,
his love endures forever.
⁶He set the earth upon the waters,
his love endures forever.
⁷He made the great lights,
his love endures forever,
⁸the sun to rule over the day,
his love endures forever,
⁹the moon and stars to rule the night,
his love endures forever.
¹⁰He slew the firstborn of Egypt,
his love endures forever,
¹¹and brought Israel out,
his love endures forever,
¹²with strong hand
and outstretched arm,
his love endures forever.
¹³He split the Sea of Reeds,
his love endures forever,
¹⁴and made Israel pass through it,

his love endures forever,
¹⁵drowning Pharaoh and his army,
his love endures forever,
¹⁶and led his people through the
desert,
his love endures forever.
¹⁷He struck down great kings,
his love endures forever,
¹⁸and killed mighty kings,
his love endures forever,
¹⁹Sihon, king of the Amorites,
his love endures forever,
²⁰and Og, king of Bashan,
his love endures forever.
²¹He gave their land as inheritance,
his love endures forever,
²²a heritage to Israel his servant,
his love endures forever.
²³He remembered us in our humiliation,
his love endures forever,
²⁴and freed us from our oppressors,
his love endures forever,
²⁵he who gives food to all creatures,
his love endures forever.
²⁶Give thanks to the God of heaven,
his love endures forever!

PSALM 137 (136)

Jerusalem, I will not forget you.

¹By the streams of Babylon, we sat
and wept as we remembered Zion.

²There on the poplars we hung our
harps and lyres ³when our captors
asked for song.

Our tormentors wanted songs of
joy: "Sing to us one of the songs of
Zion!"

⁴How could we sing the Lord's
song in a strange and alien land?

⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may
my right hand leave me!

⁶May my tongue cleave to my

palate if I remember you not, if I
consider not Jerusalem above all that
gives me joy.

⁷Remember, O Lord, the Edomites
— what they did and said when Jerusa-
lem fell. They cried, "Tear the city
down, tear it down to its foundations!"

⁸O daughter of Babylon, doomed
to destruction, happy is he who re-
pays you for what you have done to
us!

⁹Happy is he who seizes and
dashes your infants against the rocks!

¹³⁶ Praise of the marvels of God, creation of the world;
liberation from Egypt; Providence (the daily bread).

To us, this thanksgiving may, perhaps, seem too
limited to the Jewish national history, but, though our

horizons have expanded (see Paul's praise in Eph 1:3-
14), this must not prevent us from recognizing God's
presence in every day events and even in politics: "All
things come from God and were made for him."

PSALM 138 (137)

¹I thank you, O Lord, with all my heart,
for you have heard the word of my lips.
I sing your praise in the presence of the gods.

²I bow down towards your holy temple
and give thanks to your name,
for your love and faithfulness,
for you have exalted your promise above all.
³You answered me when I called;
you made me strong and bold.

⁴O Lord, all kings on earth will give you praise,
when they have heard your words.

⁵The ways of the Lord they will celebrate,
for the glory of the Lord is great!

⁶From above, the Lord watches over the lowly;
from afar, he marks down the haughty.

⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you give me life.

With outstretched arm, you save me
from the wrath of my foes,
with your right hand you deliver me.

⁸The Lord will do everything for me.
Your love, O Lord, endures forever.
Forsake not the work of your hands.

PSALM 139 (138)

God knows everything. – A prayer filled with admiration, before God's wisdom: everything is exposed and open in the sight of him to whom we are accountable" (Heb 4.13).

¹O Lord, you know me: you have
scrutinized me.

²You know when I sit and when I
rise; from far away you discern my
thoughts.

³You observe my activities and
times of rest; you are familiar with all
my ways.

⁴Before a word is formed in my
mouth, you know it entirely, O Lord,

⁵From front to back you hedge me
round, shielding me with your pro-
tecting hand.

⁶Such marvels are beyond me, too
lofty for me to attain.

⁷Where else could I go from your
Spirit? Where could I flee from your
presence?

⁸You are there if I ascend the heav-

ens; you are there if I descend to the
depths.

⁹If I ride on the wings of the dawn
and settle on the far side of the sea,
¹⁰even there your hand shall guide me
and your right hand shall pin me
down.

¹¹Shall I say, "Let darkness hide
me, and light become night about
me?"

¹²But darkness for you is not dark
and night for you shines as the day.

¹³It was you who formed my in-
most part and knit me together in my
mother's womb.

¹⁴I thank you for the wonders you
have done, and my heart praises you
for your marvelous deeds.

¹⁵Even my bones were known to

you when I was being formed in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶You have scrutinized my actions and all my days are ordained by you; you have recorded them all in your book before any one of them ever existed.

¹⁷How difficult it is to grasp your thoughts, O God! Their number cannot be counted.

¹⁸If I tried to do so, they would outnumber the sands. When I awake I am still with you.

¹⁹If only you would slay the wicked, O God, and would drive away from me the men of blood!

²⁰Against you they speak wickedly; your foes blaspheme your name.

²¹I hate those who hate you, O Lord, and loathe those who defy you.

²²I hate them and I consider them as my foe.

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts.

²⁴See if my steps have gone astray, and lead me in your eternal way.

PSALM 140 (139)

Free me from the wicked man.

²O Lord, deliver me from men of evil, protect me from violent people, ³forever plotting evil and stirring up strife.

⁴They have tongues sharp as a serpent's and fangs poisonous as a viper's.

⁵Save me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked, preserve me from the hands of the violent, who have planned to trip my feet.

⁶The arrogant have set a snare for me; they have spread out their nets to entrap me along my path.

⁷I say to the Lord, "You are my God." Hear, O Lord, my voice in supplication.

⁸O God, my Lord, my strength and salvation, in the day of battle you shield my head.

⁹Do not grant, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; do not let their evil schemes succeed.

¹⁰Those who surround me defy me; let them be overwhelmed by the mischief they have threatened.

¹¹Let burning coals rain upon them; let them be cast into the depths, never to rise again.

¹²Do not let the slanderer thrive on earth; let disaster hunt down the violent.

¹³I know that the Lord upholds the cause of the afflicted, and maintains justice for the poor and oppressed.

¹⁴Surely the just shall praise your name, the upright shall dwell in your presence.

PSALM 141 (140)

"Do not lead us into temptation." – May God grant that we resist the seduction of the world around us.

¹Lord, hear my voice and hasten to help me! Listen to my plea when I call to you.

²Let my prayer rise to you like incense, and my hands be lifted up as in an evening sacrifice.

³O Lord, set a guard at my mouth, keep watch at the gate of my lips.

⁴Let not my heart be drawn to evil; let me not be enticed into evil acts in company with sinners, and let me not partake of their delights.

⁵Let a just man strike me, but let not my head be anointed with the oil of the wicked – my prayer is ever against their evil deeds.

⁶When their rulers are flung upon the rock, only then will the wicked learn that my words have been well spoken,

⁷when the earth opens to swallow them and their bones are scattered at the edge of the netherworld.

⁸But my eyes are turned to you, O Lord; strip me not of life, for you are my refuge.

⁹Keep me from the trap they have set for me, keep me from the net laid by evildoers.

¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own snares, while I alone escape safe and free.

PSALM 142 (141)

In the time of testing. – The prayer of someone in the most dire poverty. This psalm fits the Passion of Christ, and St. Francis of Assisi prayed it when he was dying.

²I cry aloud to the Lord,
in a loud voice I beseech the Lord.

³Before him I pour out my sorrows,
before him I lay bare my woes.

⁴My spirit grows faint,
but you know my path.
Along the way I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.

⁵Look to the right and see:
no one takes notice of me.
I have lost all means of escape;
no one wants to help me.

⁶I cry to you, O Lord;
I say, "You are my refuge;
in the land of the living,
my portion, my heritage."

⁷Listen to my groaning,
for I have been brought low indeed.
Rescue me from my pursuers,
for they are too strong for me.

⁸Oh, set me free from captivity,
that I may praise your name!
Then the righteous will gather about me
when they see your goodness to me.

PSALM 143 (142)

¹O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; answer me faithfully and righteously.

²Do not bring your servant to judg-

ment, for no mortal is just in your sight.

³The enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, mak-

ing me dwell in darkness like those long dead.

⁴And so my spirit fails me, my heart is full of fear.

⁵I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on what you have done and consider the work of your hand.

⁶I stretch out my hands to you, and thirst for you like a parched land.

⁷O Lord, answer me quickly: my spirit is faint with yearning. Do not hide your face from me; save me from going down to the pit.

⁸Let the dawn bring me word of

your love, for in you alone I put my trust. Show me the way I should walk, for to you I lift up my soul.

⁹Rescue me from my enemies, O Lord, for to you I flee for refuge.

¹⁰Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your Spirit lead me on level ground.

¹¹Preserve me, O Lord, for your name's sake; free me from distress, in your justice.

¹²If you love me, crush my enemies and destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.

PSALM 144 (143)

The first part repeats verses of other psalms, especially Psalm 18. The second part, with simple images, refers to the yearning for heaven, where there will be no more tears, nor foremen, nor grief. "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord."

¹Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle – ²my loving God, my fortress; my protector and deliverer, my shield where I take refuge, who conquers nations, and subjects them to my rule.

³O Lord, what is man that you should be mindful of him, the son of man that you should care for him?

⁴Man is a mere puff of breath, his days pass like a shadow on earth.

⁵Bend your heavens, O Lord, and come down; touch the mountain and make it smoke.

⁶Flash forth lightning and rout the foe; shoot your arrows and scatter them.

⁷From above, reach down and draw me out of the deep waters, from the hands of foreigners ⁸whose mouths speak falsehood, whose words are full of deceit.

⁹I will sing a new song to you, O

God, I will make music on the ten-stringed harp, ¹⁰for you who give victory to kings and deliver David, your servant.

¹¹Rescue me from the evil sword and from the hands of foreigners, whose mouths speak falsehood, whose words are full of deceit.

¹²May our sons be like plants well-nurtured and full grown, and our daughters like pillars that adorn the corners of the temple.

¹³May our barns be full, with every kind of provision.

May our sheep increase by thousands, even by myriads, in our pastures.

¹⁴May our cattle be strong and fruitful; and may there be an end to raids and exile, to cries of distress in our streets.

¹⁵Happy are the people so blessed; happy the people whose God is the Lord!

PSALM 145 (144)

This psalm is like a litany: God is justice, faithfulness, goodness, the author of wonders. It invites us to discover the immense wealth of God through his works, his revelation in the person of Christ, made man.

I will extol you, my God and King;
I will bless your name forever.

² I will praise you day after day and
extal your name forever.

³ Great is the Lord, most worthy of
praise; and his deeds are beyond
measure.

⁴ Fathers, commend your works to
their children and celebrate your acts
of power.

⁵ I will meditate on the splendour
of your majesty and the wondrous
works manifesting your glory.

⁶ People will proclaim the might of
your deeds, and I will declare your
awesome greatness.

⁷ They will celebrate your abun-
dant kindness, and rejoice in singing
of your justice.

⁸ Compassionate and gracious is
the Lord, slow to anger and abound-
ing in love.

⁹ The Lord is merciful to everyone;
his love is for all his creation.

¹⁰ All your works will give you
thanks; all your saints, O Lord, will
praise you.

¹¹ They will tell of the glory of your
kingdom and speak of your power,

¹² that all may know of your mighty
deeds, your kingdom and its glorious
splendour.

¹³ Your reign is from age to age;
your dominion endures from genera-
tion to generation.

The Lord is true to his promises
and shows love in all he does.

¹⁴ The Lord lifts up those who are
fallen and raises those who are beaten
down.

¹⁵ All creatures look to you to be
fed in due season; ¹⁶ with open hand
you satisfy the living according to
their needs.

¹⁷ Righteous is the Lord in all his
ways, and loving in all his deeds.

¹⁸ He is near those who call on him,
who call in truth upon his name.

¹⁹ He fulfils the wish of those who
fear him; he hears their cry and res-
cues them.

²⁰ For those who love him, the Lord
has compassion; but the wicked, he
will destroy.

²¹ Let my mouth speak in praise of
the Lord, let every creature bless his
holy name, for ever and ever.

PSALM 146 (145)

The Lord frees the oppressed. – The extent of human
anguish: the hungry, the prisoners, the oppressed, – has reached
such a degree that, on their own, the powerful of this earth are
incapable of finding a solution for it. Only God can truly give the
world, justice, peace, hope.

¹ *Alleluia!*

Praise the Lord, my soul!

² I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to God while I live.

³ Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortal man who cannot save.

⁴ His spirit leaves him,
he goes back to the earth;
on that very day his plans fall apart.

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord his God.

"You have sent me to announce the Good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to prisoners..."

Let us not be dazzled by those who give orders, be money and conveniences, but let us look at the reality: the world is full of evil and injustice and we are asked to "straighten what is crooked."

We must proclaim, without fear, that God is the one who liberates the poor. The more we are convinced of that, the more we will try to share the Lord's thoughts, placing our lives at the service of the marginalized, the hungry and the humiliated.

PSALM 147

*The Lord is Jerusalem's builder.
Jerusalem, praise the Lord.*

For the Jews, more than the capital, Jerusalem was the Holy City where God was dwelling hidden in the cloud of the Temple, and whose presence protected the city and the people against hostile forces: Jerusalem is the church.

The Lord is its builder, the one who gathered the dispersed children of God there. Our God fills the distance between the order of the universe and the life of each one of us. *He calls the stars by name and helps the humble.*

⁶maker of heaven and earth,
the sea and all they contain.

The Lord is forever faithful;
⁷he gives justice to the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free
⁸and gives sight to the blind.

The Lord straightens the bent,
and loves the virtuous.

⁹The Lord protects the stranger,
sustains the widow and the orphan;
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰The Lord will reign forever,
your God, O Zion,
from generation to generation. Alleluia!

Rejoice, Jerusalem. – Let the Church rejoice because the Lord "strengthened the bars of her gates." The powers of evil and death will not overcome her. The Lord blessed her children and gave them "his" peace, not that of the world. He feeds her with his word and with the best of wheat: his body made Bread of Life.

¹ Alleluia! Praise the Lord!
How good it is to sing to our God,
how sweet and befitting to praise him!

² The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem;
he gathers the exiles of Israel;
³ he heals their broken hearts
and binds up their wounds.

⁴ He determines the number of stars,
he calls each of them by name.

⁵ The Lord is great and mighty in power;
his wisdom is beyond measure.

⁶ The Lord lifts up the humble,
but casts the wicked to the ground.

⁷ Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving,
make music on the harp for our God.

⁸ With clouds he covers the sky,
he waters the earth with rain
and makes grass grow upon the hill.

⁹ He provides food for the cattle
and the young ravens when they call.

¹⁰ He is not concerned with the strength of a horse;
nor is he pleased with men's agility;

¹¹ The Lord delights in those who fear him
and who put their hope in his constant love.

¹² Exalt the Lord, O Jerusalem;
praise your God, O Zion!

The Jews marveled at the transformation of water into ice: how can God transform the elements this way? In the same way the church marvels at seeing how, in God's hands, the crises of the world serve his plan.

¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your children within you.

¹⁴ He grants peace to your borders and feeds you with the finest grain.

¹⁵ He sends his command to the earth and swiftly runs his word.

¹⁶ He spreads snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.

¹⁷ He hurls down hail like pebbles; his icy blasts make waters freeze.

¹⁸ But he sends his word and melts the snow; he makes his breeze blow, and again the waters flow.

¹⁹ He proclaimed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel.

²⁰ He has done this for no other nation, so his laws remain unknown to them.

Alleluia!

PSALM 148

Alleluia!

¹ Alleluia! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heavenly heights.

² Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.

⁵ Let them praise the name of the Lord, at whose command they were made.

⁶ He established them forever and gave each a fixed and lasting duty.

⁷ Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea creatures and all the depths, ⁸ clouds and snow, hail and lightning,

storm winds that do his bidding, ⁹ you mountains and all you hills, you fruit trees and cedars, ¹⁰ you wild beasts and tame animals, you creeping things and winged fowl.

¹¹ Kings of the earth and nations, princes and all rulers of the world, ¹² young men and maidens, old men and children – ¹³ let them praise the name of the Lord.

For his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven; ¹⁴ and he has given his people glory.

This is his praise from his faithful, from the children of Israel, the people close to him. Alleluia.

PSALM 149

National hymn. – The people of God know that they are called to glory and happiness. They will be the instruments of God's justice. God uses his poor, the humble people, gathered by Christ, in order to judge the world and bring it to salvation.

¹ Alleluia! Sing to the Lord a new song of praise in the assembly of his saints.

² Let Israel rejoice in his Maker, let the sons of Zion glory in their King!

³ Let them dance in praise of his

name and make music for him with harp and lyre and timbrel.

⁴For the Lord delights in his people; he crowns the lowly with victory.

⁵Let the saints exult in his honour and praise him; even at night on their couches, ⁶let the praise of God be on their lips.

Let them take hold of two-edged swords ⁷to wreak vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, ⁸to bind their kings in chains and their nobles in iron fetters, ⁹to execute on them the written sentence.

This is the glory of all his saints.
Alleluia!

PSALM 150

Universal symphony! The book of psalms concludes with a song performed by the whole orchestra. This is symbolic: to be complete, the praise of God requires the participation of all nations, races, civilizations and cultures.

Let all that breathes praise the Lord. It will be said again in Revelation (5:13): "And I heard them answer: To the one who is seated on the throne and to Christ, praise, honor, glory and power forever and ever."

¹ *Alleluia!*

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in the vault of heaven.

² Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him for his own greatness.

³ Praise him with trumpet blast;
praise him with lyre and harp.

⁴ Praise him with dance and tambourines;
praise him with pipe and strings.

⁵ Praise him with clashing cymbals;
praise him with clanging cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise him.
Alleluia!

NEW TESTAMENT



The New Testament is the collection of 27 books in the Bible which were written in the seventy years following the resurrection of Jesus. The church of the apostles saw in them the authentic expression of their faith. No matter how much they may have been inspired by God, these books did not fall down from heaven, rather we owe them to the apostles and the evangelists of the early church. They make no pretense at answering all our questions concerning the faith: they are testimonies about the impact which the unique person of Jesus Christ made on his contemporaries.

But, why is there a *New Testament* after the *Old*?

Simply because they form two parts of sacred history, separated by the cross of Jesus.

In the Old Testament a people is being formed. They grow through their experiences, and after having hoped for the thousand and one things that people look for, they understand that what really matters is to hope for and to seek the Kingdom of Justice in which persons will be made new. When we read Sacred History, we see the direction it takes and discern stages and key people. Israel discovers the great values of existence and of social life. We understand why it took them so many centuries to discover something of the beyond. We grasp why the prosperity of the ancient kingdom of Israel could not last and why it was necessary for the people of God to gain in insight and interiority what they were losing in earthly power and glory. We see why, after so many saviours, the unique Saviour came to them when they were experiencing the final crisis under Roman oppression and the radicalization of political forces.

Thus, the message of Jesus was a call to overcome the narrow-mindedness of their nationalism and fanaticism in order to find *the kingdom and the justice of God*. The history of Israel had to flow into a new era with a universal people of God, who would be rich in the knowledge of the Father and of the Son. Such a people would practice nonviolence which can overcome divisions and oppression. And we know the Jewish nation collapsed in a few years because they did not welcome the message of Jesus: the end of one world and the rupture of a destiny.

The Jewish people, who did not believe in Jesus, did not lose their divine vocation because of that. They continued being a people different from all others, conscious of being the Servant of the One God for the salvation of all. The Old Testament, which they faithfully followed, was prolonged in a living tradition which enabled them to have a role in history out of all proportion to their smallness.

But there were also those who did believe. When attempts to evangelize the Jews in Palestine failed, the first Jewish Christians turned, with added incentive, to other peoples and announced the Gospel to them. Within a few years, the church began to spread throughout the world known then, that is to say, the nations of the Greco-Roman empire. At first, it was a common belief among Christians that the message would shortly reach the ends of the world and Jesus would then return in glory for judgment. But in the seventies this illusion disappeared: history might last longer than they had expected.

The Christian communities then began to gather what had been written down to preserve the preaching of the apostles. They also spent time recalling significant experiences of the first Christians. Of the books thus produced, the church approved those which expressed the faith as it was received from the apostles and rejected others which, although very commendable, did not seem to transmit the most fundamental and universal message of the faith.

The New Testament does not replace the Old. Jesus' preaching does not make the warnings of the prophets irrelevant. Love does not replace justice. The salvation promised to the Jewish people is not replaced by a "salvation of souls," but rather the Gospel is presented as the liberating truth which redirects history and moves all civilizations toward the goal of reunion and reconciliation in Christ of all human powers and creative energy in the universe.

HOW THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN

The Four Gospels

As far back as we go in church history, it is an unquestionable fact that reference is made to four Gospels attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are our Gospels. All the publications of the New Testament and of the Gospels in particular, whether they be in English, Spanish, or any other language, are translations of original texts written in Greek. Ancient manuscripts containing these texts were copied quite a number of times until each of these texts was fixed with the invention of printing.

Those copying the manuscripts could not avoid making some mistakes. By comparing the various manuscripts, grouped according to their differences and their origin, critics can determine what were the original texts which the Catholic church recognized as the expression of the apostolic faith, and as the word of God. But who wrote these first Gospels and what was their source?

The Tradition of the Apostles

We know that Jesus died when he was still young and that he died without having written anything. But Jesus had dedicated most of his time to forming the twelve apostles whom he had chosen. They lived with him, as was the custom with disciples of Jewish masters. Jesus had them learn his teaching by heart. Instead of multiplying discourses, Jesus repeated the essential truths in many ways. The apostles had engraved in their memory the instructions of their Master as well as all the events they had witnessed. And we cannot doubt that after the days of Pentecost their concern was to give form to these instructions of Jesus which were to be the catechesis of the early church.

We call *tradition of the apostles* all the events and teachings of Jesus that the apostles preached and commented on to make Jesus and his work known. Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews and the Saviour of all humankind, the Son of God come-from-God who rose from the dead. As we have already said, all that we know about Jesus is what we received from his

apostles. We would like, of course, to have the very words of Jesus just as they were heard, but the faith of the church holds that the apostles alone were his authentic witnesses and they understood him as God wanted him to be understood and believed. The word of God is not only what Jesus said and what they heard; it is also what the apostles told us about Jesus.

From the Aramaic of Jesus to the Greek of the Gospel

Jesus and his contemporaries spoke *Aramaic*, the commonly-used language which had replaced Hebrew in Palestine since the return from Exile. Yet, *Hebrew* continued to be taught and even spoken. Many Jews understood it and the religious writing was often in that language. We point out here that Hebrew and Aramaic are two very similar languages belonging to the same family of Semitic languages.

Greek, on the other hand, was the language used for trading and in cities throughout the countries in the Roman Empire. Like English in our days, it made communication possible among very different people who were united under Roman authority and law. Greek was understood by a good number of Jews in Palestine. *Latin*, on the contrary, was the language of the Romans and it was used only for administrative purposes. The big number of Jews in all the great cities of the Roman Empire and the Christians, who were going to increase in the same places, spoke Greek and already used the Bible translated into Greek called the Septuagint (Version of the LXX).

The Synoptic Gospels

At first reading, something is immediately evident: the first three Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke – resemble one another in many passages, they relate the same events, often in the same sequence. This is why they are called the *Synoptic Gospels*, which means that we could place them in three columns to compare the three ways of relating the same event in rather similar words. There are so many similarities

and also so many differences that, to this day, it has not been possible to explain them both.

We can easily see that Matthew, Mark and Luke adapt their text to the basic requirements of catechesis. The purpose of these Gospels was to give sufficient knowledge of Jesus to support the oral teaching transmitted in the church by the apostles, the prophets and the teachers, and to affirm the faith of the beginners. John, however, wants to bring us to a more profound knowledge of the person of Jesus and to specify the bases and forms of authentic Christian experience.

For these reasons, we shall begin by speaking of the Synoptic Gospels.

Origin, authors and dates of the Synoptic Gospels

We can only provide some dates concerning these points and we must take into account the fact that modern studies have profoundly renewed what was believed to be true a few years back.

a) The Synoptic Gospels are translations into the Greek of more ancient texts which may have been written in Hebrew.

Every day more arguments come up in favour of the idea that the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were first written in a Semitic language. This could have been Aramaic, but most probably it was Hebrew.

These Hebrew original texts of the Gospels were written in the Christian communities of Palestine for their own use in the early years of the church. They were later translated into Greek with so much precaution not to betray their meaning that the translator often preserved even the Hebrew expressions, running the risk of creating a heavy style or of being more difficult for a Greek reader to understand.

Luke also translated original Hebrew texts, the most important of which had been the foundation of Matthew's Gospel. But Luke was not satisfied with merely translating these texts, he took some liberty in the style of putting them together.

b) Testimony of ancient Christian authors

In 110, Papias of Hierapolis (near Ephesus) wrote: "Mark, Peter's interpreter, wrote with precision, though not in an orderly manner, all that he recalled about the sayings and deeds of the Lord. He accompanied Peter who taught according to the needs of the moment, not in the form of a composition, and he made no

mistakes in including some things as he remembered them. Matthew put together the sayings of the Lord in Hebrew, and from then on everyone translated them according to his ability."

In 185, bishop and martyr Saint Irenaeus wrote: "Matthew published a gospel among the Hebrews and in their language while Peter and Paul went out to evangelize Rome and to establish the church. After they left, Mark, a disciple and Peter's translator, wrote down Peter's preaching. Luke, Paul's companion, also wrote a book with the Gospel preached by Paul."

These ancient sources, to which we should add a lot more, were looked down upon by many modern biblical scholars. Lately, they have once again been seen as information of great historical value.

c) Date of the writing of the Synoptic Gospels

Most contemporary biblical scholars, often under the influence of subjective considerations, claim that Mark was written in the year 70; Matthew and Luke between 80 and 85. However the most prominent of them have confessed that they have no solid arguments to support their theory. More recent studies have come up with proof that these very late dates are difficult to maintain. On comparing the Gospels with ancient Jewish writings, the Jewish masters of Jerusalem Hebraic University conclude that it would have been impossible to write them as they are after the years 50-55.

Many reasons suggest that the gospels of Mark and Matthew were written in Hebrew in the years 40-50. Luke must have written his gospel in Greek between 50-60 and shortly after him, in the years 60-63, Matthew's and Mark's were translated into Greek.

Two Pauline texts - unfortunately not very clear - could support these dates: 2 Cor 8:18 and 2 Cor 3:14; the first of these may be referring to Luke's Gospel.

Mark, Matthew and Luke: The Two Sources

We all know that Mark's Gospel is much shorter than Matthew's or Luke's. However, we can easily see that all the events related in Mark are also found in Matthew and in Luke.

On the other hand, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke both include some deeds and many sayings of Jesus which are not found in Mark. In Luke, we find them mostly in chapters 9: 52 to 18: 14, where they form one continuous seg-

ment of the Gospel, whereas the same sentences are scattered throughout Matthew. This is why, many scholars speak about *Two Sources* for the three synoptic Gospels. The first of these which was either a writing or an oral tradition contained, more or less, the same events we find in Mark. Matthew and Luke may have used the same source. The other source must have compiled more than anything else sayings of Jesus. It was used by Matthew as well as by Luke, although it may have contained much more than what they took from it. This second source is usually called *Q* or the *Sayings of the Lord*, but it is not preserved in writing.

Undoubtedly, the apostle Matthew wrote a "Gospel," but in Hebrew and for Hebrews, that is to say, for the Jews of Palestine who had been converted to Christ. But we do not know if his work was the *Sayings of the Lord*, or the composition based on these Sayings and the first source that is known as *Matthew's Gospel*. This can have been translated into Greek around the year 60.

Luke, for his part, placed the *Sayings of the Lord* between the two parts of the first "source" which is the pattern found in Mark. Mark distinguished between the deeds of Jesus in Galilee (Mk 1-10) and the deeds of Jesus in Jerusalem before his Passion (11-16). Luke used the literary device a journey of Jesus to

Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51-18:14) in which he put these Sayings. Luke was Greek and he was writing for the Greeks. He did not reproduce the texts of the Gospel referring to Jewish laws and customs which would have made little sense to his readers (Mk 8: 8; 9: 11) or those which could have offended them (Mk 8:31; 9: 43; 11:11). As a good Greek, he eliminated all the repetitions, so dear to the Jews, or episodes too similar to others previously narrated (Mk 8:22; 14:3). Luke also gave his Gospel an introduction and a conclusion of its own.

The Gospel of John

In the Gospel of John we find parts of an ancient Gospel as simple as Mark's, with more deeds than words of Jesus, which may have been addressed to the Christian communities of Samaria, and which was written in Aramaic. But this was nothing more than the foundation on which John developed those long discourses of Jesus which show that salvation transforms man and renews creation. In this Gospel, the mystery of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is revealed and so is God's intimate communication with us through community life and the sacraments of the church. This Gospel appeared only after John's death, around the year 95.

CAN WE BELIEVE WHAT THE GOSPEL SAYS?

1. Do not take everything literally

With the preceding explanations, we readily understand the following:

- All the deeds and words of Jesus are not found in the Gospel.
- In relating the words of Jesus, each evangelist expresses them in his own way and adapts them for the better understanding of his readers.
- The events are not always told in the order in which they took place, and things that Jesus said on different occasions can be mixed together in the same passage.

In the Gospel, we cannot, therefore, find a "picture" of Jesus, or a "recording" of his words. However, this does not in any way mean that we cannot believe the testimony of the evangelists.

2. The unique place of the Gospel in literature

The Gospel is an exceptional and unique work among the literary writings of all times. Any comparison with other writings of its

time, Christian or otherwise, shows a tremendous contrast. In the Gospel, the simplicity and the desire to be temperate. In the other texts, the marvelous, the complexity, the "not down-to-earth." A modern philosopher – not a believer – wondered why there were not many miracles in the Gospel. The Gospel witnesses to its own authenticity. Taking into account what was said in the former paragraph, modern criticism has not been able to find falsehood in the Gospel, even though it has been scrutinized with a magnifying glass for more than a century and has undergone countless tests, as has never been done to any other book.

3. Those who doubt

Nevertheless, those who question the testimony of the Gospels are many. At times, this is because they think they see some contradictions in the Gospels; more often, because it seems impossible for them to accept the miracles. Even among believers who study the Gospels, some have reservations concerning the historical value of the Gospel episodes which speak of God's interventions for Jesus.

This may be due to the fact that these scholars usually come from well-to-do backgrounds and countries and they have been trained in a "scientific" culture which relies only on human resources in order to solve every problem. There, little is expected from God and God does not multiply miracles.

And so, they reason the following way: If now I cannot see anything similar to what happened in the Gospel, how am I to believe that such things happened then? Everything would be different if they were involved in a church of the poor and if they could witness the constant interventions of God for the benefit of those who hope in him alone.

In fact, it is impossible to study the Gospel "impartially," as we would do with any ordinary book. If we share the same faith of the apostles, we have no difficulty accepting the sacred book while remaining aware of the critical questions. But, if we do not fulfill the conditions that would allow us to "see God," we feel uneasy until we find some reason to "reduce" Gospel's testimony. This is why many persons, though they admire the Gospel and refuse to consider it a lie, search for a thousand reasons to deny its very contents.

4. Some objections

Therefore they cling especially to three arguments:

- They say that the Gospels were not written by an historian but rather they combine testimonies from several witnesses: they belong to popular literature in which we can find everything, except historical certainty.
- They also say that the Gospels were writings destined for the catechesis and the teaching of the Christian people: the facts they relate are aimed at supporting what is being taught. Hence it is not important whether Jesus walked on the water or not: the episode was written to show that Jesus possessed divine power.
- They say that the Gospels were written many years after the death of Jesus when popular imagination had already placed a halo around him. And so, they do not reveal the reality of Jesus to us, but rather the faith of the church in the first century. (Let us remember what we said about the date when the gospels were written.)

But, what about the apostles? They had been Jesus' witnesses, and their function was for to remain his official witnesses within the church. They knew what had actually happened; would they have stayed quiet while

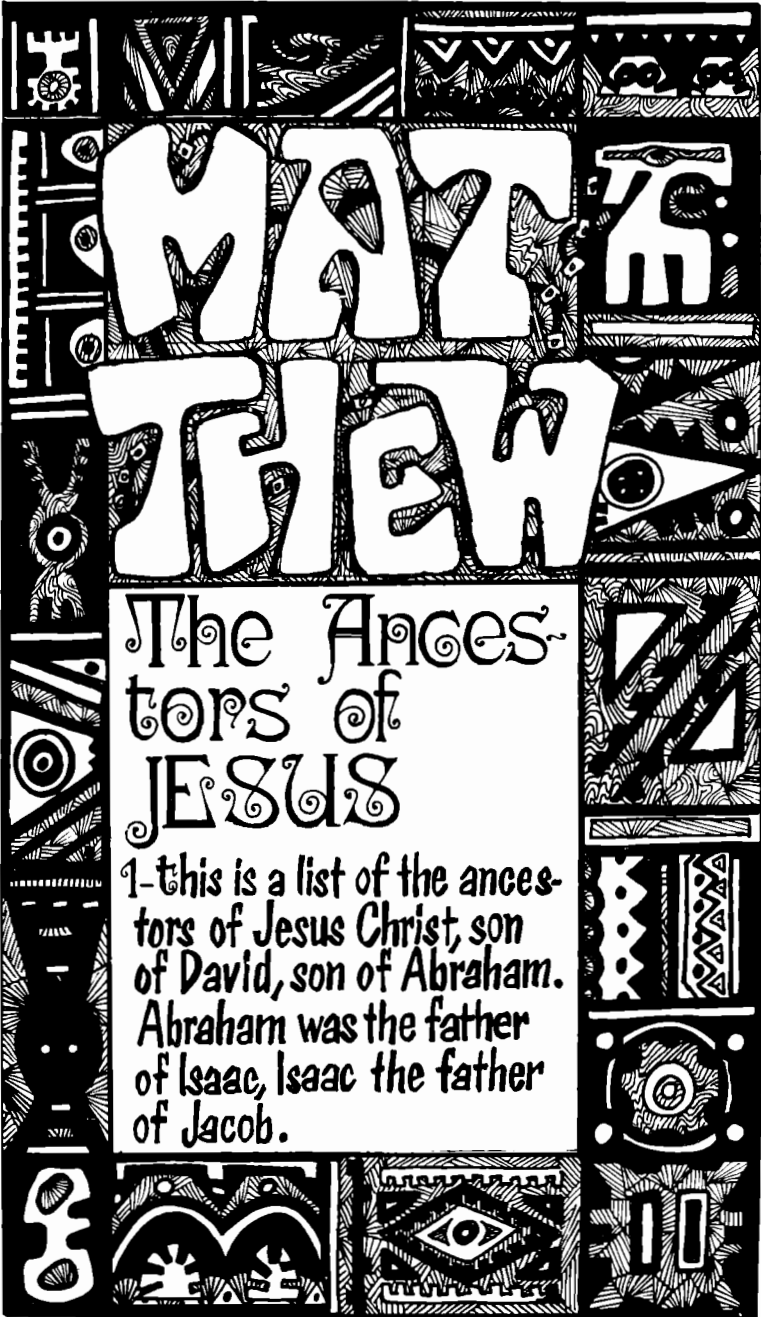
some people were distorting the history of Jesus? The guarantee of the Gospel is found in the very structure of the Catholic church which never was a group of spontaneous believers carried away by enthusiasm or opportunism. From the start the church was an organized group, with a respected hierarchy which had the final say in questions of faith and traditions.

The four Gospels were not a popular work created on the basis of legends, of words heard and distorted, of miracles invented in part to justify what was being said of Jesus. The Gospels came from the *tradition of the apostles*, and the church retained them because it recognized this tradition in them. In those very years and during the following century, other "gospels" were written: "the gospels of Peter," "the gospel of Thomas," "the gospel of Nicodemus," "the proto-gospel of James." The church, however, did not believe them because of the fabulous events recorded in them, or because of theological orientations which did not conform to the teaching received from the apostles.

The fact that the Gospels were written with a view to catechesis does not mean that the history was adulterated to better convince the listeners. As if the facts alone cannot speak to those who are open to understanding! And what about Jesus' apostles, formed by Jesus? Would they not have the basic integrity to respect truth?

A great deal of importance has been given to the literary patterns which are used to relate the events. Since several miracles are told according to the same framework, some scholars conclude that everything is fictitious. Would it not be simpler to think that the events and the miracles were presented in certain patterns which made their teaching and memorizing much easier?

Another typical case is that of the Annunciation to Mary. Luke tells it by borrowing from texts referring to the birth of Ishmael and Samson. Some people say immediately: since Luke imitated the style of legendary stories, it is because his story is a legend; Mary's virginity and the annunciation of the angel are no more than fiction and all they pretend to do is to celebrate the divinity of Christ. Why look for such strange explanations? Luke and his contemporaries considered these ancient texts to be historical. So Luke copied their style to emphasize that the birth of Jesus was also part of sacred history. Luke told the events which were the basis of his own faith; if these events had not happened, he would not have believed.



MATTHEW

The Ancestors of JESUS

1-this is a list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob.



INTRODUCTION

Who was Matthew? In the Gospel we read that Matthew, also known as Levi, was a tax collector whom Jesus called to be one of the Twelve apostles (Mt 9:9 and Mk 2:13). Matthew wished to present in an orderly manner what Jesus had taught. He did not mention many details about the deeds of Jesus that he included, but brought out instead his words.

As an Introduction, Matthew set at the beginning of his Gospel some stories about the infancy of Jesus. The rest of the Gospel is divided into five parts. Each begins with deeds of Jesus and continues with a discourse. These discourses are:

Discourse on the mountain: 5-7.

Instructions to the missionaries: 10.

Parables of the kingdom: 13.

Admonitions for the Christian community: 18.

The future of the Church: 23-25.

The Gospel of Matthew was written for the use of Christian communities in which the majority were Jews. Because of this it brings out that Jesus was the Messiah expected by the Jews, quoting many verses from the Old Testament which foretold the Messiah and described his ways: 4:14; 8:17; 12:17 ...

It repeats this message many times: the kingdom of God had to be preached to the Jews, but Jesus knew that they would reject it and that, because of this, the Church should address the pagan nations.

For Matthew, Jesus is first the Teacher of humankind. His speeches and parables show us a way to perfection and lay down the guidelines for community sharing in a Church of the poor, where everyone is equal.

In the present edition there is no commentary on paragraphs found in an identical form in the Gospel of Mark and that are commented on there.

The ancestors of Jesus

1 This is a list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zarah (their mother was Tamar), Perez was the father of Hezron, and

Hezron of Ram. ⁴Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon.

⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz. His mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed. His mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶Jesse was the father of David, the king. David was the father of Solomon. His mother had been Uriah's wife.

Lk 3, 23

3. 1 Chr 1, 34; 2, 4; Gen 38, 29; Rut 4, 13

6. 2 S 12, 24

o The Saviour has blossomed from our land and from the chosen race of Israel (Is 7:45:8). There are 42 names in the list, arranged in three series of 14 names each, a symbolic number for the Jews. It is obvious that it is not a complete list.

Jesus is the son of Abraham. Abraham is the father of the believers. God promised to unite all nations around his race. The first series of names appears in Ruth 4:18.

As promised to Israel, Jesus is also the son of David. The kings of Israel, descendants of David, play a part in the sacred history. Some of them had a very good reputation, others very bad. As

to the descendants of Zerubbabel, the Bible is silent (Ezr 3 & 4).

The list extends to Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. Among the Jews, this adoption was sufficient for Jesus to be considered, like Joseph, son of David.

Four names included in the list belong to women, all described in the Bible: Tamar, who gave everything so as not to lose the divine blessings; Rahab, a foreign prostitute whom the Bible praises (Jos 2); Ruth, another foreigner of exemplary conduct; and the widow of Urias, the beautiful Bathsheba, who shared David's sin.

⁷Solomon was the father of Rehoboam. Then came the kings: Abijah, Asa, ⁸Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, ⁹Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, ¹⁰Manasseh, Amon, Josiah.

¹¹Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²After the deportation to Babylon Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, the father of Zerubbabel.

¹³Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud of Eliakim, and Eliakim of Azor. ¹⁴Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Ackim, and Ackim the father of Eliud. ¹⁵Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar of Matthan, and Matthan of Jacob.

¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and from her came Jesus who is called the Messiah – the Anointed.

¹⁷So, then, there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David,

and fourteen from David to the deportation to Babylon, and again fourteen to the birth of the Christ – the Anointed.

Jesus born of a virgin mother

(Lk 1:27)

◆¹⁸ This is how Jesus Christ was born. Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph; but before they came together as husband and wife, she became pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹Joseph, her husband, was an upright man. As he regarded her highly, he did not want to expose her and he made plans to divorce her in all secrecy.

²⁰While he was trying to make up his mind about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Having conceived by the Holy

11. 2 K 24, 12

21. 1, 25; Lk 1, 31; Acts 4, 12

All of this background discreetly announces him who came down to save sinners and to open the Kingdom of Israel to the multitudes coming from the pagan world.

This list represents what Jesus inherited from Joseph. And Jesus will hand down this spiritual inheritance from Israel to his own people, the Church. We have received very much from the Jews, e.g. the Old Testament which is the Bible of the Jews.

So Jesus takes root in our human race. He is the fruit of many centuries of history marked by suffering and sin, but also by hope and grace. The long and slow education of the Jewish people reaches its climax in the coming of the Saviour. We must understand that we are in solidarity with Christ first of all through human ties. The history of the present times, as well as the history of our families, prepare for the second coming of Christ to humankind.

◆ These short and almost bashful sentences do not dare to unveil the mystery of Mary, the virgin through whom life on earth touches God and offers itself as an oblation. A messenger breaks through the night and speaks with silent words: the world is opened to the active presence of God.

With reference to the virginity of Mary, see Lk

1:26.

Mary was engaged. Engagements gave to the Jewish people practically every right of marriage, especially conjugal rights. The only difference was that women continued living under the parents tutelage and in their parental home. Jews were markedly a "macho" society. A woman necessarily belonged to a man, either to her father, her husband, or her son. Mary was already the wife of Joseph, but she would not be under his authority until he brought her to his home (v. 20 & 24).

Those who reflect deeply on the attitude of Mary, basing their reflection on the Gospel and on the faith and experience of the Church, think that Mary must have already consecrated herself to God. Such a decision would be totally unheard of in Jewish society. But if God had infused into Mary such an intention, she then had to look for a man who, honouring her virginity, would extend to her the legal status of a marriage.

If the virginity of Mary was a very unusual commitment, it would not have been so unusual for Joseph to choose a life of celibacy. For we know that in those days groups of Jews, known as the Essenes, lived a life of celibacy like monks. Joseph, surely, was not going to be an obstacle to Mary but rather a support.

Spirit, ²¹she will bear a son, whom you are to call 'Jesus' for he will set his people free from their sins."

²²All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³*The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he will be called Emmanuel* which means: God-with-us. ²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do and he took his wife with him. ²⁵But he had not had intercourse with her when the son was born. And he called him Jesus.

Wise men from the east

2 ¹When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, during the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. ²They asked, "Where is the new born king of the Jews? We observed the rising of his star and have come to honor him."

³When Herod heard this he was greatly disturbed and with him all the

people in Jerusalem. ⁴He immediately called a meeting of all high ranking priests and experts of the Law and asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

⁵They told him, "In the town of Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶*And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the clans of Judah, for from you will come a leader, the one who is to shepherd my people Israel.*"

⁷So Herod called the wise men to a private meeting and gathered more precise information about the appearance of the star. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem with the instruction, "Go and get precise information about the child. As soon as you have found it, report to me, so that I too may go and honour him."

⁹After the meeting with the king, they left. The star that they had seen in the East went ahead of them and

23. Is 7, 14

25. Lk 1, 31; 2, 21

2. Num 24, 17

4. Jn 7, 42

6. Mt 5, 1; 2 S 5, 2

Joseph made plans to divorce in all secrecy. The Gospel tells us that Joseph was planning to leave Mary so as not to disgrace her, but it does not tell us why he was going to do so.

- Perhaps knowing her to be pregnant but having no explanation from Mary, he had a feeling of some mystery and could not find any other solution.
- Perhaps he had already learned from Mary the mystery and did not want to be an obstacle to such a great happening.

It is difficult to imagine Joseph entertaining doubts about the faithfulness of Mary. Neither of the two were the kind of people who could be unfaithful and Joseph knew that very well.

According to some exegetes, the text in verses 20-21 should be translated like this: "Although the child conceived in her womb comes from the Holy Spirit, you will be the one to give the name of Jesus to the boy who will be born of her." It is obvious that the intervention of the angel is not mainly to justify Mary by saying: Look she conceived by the Holy Spirit... but rather to tell Joseph about his role in God's plan: You will give him the name Jesus and receive him as your son.

Joseph was a descendant of David. According to biblical prophecies, the Saviour had to be

a descendant of King David, from the tribe of Judah. Very likely Mary did not belong to this tribe but, like her cousin Elizabeth, belonged to a family of priests from the tribe of Levi. God had disposed that through Joseph, adoptive father of the child, the prophecies would be fulfilled (Is 7:14).

You are to call him Jesus. Jesus is the English form of Jeshuah, which means Saviour, a common Jewish name.

Joseph's fosterfatherhood remains as a symbol of a deeper religious truth. How many men remain doubtful even after reading this page! Not even God can do without them! But that is precisely the point: there is no place for two fathers, because Jesus, born in time of Mary, is the only Son of the Father, born of God in eternity.

This text shows us to what extent the Son of God in his incarnation accepted all the hazards of the human condition, except sin. He did not spare Joseph of confusion or Mary of possible embarrassment in this crucial event.

In order to understand this chapter well, we have to keep in mind that it belongs to a kind of literature very much in vogue among the Jews of that time, when history and fiction were intertwined with the objective of teaching through figures.



stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰The wise men were overjoyed on seeing the star again. ¹¹They went into the house and when they saw the child with Mary his mother, they knelt down and worshipped him. They opened their bags and presented to him their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.

¹²In a dream they were warned not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their home country by another road.

Escape to Egypt

o ¹³After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go as fast as you can to Egypt, and stay there until further notice. Herod will soon be looking for the child in order to kill him."

¹⁴Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left that very night for Egypt; ¹⁵and he stayed there until the death of Herod. In this way, what the Lord had said through the prophet could be fully understood: *I called my son out of Egypt.*

¹⁶When Herod found out that he had been tricked by the wise men, he

became furious. He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood who were two years old or under. This was done in line with what he had learned from the wise men about the time when the star appeared.

¹⁷In this way, what the prophet Jeremiah had said could be fully understood: *¹⁸A cry is heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation: Rachel is crying for her children. She refuses to be comforted, for they are no more.*

Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth

+ ¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, ²⁰"Get up, take the child and his mother and go to Israel, because those who tried to kill the child are dead." ²¹So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and went to Israel.

²²But when Joseph heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judea, he was afraid to go there. He was given further instructions in a dream, and went to the region of Galilee.

11. Lk 2, 16; Ps 72, 10; Is 60, 1-6 12. 2, 22 13. 1, 20; 2, 19 15. Hos 11, 1 | 18. Jer 31, 15 | 20. Ex 4, 19

The *Wise Men* were not kings, but seers and priests of a pagan religion. While the Jewish priests, chiefs of the people of God, do not receive notice of the birth of Jesus, God communicates the news to some of his friends in the pagan world. This lesson is good for all times: Jesus is the Saviour of all people, and not only of those who belong to the Church.

The star reminds us that God calls each one according to his own personality. Jesus calls the fishermen of Galilee after a miraculous catch of fish; the pagans who look at the stars, God calls by means of a star. God knows how to communicate with us by means of events and through our own ideals which guide us as stars. But those who do not seek truth, justice and forgiveness, how will they find Christ?

o In relating the story about the slaughter of innocent children and the Flight into Egypt, Matthew quotes two words from the prophets

Hosea and Jeremiah about the trials and sufferings of God's people in past times. Jesus must live in exile and in anguish as did his ancestors. Persecution begins with his birth and will follow him till his death.

Likewise, we learn here that from the very beginning, Mary (and Joseph to a lesser degree) were associated with Jesus' sufferings and saving mission.

Herod is an example of so many government officials who are more zealous for power than for service. But no matter how much innocent blood the enemies of the Gospel spill, they will not be able to extinguish the Church or to block God's plans.

+ Jesus was probably about two years old when Joseph brought Mary and Jesus back to his village, Nazareth. Jesus would spend 30 years in this small village where he would grow up and work as the carpenter (Mk 6:13), while



■ ²¹There he settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way the word of the prophet was fulfilled: *He shall be called a Nazorean.*

John the Baptist prepares the way
 (Mk 1:1; Lk 3:1; Jn 1:19)

3 ¹About that time John the Baptist came to the desert of Judea ²and started proclaiming, "Change your ways, the Kingdom of Heaven is near!" ³It was about him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said, *I hear a voice shouting in the desert: prepare a way for the Lord; make his paths straight.*

⁴John's clothes were made of camel's hair; he wore a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People came to him from Jerusalem, from all Judea and from the whole Jordan valley, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the Jordan as they confessed their sins.

⁷When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who told you that you could escape the punishment that is to come? ⁸Produce evidence that you are serious in your conversion, ⁹and stop thinking: We have Abraham for our father. I tell you that God can raise children for Abraham from these stones! ¹⁰The ax is already laid to the roots of the trees; any tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire.

¹¹I baptize you in water for conversion, but the one who is coming after me is to do much more than I – indeed I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²He has the winnowing fan in his hand to thresh out all the grain. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn in an everlasting fire."

23. Is 11, 1; 53, 2; Jdg 13, 5

2. Mk 1, 15

3. Is 40, 3

7. 12, 34; 23, 33; Lk 21, 23;

Rom 1, 18; 2, 5; 5, 9; Eph 5, 6; Col 3, 6; Rev 6, 16

9. Jn 8, 33; Rom 4, 12

10. 7, 19; Lk 13, 7; Jn 15, 6

11. Jn 1, 26; Acts 1, 5; 11, 6; 13, 24; 19, 4

12. 11, 3; Jn 1, 15; Acts 13, 25; Jn 1, 33; Acts 1, 33; 11, 16

the world waited for its salvation. But since his life was totally consecrated to the Father, Jesus was already saving the world.

■ *He shall be called a Nazorean.* Matthew plays with this word which brings to mind *nezer*, or shoot (Is 11:1) and *nazorite* (Nm 6). In those days there were religious groups who preached and baptized, as did John, and they were considered nazorites. Jesus was both *nezer* and *nazorite*.

Many people wonder what Jesus did between the ages of twelve, when he was seen in the Temple (Lk 2:41), and thirty, the approximate age of Jesus when he began his ministry. False pretenders take advantage of this Gospel's silence to speculate that Jesus went to India to learn magic and how to work miracles from the fakirs. (Hindu wonder workers) or even that he visited some outerspace goblins. It does not take much to imagine things!

Let's remember, first of all, that the Gospel is not a biography of Jesus, a narration of his life from birth to death. It seeks only to tell us the most important deeds and words of Jesus by which he gives us his message. It does not tell us what Jesus looked like, whether he was tall or stout, blond or dark, and many other things that did not interest the first Christians. The Gospels

of Mark and Luke open with Jesus' baptism by John, after which Jesus began teaching. Later on, Matthew and Luke wrote a little about Jesus' childhood to help us understand the secret of his person.

Secondly, let's read Matthew 13:54-56. The people of Nazareth, astounded by his deeds, do not say: surely Jesus has learned this in foreign countries because he was abroad so much. But they wonder: what has happened to the carpenter's son? We have known him for a long time ... what happened to him?

Thirdly, we can say that to speak the word of God is at the same time to speak a word of human experience. The prophets speak words of God, not as a tape recorder, but as men who feel something and have something to cry out. Jesus could not speak the word of God if he had not acquired, as a man, an exceptional wisdom of what is inside man (Jn 2:2). The years Jesus spent in Nazareth were not really lost. He absorbed the culture of his people and observed events affecting his nation: he experienced manual labour, human relations, feelings, suffering and oppression. Jesus had to experience all these things to be our saviour, so that his words would be true, weighty and valuable for all times.

• See commentaries on Mk 1:1 & Lk 3.

Jesus baptized by John

(Mk 1:9; Lk 3:2; Jn 1:29)

¹⁴At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁵But John tried to stop him, and said, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me!"

¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so for now. We must do justice to God's plan". John agreed.

¹⁶As soon as he was baptized, Jesus came up from the water and he saw the Spirit of God come down like a dove and rest upon him. ¹⁷At the same time a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he is my Elected one."

Jesus tempted in the wilderness

(Lk 4:1; Mk 1:2)

+ 4 ¹Then the spirit led Jesus into the desert. There he was tempted by the devil. ²After spending

forty days and forty nights without food, Jesus was hungry.

³Then the devil came to him and said, "If you are son of God, order these stones to turn into bread." ⁴But Jesus answered, "Scripture says: *people cannot live on bread alone, they need every word that God speaks.*"

⁵Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city, set him on the highest point of the temple, and said to him, ⁶"If you are son of God, throw yourself down, for the scripture says, *God will charge his angels to rescue you. They will carry you lest you hurt your foot against a stone.*" ⁷Jesus answered, ⁸"But the scripture also says: *You shall not challenge the Lord your God.*"

⁹Then the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the nations of the world in all their greatness and splendour. And he said, ¹⁰"All this I will give you, if you kneel and worship me." ¹¹Then Jesus an-

17. Is 42, 1; Mt 12, 18; 17, 5	1. Heb 2, 18; 4, 15	3. 27, 40	4. Dt 8, 3
5. Is 52, 1	6. 27, 40; Ps 91, 11	7. Dt 6, 16; 1 Cor 10, 9	9. Dn 3, 5; Mt 2, 11; 18, 26
1 Cor 14, 25; Rev 4, 10; 22, 8	10. Dt 6, 13	15. Is 8, 23	16. Lk 1, 79

+ This event is commented on in the footnotes to the Gospel of Luke (4:1-13).

Before Jesus began his public mission, when he was not yet known, he defeated the evil spirit. The devil tried to convince him that it was nonsense to pretend to save the world by the ways God proposed.

Order these stones to turn into bread. Jesus could, if he wanted, fill the multitudes with enthusiasm by giving them free food and solving their economic problems without demanding of them a personal renewal.

Throw yourself down. The devil lures Jesus to carry out his mission of salvation through means which will bring instant success: attract people by a spectacular use of his supernatural powers. If Jesus used this means, there would have been no room for faith, for conversion through love and the mystery of the cross. Moreover, Jesus had not come to be admired, but to reveal to us the person of the Father.

I will give you all this if you kneel before me. Since people usually do not want to change their ways, Jesus could have considered it as a lesser evil to just accept reality and make a pact with the devil. Had he done this, Jesus would

have kept hidden what the world did not want to receive and in so doing, he would have used the same means which bring success to unjust rulers or governments, to mafias and all exploiters.

Jesus comes out a winner. But after him the Church will also face these temptations. She can be tempted to satisfy human wishes instead of offering true salvation. Jesus teaches us how to be strong against the traps of the devil: following him, we must first gain a genuine understanding of the word of God.

These three temptations remind us of the three temptations suffered by the chosen people of Israel in the desert (Ex 16:2; Ex 17:1; Ex 32). First they complained that God was leading them through difficult roads: what have we done to be treated like this? Then they doubted: can He do anything for us? And finally they abandoned God to make for themselves a more human god – this was a calf.

He spent forty days and forty nights without food: Ex 24:18; 1 K 19:8.

The angels came to serve him. After rejecting the temptations, Jesus finds total peace. His purity of heart opens up to him a spiritual world hidden from human eyes, a world as real as the material things and beings surrounding him. In

¹¹Then the devil left him, and the angels came to serve him.

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he took refuge in Galilee. ¹³He did not settle in Nazareth, but went to live in Capernaum, a town by the lake of Galilee, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

¹⁶The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in the land of the shadow of death, a light has shone.

¹⁸ As Jesus walked by the lake of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ He said to them,

²⁰They left the nets then and there and followed him.

²¹He went on from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus called them.

²²There and then they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³Jesus went all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and curing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people.

²⁴The news about him spread through the whole of Syria, and the people brought all their sick to him, and all those who suffered pain, the possessed, the deranged, the paralyzed, and he healed them all. ²⁵Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Ten Cities, from Jerusalem, Judea, and from across the Jordan.

The Beatitudes (Lk 6)

5 ¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. He sat down and his disciples gathered around him. ²Then he spoke and began to teach them:

this spiritual world, as Son of God he is king among the spirits who are servants of his Father.

◆ **Change your ways.** We use these word to translate: conversion. The biblical meaning of "convert" is: to take another road (see commentary on Mk 1:14). But this term can be understood in many ways. In the mouth of John the Baptist "Be converted" means: turn away from your sins. With Jesus, "conversion" means a renewal of life from inside out. The Gospel will tell us that this renewal follows the discovery of God's mercy and is the work of his Spirit within us.

Christian conversion includes these two dimensions: a change of heart by the grace of God and a change of deeds and lifestyle, something much more than mere good intentions and wishful thinking.

- Centuries earlier, God had given the Law on

the Mountain of Sinai (Ex 20). Now, on another mountain, the Son of God gives the New Law. In this, the first speech of his public ministry, Jesus gives an overview of a whole program for his followers. And with this, he defines himself in relation to the law of Moses.

The Beatitudes are included in the Gospels of both Matthew and Luke, but each treats them in a different way (see Lk. 6:20-26). We know that Luke presents four blessings (the poor, the hungry, those who weep and the persecuted) while Matthew gives eight. In fact, all develop the same theme, so the number is not important. The main difference between Matthew and Luke lies in the fact that the Beatitudes are addressed to two different audiences.

Luke presents the Beatitudes in the way they were proclaimed by Jesus. In Luke, Jesus addresses the whole assembly of common people, speaking as one of them. Like the prophets he



³Fortunate are those who have the spirit of the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

⁴Fortunate are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

⁵Fortunate are the gentle, they shall own the earth.

⁶Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷Fortunate are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.

⁸Fortunate are those with a pure heart, for they shall see God.

⁹Fortunate are those who work for peace, they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰Fortunate are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

¹¹Fortunate are you, when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be glad and joyful, for a great reward is kept for you in God. This is how this people persecuted the prophets who lived before you.

5. Ps 37, 11	6. Is 51, 1; Sir 24, 21	7. 18, 33; James 2, 13	8. Ps 24, 4; Ex 33, 20	10. Heb 2, 14;
James 3, 18; 1 Pet 3, 14	11. James 1, 2; 10, 22	12. 1 Pet 4, 14; Heb 11, 32; James 5, 10		

speaks boldly and clearly: you, the poor, are the first beneficiaries of the promises of God. Rejoice because God is giving you the great message and you shall be the ones to transmit the secrets of God's mercy to the world. You, who are totally dependent on others and on circumstances, are in the best position to experience the kindness of God.

Matthew adapts Jesus' words to his audience of Christian believers. The Church had already spread and Christian communities brought together all kinds of people: slaves, ordinary people and wealthy ones. So Matthew tells them that the Gospel is significant for each of them. It is not only by being poor that they will please God, but by their inner attitudes and way of life. He says: Fortunate are those who are spiritually poor, adding the *pure of heart, those who work for peace*...

So Luke points out those to whom the Gospel gives priority: the masses who are poor, the workers, peasants and the marginalized. His Beatitudes are a call for those who have not yet joined the Church. While Matthew teaches those already within the Church how they should behave to be worthy of the God who chose them. His Beatitudes are like a new law, or religion, which demands spiritual readiness rather than external acts.

Fortunate... Jesus offers to all the gift of true happiness. People tend to confuse "happiness" with "contentment," and "to be happy" with "to be content." Happiness is deeply moral and spiritual; it is really human fulfillment. Contentment has to do merely with our senses and material achievements. Unfortunately, many people look for contentment and not for happiness; thus the enormous human relevance of the Beatitudes. This happiness coincides with the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven, as stated in these Beatitudes, a Kingdom to be participated in here and now, but to become complete only in our life after death. Thus, the Beatitudes offer

both hope in the present and plenitude in the future.

Fortunate ... for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. This term *heaven* must be understood in the same sense that it was used in the days of Jesus. Being exceedingly respectful of God, the Jews would not pronounce his name, referring to him with other words like *Heaven, The Glory, The Power ...* The Kingdom of Heaven means literally the Kingdom of God, like the Father of Heaven means simply: God, the Father. On reading the word *Heaven*, remember that Jesus usually meant by this word, not the reward we will obtain after death "in heaven" but the Kingdom of God which comes to us on this earth together with Jesus.

Fortunate ... because they shall own the earth. Is Jesus promising a material reward, or a spiritual and "heavenly" earth? The Gospel does not present the spiritual and the material as opposed to one another and, in fact, the word "spiritual" does not even appear in the whole Gospel. When God spoke through the prophets, he promised his people a happy world where all their needs would be satisfied: banquets with exquisite meat, long life, rain to water the land, liberation from oppressors, a kingdom of justice. But it was clear that, in giving all this, God would live among humankind and communicate his spirit to them: *They will be my people and I will be their God.*

Because of this, Jesus presents the beatitudes like a litany in which all the promises point to the same reality. The kingdom of God is both, the land of Palestine promised to the children of Abraham, and the earth in which peace prevails and God dwells. Those *hungry for justice* will receive the bread and the holiness of God, because *justice*, in the Bible, means also: to be at peace with God.

Fortunate ... because they will be comforted. We are comforted by knowing that God



Salt and light

(Mk 4:21; Lk 1:34; 8:16; 11:33)

■ ¹³You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how can it be made salty again? It has become useless. It can only be thrown away and people will trample on it.

o ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and covers it;

13. Lev 2, 13; Mk 9, 50	14. Jn 8, 12; 9, 5; Phlm 2, 15	15. Lk 8, 16; 11, 33
16. Jn 3, 21; 15, 8; 1 Cor 10, 31	17. Rm 3, 31	

loves and cares for us. We are comforted by knowing that, even when he does not seem to hear our prayers, our cross has a meaning and a purpose. We are comforted at seeing steps taken towards creating a world where justice and dignity are given to the marginalized. We are comforted by knowing that God will give us in the next life an excess of whatever we could hope for and deserve.

Fortunate... those who mourn. Jesus does not have in mind people full of self-pity who look only for their own comfort. In the Bible, those who weep (Is 61:1), the patient ones (Ps 37:11) are people who hope for a city of justice. For God's purpose is not to satisfy egocentric prayers, but as he promised to Abraham from the beginning, to grant blessings and salvation to all humankind.

Fortunate... the persecuted. And Matthew, like Luke, includes one more beatitude: *Happy are you when people persecute you and speak evil things against you because of me.* It is impossible to announce the Gospel without suffering persecution. Many people accept superficially the words of God in the Gospel, but, as soon as somebody tries to point out those same words of God in order to change lives and the world itself, he is persecuted openly or in an underhanded way. This occurs in politics and in all other fields of human interaction, including the religious life.

Fortunate says Jesus. He has not come into this world to remind people, as other religious leaders do, of commandments new or old. His first mission is to proclaim the end of one era and the beginning of a new one – which is the kingdom of God.

Before Jesus' arrival, the prophets chosen by God to speak in his name, announced a kingdom to come; they encouraged the believers with hope for the future. But Jesus, and the Church after him, announce a Kingdom already present and at work amongst us (Mt 12:28). Total liberation and reconciliation with God become a personal experience and a way of life, expressed through these Beatitudes: *we shall be comforted, we shall obtain mercy, we shall see God...* Yet we do not forget our troubles, or our

instead he puts it on a lampstand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way your light must shine before others, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in Heaven.

More perfect law

+ ¹⁷Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I

actual situation, and the Church would not be the Church if the word *justice* were not pronounced and heard within it as it is throughout the Bible. But we are more advanced than the ancient prophets, because God has come and we have been reconciled. Jesus says: *They will see God.* Now we understand the patience of God because we experience a renewal and security that cannot be expressed, and we taste the very presence and sweetness of God. We can truly sow peace because we possess it and we are not in anguish when we compare the powers of evil with our nothingness.

They shall be called sons of God: because in truth we are: 1 Jn 3:1.

■ Jesus calls us to save the world. This does not mean that all people are to enter the Church, but that the Church has to be *salt and light* to the world. The Bible mentions *salt* as the element that preserves food. The *covenant of salt* was the covenant of God with those who were to serve him forever (Nm 18:19). So the disciples of Jesus are called *salt of the earth* because through them the world benefits from the Covenant with God. They must continually enkindle in the world the desire and struggle for true justice and perfection, and not allow human societies to become satisfied with mediocrity.

o The Church, in its totality, must be a *city built on a hill* (see Is 2:2; 4:2), that everybody can see: a dwelling place for truth and fraternity. To think of the Church and all Christians as light, as witnesses of faith, hope and love in the midst of the world is to bring out the essence of a Christian's identity and the absolute value of the Gospel they share, which cannot be reduced, diluted or confused with any culture, ideology or social organization. Christianity is a light to the peoples because it is the fullness of the presence of the saving God and his communion and humankind.

Children of light: Eph 5:8; 1 Pet 2:12; 1 Thes 5:4).

+ *As long as heavens and earth last... until it all be fulfilled.* In Jesus' time the Law had several meanings:

First of all, it meant all the commandments

have not come to destroy but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you this: as long as heaven and earth last, not one letter of the Law will change until all is fulfilled.

¹⁹So then, whoever breaks the least important of the commandments, and teaches others to do the same will be the least in the kingdom of Heaven. On the other hand, whoever obeys the Law and teaches others to do the same, will be great in the kingdom of Heaven.

²⁰I tell you, then, that if you are not righteous in a better way than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.

◆²¹You have heard that it was said: to our people in the past: *Do not commit murder; anyone who does kill will have to face trial.* ²²But now I tell you: whoever gets angry with his brother will have to face trial. Whoever insults his brother deserves to be brought before the council, whoever humiliates his brother deserves to be thrown into the fire of hell. ²³So, if you are about to offer your gift at the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

²⁵Don't forget this: reconcile with

18. Lk 16, 17; 21, 35

19. James 2, 10

20. Rom 10, 3; Phlm 3, 9

21. Ex 20, 13; Dt 5, 17;

22. Rom 13, 9; Eph 4, 26; James 1, 19

25. Mk 11, 25

and practices based on the teaching of Moses.

- The Law was also another term for the Bible, as was the Law and the Prophets.
- There are several places in the Bible where *The Law* designates the religion of the Jews, which was based on the Bible.

With this explanation we will better understand the apparently contradictory sayings of Jesus regarding the Law.

Everything is to be fulfilled (5:10). Jesus does not refer to the commandments. Rather he affirms that the religion founded on the Old Testament's Scripture was a provisional, yet necessary, step in the history of salvation. The prophecies had to be fulfilled; also the rites and sacrifices of that religion served to instruct the people about the mystery of sin and mercy that would be fulfilled in the person and the work of Jesus. With him comes the *perfect and definitive* fellowship of God with man.

In 5:19 Jesus is referring to the commandments.

In 5:20, *If your righteousness is not more*, Jesus refers to the spirit of the Law.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

The Laws of Israel were written, adapted and completed over the course of many centuries. Those laws are in the Bible and it is not easy to reconcile so many commandments which are not always in agreement with one another. Due to that confusion, even before Jesus the teachers of the Law began teaching and writing many explanations, and adapting these commandments for the use of Jews who now lived in a different situation.

That work was useful, but when Jesus proposes a perfect law, he does not intend like other Jewish teachers to reform the religious laws or to increase them: he exhorts us to receive the spirit which inspired the Law.

Imitate God (5:48). This is the spirit of the Law. It is more important to always consider the mercy of God than to continually meditate on the commandments. He who intends to live as a child of God becomes more perfect than the Pharisees who were preoccupied only with the fulfillment of external duties. When Jesus shows us the Father and how to live in his sight, he gives us the perfect Law.

But, many could misinterpret the words of Jesus and say: It would be better if religion were less demanding and easier to practice! Because of this Jesus points out that anyone who does not intend to fulfill the entire Law will not enter the Kingdom. Likewise those who have ready excuses for their laziness: these commandments are not so important! But to those who obey the Law, Jesus shows the spirit of the Law. For such as these the Gospel is not a comfortable road, but the call to a more perfect life.

◆Before God we will give an account of our life. He is Truth. Therefore, let us not call sin only that which is seen or condemned as such by people. For my sins are all the bad thoughts that I keep inside and that produce evil fruits when the opportunity comes.

The comparison of the two enemies walking side by side teaches us that we must not continually delay the moment for settling accounts and for rectifying our lives. Better today than tomorrow. The point is not only to repent but to repair the damage done. Repairing the damage means:

your opponent before you are summoned to court. Otherwise he will turn you over to the judge, who will hand you over to the police, who will put you in jail. ²⁶There you will stay, until you pay your fine down to the last penny.

■ ²⁷You have heard that it was said: *Do not commit adultery.* ²⁸But I tell you this: anyone who looks at a woman with the intention of possessing her has in fact already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹So, if your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away! It

is much better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. ³⁰If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell.

+ ³¹It was also said: *anyone who divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.* ³²But what I tell you is this: If a man divorces his wife for any cause other than unfaithfulness, he causes her to commit adultery. And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

27. Ex 20, 14 30. 18, 8; Mk 9, 43 31. Dt 24, 1; Mal 2, 14 32. 19, 7; Mk 10, 4; Lk 16, 18; 1 Cor 7, 10

more than just returning the money or the tool I have illegally taken. I must also question why I am so weak that I am carried away by any desire. So I have to strengthen my weak will by means of prayer and self-control.

Often we recognize how lukewarm our love for God is and how short-lived our perseverance in doing good. This is the first of many years of wrongdoing. We are able to forget about the wrong we have done but we fail to repair the damage caused to our whole person. Although we may feel happy and unconcerned, we carry a deadness within ourselves from the unsettled debts and accounts.

Until you pay your fine down to the last penny. Every evil deed and falsehood on our conscience shall be brought to light before we may enjoy the happiness and eternity of God. If we are not purified during this life, we will be during or after our death, the Church calls this painful purification "Purgatory."

We must not think of Purgatory as a "waiting room" for heaven, or as penalties from God to punish us before admitting us into his presence. Purgatory is an expression of God's love, for it purifies a person of the remnants of evil which make one unable to fully enjoy the plenitude of love and happiness that is found in God. As a damp log before it catches fire must first be purified of its humidity by the same fire, so we must be purified by God's love.

■ *If your right eye...* this has to do with the Christian sense of self-denial, or asceticism. Christians, and any person concerned with ethics, are sometimes called to renounce certain things, persons and involvements.

First of all, we are called to renounce things if they are evil (e.g. an immoral job such as selling drugs) and, therefore, incompatible with our Christian call. In such cases, self-denial must be absolute.

Secondly, we must renounce things that are

in themselves good, but which impede our inner freedom and love, due to our tendency towards selfishness (e.g. an exclusive sort of friendship, or an all-absorbing hobby). This renunciation is relative: as a general rule we must not undermine values or good things; creation at large is good in itself (Gen 1:31), and was given to us by God for our human growth and happiness. But we must learn to control it, and avoid becoming enslaved by it. Therefore renunciation of persons, situations, social, cultural and political values is required only to the extent needed for us to again become free in their use. Spiritual writers call this Christian asceticism.

There is, however, one case that Jesus refers to, in this text, in which we must break away from good things or values (our eye, our hand, our good things). It is the case in which we are so over-attached and enslaved to a value, that this turns out to be an idol, or a replacement of God, against which our efforts for a balanced control are hopeless. In these limited cases, which do happen occasionally in our lives, we must be ready to make a complete break.

+ *If a man divorces his wife...* See commentaries on Mk 10:1; Mt 19:2.

Here this saying of Jesus is given as an example of the courageous decisions that a Christian may be called upon to make. God sometimes asks for heroic sacrifices and anyone who does not choose the difficult way necessarily loses something of the Gospel.

Except for unfaithfulness. In this case, the most ancient Christian writings taught that the spouse could divorce, but not marry again.

Except for unfaithfulness. It is a fact that the Greek text of the Gospel is not always clear. These words can also be translated as: *out of unlawful marriage*. In this instance Matthew would be referring to the great number of Christians who were formerly pagans and who upon being accepted into the Church, dissolved illegal



Oaths

◆ ³³You have also heard that people were told in the past: *Do not break your oath; an oath sworn to the Lord must be kept.* ³⁴But I tell you this: do not take an oath for any promise. Do not swear by the heavens, for they are God's throne, ³⁵nor by the earth, because it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem because it is the city of the great king. ³⁶Do not even swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair on it white or black. ³⁷Say *yes* when you mean *yes* and say *no* when you mean *no*. Anything else you say comes from the devil.

33. Ex 20, 7; Lev 19, 12

34. James 5, 12; Is 66, 1

37. 2 Cor 1, 17

38. Ex 21, 24; Lev 24, 20; Dt 19, 21

35. Ps 48, 3

36. Mt 23, 22

41. Jn 18, 22; 1 Cor 6, 7

43. Lev 19, 18

unions and had to send their partners away (see 1 Cor 7:12-16).

◆ Many invoke the name of God on any occasion. Is it because they truly know him and have him in mind? If we use his name just for any flimsy reason, it is because we do not experience the weight of his presence. How irreligious it is to swear in the name of God and make him a witness of our sincerity when we do not even know ourselves and our low motivations!

Anything else comes from the devil. We apologize because we are anxious for the approval of others. The children of God allow the Father to take care of them and more so to defend their good name. The truth will always come forth and when we are content to merely give our testimony, we honour the Father greatly. See also Mt 23:16; James 5:12.

○ *If someone forces you...* Jesus speaks to an audience of farmers who are vexed and oppressed by foreign troops. Their usual reaction is silent submission that harbours hatred and awaits revenge.

Do not oppose evil with evil. If we are the only ones vexed or harmed, let us forgive, and let us put our cause in the hands of God instead of fighting. For every conflict, no matter how lawful, will make us more worried about our own interests and our own rights. God sees and will do better than our own justice can do.

However there are many occasions when we must resist the oppressor because it is the only way to educate him and force him to act in a more human manner. Very often, if I accept the abuses of another, I encourage him to do the same to my neighbour and I become an accomplice in social injustice.

Love for enemies (Lk 6:29)

○ ³⁸You have heard that it was said: *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* ³⁹But I tell you this: do not oppose evil with evil; if someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn and offer him the other. ⁴⁰If someone sues you in court for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him. ⁴²Give when asked and do not turn your back on anyone who wants to borrow from you.

+ ⁴³You have heard that it was said: *Love your fellowman and hate your*

Do not oppose evil with evil. Jesus gives this advice to the strong of spirit, who can understand that sometimes, by conceding more than the adversary demands, they will bring about a change in his attitude. But for timid people, the first step towards justice and salvation which they must learn is solidarity; they have to unite and organize with other oppressed people to demand their rights, inspired in justice and solidary love and not in revenge and hatred. We know that the Bible first taught God's people to struggle, and only later, to forgive.

Offer your left cheek. With this provoking advice, Jesus opens our mind to an understanding of violence and teaches us the secret of non-violence. Violence, like desire and greed, awakens within us at seeing violence, desire and greed. There are many things that for years we did not desire, but, as soon as others appreciate and keep them, we die to have them also. Likewise, upon seeing others successfully use force, we want to do the same. But mutual violence never brings about justice; for, with victory over an oppressor, yesterday's victims become the oppressors of tomorrow.

Jesus does not address those who look for immediate solutions, which are always deceptive, but rather those who are ready to take part in the slow and painful building of the Kingdom. Such as these will find means other than the "holy war" which so many revolutionaries dream of.

Those practicing judo are taught how to put the adversary off balance: if he pushes you, bring him toward you; if he pulls you forward, do not resist, but rather throw yourself forward, that he may fall down. Likewise Jesus teaches us to give the opponent twice as much as he demands, in order to disconcert his defenses, so that, in the end, he will realize that he was mistaken.



enemy. ⁴⁴But this I tell you: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons (& d.) of your Father in Heaven. For he makes his sun rise on both bad and good, and he gives rain to both the just and the unjust.

⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do even tax collectors not do as much as that? ⁴⁷And if you are friendly only to your brethren, what is so exceptional about that? Do not even the pagans do as much? ⁴⁸For your part you shall be righteous and perfect in the way your heavenly Father is righteous and perfect.

Doing good for God alone

6 ¹Be careful not to make a show of your righteousness before people. If you do so, you do not gain anything from your Father in Heaven. ²When you give something to the poor, do not have it trumpeted before you, as the hypocrites do in the

synagogues and in the streets in order to be praised by the people. I assure you, they have been already paid in full.

³If you give something to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your gift remains really secret. Your Father who sees what is kept secret, will reward you.

⁵When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues or on street corners to be seen by everyone. I assure you, they have been already paid in full. ⁶When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is with you in secret; and your Father who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

o Our Father...

(Lk 11:1; Mk 11:25)

⁷When you pray, do not use a lot of words, as the pagans do, for they hold that the more they say, the more

45. Pro 25, 21; Ex 23, 4	48. Lev 19, 2; Dt 18, 3; 1 Pet 1, 16; James 1, 4	1. 23, 5; Lk 16, 14; Jn 5, 44
2. Am 4, 5	4. Ps 139, 2	5. 6, 16
	6. 2 K 4, 33; Dn 6, 11	

+ Jesus spoke only once of being *perfect as the Father* is. This was in reference to not differentiating between friends and enemies. God loves everyone and we are to imitate him. (See commentary on Lk 6:32). To do this we must not only cultivate a heart of love but also an ability to understand others. As long as we condemn others, love will be affected. When we realize that there is a place for everyone in the present world and that God directs everything for the benefit of all, we attain the criteria of God and are *perfect as the Father* is perfect.

Love your neighbour. In the Old Testament, *neighbour (or fellowman)* refers to a fellow Jew. Jewish laws promoted solidarity among the people of Israel, but they never thought of a universal brotherhood and sisterhood.

Hate your enemy. This can be read in a similar form in Deut 7:2. Pointing to national enemies (not to personal ones), it cautioned the Jews to distrust them and live far away from them, so as not to share in their misdeeds.

Love your enemies: Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Rom 12:20; Lk 23:34; Acts 7:60; Rom 12:14; Eph 5:1.

◆ God cannot reward us as long as we seek our own interest and the approval of others. He will begin listening and showing himself to us when we make him the only witness of our life. A believer is one who sees what cannot be seen, and is happy to know that God sees and knows him.

o The value of prayer does not lie in the quantity of words and the mere repetition of formulas, as if accomplishing a task. The value of prayer lies chiefly in our inner attitude of faith and love of God. We should try to put our minds and hearts on God as a Father and a friend, a God who loves us and is always waiting for us to share a silent moment with him. To pray is not to talk much, but to surrender our lives into God's loving hands.

Jesus gave his disciples the *Our Father* as the perfect prayer that comes from the heart of God's children, because in it they express all their desires in the proper order and form. Jesus composed the *Our Father* very carefully, as did the teachers of his time, so that it could be easily memorized. In the language spoken by Jesus, the first letter of each verse when put together

chance they have of being heard. ⁸Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need, even before you ask him.

⁹This then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in Heaven,
holy be your name,
¹⁰your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²Forgive us our debts
as we forgive those
who are in debt to us.

¹³Do not bring us to the test
but deliver us from the Evil One.

¹⁴If you forgive others their
wrongs, your Father in Heaven will
also forgive yours. ¹⁵If you do not
forgive others, then your Father will
not forgive you either.

8. 6, 32; Lk 12, 30

9. Ezk 36, 23; Jn 17, 6
15. Mk 11, 25; Eph 4, 32; Col 3, 13; Sir 28, 1

12. 18, 21

formed the word "to come" which is the key of this prayer: *Your Kingdom come*.

The contemporaries of Jesus used the word *Heaven* to signify God, because they would not pronounce his name. Jesus says likewise: *Father of Heaven*, meaning: God, the Father.

Heaven is for us a beautiful world where God is all. On calling upon the Father of Heaven, we do not mean that he is far or near, above or below or inside. We only intend to raise our spirits to Him. We recognize that our words are not worthy, that our concerns are selfish and limited when we compare them with the breadth of God's thoughts and the generosity of His love. That we can address God and call him Father is not something natural, but a very special privilege. "My Father," says Jesus; also: "your Father." For he is the only one, and we are adopted children, by the mercy of God who allowed us to be born again (Jn 3:1).

The Bible speaks of God, and also of the *Name* of God. All of creation is but a manifestation of God, who fills this universe. But he is not contained in it, nor is he in a determined place. Because of this, we speak of his *Name* as a way of designating God's active presence, radiance, and splendour which covers everything.

Holy be your name! May your Name be known and proclaimed Holy! May your splendour and generosity be seen in those who become your children. May your perfection be recognized through their good works (5:16). May your presence and your riches be welcomed by those who keep your word, according to John 14:23. The Father only wants to pour out his holiness and happiness on the children he has chosen and loved. He wants to seal us with his Name, so that day and night we will be united with him, like the Father and the Son are united by the Holy Spirit.

Your Kingdom come. With the coming of Jesus, that Kingdom has come near to us. God reigns, not because he can now rule more easily, but because he is now known in truth. The believers now perceive him, not as a God who imposes obligations, nor as a Saviour more

powerful than the evil ones, but instead recognize him in the gift of his Son, in the humiliation of the Son and in their mutual love. From this discovery, love and mercy pour forth and, in time, we will see on earth some fruits of this Kingdom. The reconciled children of God are a leavening element in society, and the whole human person with his projects, labor, economic and political plans moves towards a common goal: everyone and everything must return to the Father.

But whether we are good, bad or indifferent, the Kingdom of God will come, with or without our help, because actually it is already here.

Your will be done. These are the words of Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt 26:39). Some people consider themselves to have much faith because they always wait for God to solve their problems. But that is not the way to please him. The children of God lift up their spirit to him so that God's will may be, at last, their own will.

On earth as in heaven. This applies to the previous three petitions. It reminds us that everything in this world which is created and subject to time, depends on another world, not created, where time does not exist. There God the Father enjoys the riches he has communicated to his creation. He sees his chosen people as they will be at the end of the world, united in Christ. There his will is realized and glorified by everyone. But we, who live in time, are anguished by an imperfect situation, by a world in labour where evil appears to triumph. And we pray that everything may come about according to the initial plan of God, as it truly will.

We ask the Father for the bread he has promised to those who listen to his word. A modern man believes that material welfare depends only on personal effort. But the Bible says that it depends on both God and ourselves. Alone we can bring about for a while some economic miracles, but we may waste the accumulated riches. Only by listening to the word of God (Deut 8:3) will people have bread, and be able to distribute it. A person who expects from God, not his bread, but our bread, will strive to

o ¹⁶When you fast, do not put on a miserable face as do the hypocrites. They put on a gloomy face, so people can see they are fasting. I tell you this: they have been paid in full already. ¹⁷When you fast wash your face and make yourself look good, ¹⁸because you are not fasting for appearances or for people, but for your Father who sees beyond appearances. And your Father, who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

(Lk 11:34; 12:3)

■ ¹⁹Do not store up treasures for

yourself here on earth where moth and rust destroy it, and where thieves can steal it. ²⁰Store up treasure for yourself with God, where no moth or rust can destroy it or thief steal it.

²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.

+ ²²The lamp of the body is the eye; if your eyes are sound, your whole body will be in the light. ²³If your eyes are diseased your whole body will be in darkness. Then, if your light has become darkness, how dark will be the darkest part of you!

16. Is 58:5; 23, 5

19. James 5, 2

Sir 29, 11

20. Mt 19, 21; Col 3, 1

find work, to work in useful ways, and to promote justice where he is working.

The Our Father speaks of *debts* that we must forgive (6:12). But in 6:14, we read *wrongs*. Jesus considers debts and wrongs as the same thing. When we forgive someone who asks for forgiveness, we are not doing that person a favour, nor do we deserve any merit for doing it: we actually free ourselves from some rancour or hatred that is poisoning us. Inasmuch as we stick to our rights, we hold fast to this world. God wants to forgive us and bring us closer to him, but how can he if we remain anchored to the things of this world?

Jesus speaks to the poor who are accustomed to being burdened with debts, which many times they cannot settle. They are obliged to live together with neighbors they have not chosen. All this increases the occasions for offending one another. Many people today live very independent lives and hold as an ideal not to owe anything to anyone. This independence can make it harder for us to understand God's mercy towards us, poor as we really are before God.

Do not bring us to the test. Thus speaks one who knows his weaknesses and little faith. No matter how confident he may feel at the present moment, he knows that, if God hides his face, he will be left alone. We are not afraid to fight difficult battles if God requires it, because he who commands also gives us the necessary strength. But we know that by ourselves we are nothing.

We will be still more prudent if we know that the enemy is not the evil, but the devil. Somebody, stronger than ourselves, is watching to deceive us, to make us lose faith and fall as soon as we feel sure of ourselves and abandon the means given by Jesus for perseverance in the faith and in the Church.

See another shorter text in Luke 11:1.

o Here Jesus neither justifies nor condemns fasting. He himself fasted: 4:2; 9:5; 17:2. But fasting is unworthy when done to obtain men's

approval rather than God's.

All religions know fasting. It is a way of calling upon God, especially when great misfortunes come upon us (Joel 2:12); it befits people who feel guilty and want to move to compassion the one who forgives them (Jonah 3:8). It also teaches self-control and integrates our energies in preparation for divine communications.

Scripture puts limited emphasis on fasting. The prophets asserted that fasting without justice towards the neighbour is of no use: Is 58; Zac 7:4.

Fasting is also used by persons and groups as a means of social pressure, as a political weapon to call attention to some demands. This is all right, although it is different from the religious fast Jesus speaks of. The difference is that a religious fast is addressed to God, not to public opinion (Mt 6:18), and it entails an inner disposition of conversion and sorrow for personal sin on the part of the fasting person.

■ *Do not keep riches on earth.* What are the things on which we spend our energies, about which we dream and feel proud? Which riches do we keep safe at home? Which are the beloved riches stored in our memory for the enjoyment of recalling them?

There will be your heart. (The heart, in Jewish culture, means the mind.) I will not own them; they will own me and prevent me from seeing life clearly. Because of them I refuse to listen, and do not dare to seek the truth, for fear of being judged by the truth.

The believer uses money, makes plans, lives in the world. But he seeks and loves only what is important here and now, according to the Gospel.

+ Jesus' warning about the danger of a blind conscience, which can lead us astray, is congruent with his admonition that our hearts should be where true values are. It is commonly accepted in Christian spirituality that blindness of the heart comes about when we are inordinately attached to ideas, persons, things, money ...

Set your heart on the kingdom

(Lk 12:23; 16:13)

o ²⁴ No one can serve two masters; for he will either hate one and love the other or he will be loyal to the first and look down on the second. You cannot at the same time serve God and money.

²⁵ This is why I tell you, not to be worried about food and drink for yourself, or about clothes for your body. Is not life more important than food and is not the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow, they do not harvest and do not store food in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than the birds?

²⁷ Which of you can add a day to his life by worrying about it? ²⁸ Why are you so worried about your clothes? Look at the flowers in the fields how they grow. They do not toil or spin. ²⁹ But I tell you that not even Solomon

in all his wealth was clothed like one of these. ³⁰ If God gives such clothes to the grass in the field – which blooms today and is to be burned tomorrow in an oven, how much more will he clothe you? How little faith you have!

³¹ Do not worry and say: What are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? Or: what shall we wear? ³² The pagans keep themselves busy with such things; but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ Set your heart first on the kingdom and the justice of God and all these things will be given to you. ³⁴ Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Children of the Kingdom

(Lk 6:37; 11:9; 6:31; 13:23)

◆ **7** ¹ Do not judge and you will not be judged. ² In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the measure you use for

26. 10, 31 29. 1 K 10 32. 6, 7; 1 k 12, 30 34. Ex 16, 4 1. 1 Cor 4, 5 2. Rom 2, 1; 14, 4

o *No one can be a servant of two masters.* This opening line helps us understand what follows, that Jesus wants us to be free, not of concerns, but of all worries in order to serve God.

Scripture had already taught that we must choose between God and false gods. Jesus affirms that money is a false god, because it offers happiness and security for the future, but robs us of our only riches that is the present time. Caught up in making money, we are unable to live truly and freely; we neglect our personal growth and family life, keep silent before evil and lie. We ignore our neighbour and crawl in front of the powerful.

Why are you worried? After worrying much because we do not have money, or because we are having a bad time, or because our work is being delayed, we are ashamed at meeting simple persons who share the little they possess with others poorer than they, without feeling sad or thinking they have done something great. Liberation is the work of God throughout history, and we, shall we have enough faith to free ourselves from so many worries?

The comparison with the flowers and the birds does not mean that we can fold our arms and be idle, because when God gave us arms and brains, it was for us to use them. Rather

Jesus teaches that, if God takes care of and beautifies the smallest of creatures, the more he cares for us and desires our lives to be beautiful and perfect.

Look first for the Kingdom. Jesus wants us to take risks for what is true, rather than worrying about our security and future. We are called to battle every day to win more justice, beauty and greatness, and to that end we must forget ourselves, sacrifice our own interests, and perhaps the financial security for our children. Perhaps we have to dedicate ourselves to apostolic work with little or no remuneration.

◆ *Do not judge.* We must exercise good judgement to distinguish between the good and evil around us. We must not make ourselves judge of our neighbour, as if we were better than he and had to condemn him.

When we look at our own lives, we realize that those who helped us grow were those who supported and understood us, not those who judged and condemned us.

Do not judge. See Rom 2:1; 14:4; 1 Cor 5:12; James 4:11.

How are we to judge the wrongdoing of our neighbour in order to correct him? Paul explains, how in Gal 6:15. See also Jesus' attitude in Jn. 8:1-11.



others, will be used for you.³ Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother: 'Come, let me take the speck from your eye,' as long as that plank is in your own? ⁵Hypocrites, take first the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clear enough to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

o ⁶Do not give what is holy to the dogs, or throw your pearls to the pigs, for them to trample on and even turn on you and tear you to pieces.

◆ ⁷Ask, and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks, finds; and the door will be opened to him who knocks. ⁹Would any of you give a stone to your son when he asks for bread? ¹⁰Or give him a snake, when he asks for a fish? ¹¹As bad as you are, you know how to give good

things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹²So, do to others whatever you would that others do to you, that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets.

■ ¹³Enter through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many go that way. ¹⁴How narrow is the gate that leads to life and how rough the road, and there are few people who find it.

The tree is known by its fruits
 (Lk 6:43)

+ ¹⁵Beware of false prophets: they come to you disguised as sheep, but inside they are wild wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Do you ever pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?

4. 1 Cor 5, 12; James 4, 11 5. Mk 4, 24; Jn 8, 7
 11. 15, 7; 16, 23; James 1, 5; 1 Jn 3, 22; 5, 14
 15. Eek 22, 28; 2 Pet 2, 1; Lk 6, 26; Gal 1, 8

7. 18, 19; Lk 11, 9 8. Mk 11, 24; Jn 14, 14
 12. James 1, 17; Rom 13, 8 14. Acts 14, 22
 16. Mt 10, 16; Jn 10, 12; Acts 20, 29

o *Do not throw your pearls to the pigs.* Jesus addressed this warning to his followers living in a hostile world. They should not tell everything to everyone. God has given each of us wonderful gifts: we must not share them with everyone at once, believing that it will bring them to faith.

◆ See commentary on Lk 11:9; Mk 11:24; Jn 14:13; 15:7; James 1:5.

■ *Enter through the narrow gate.* We could ask, "Who will be saved?" (Mt 19:25). In no instance did Jesus say whether those who would share in eternal life would be many or few. But he said many times that very few would be chosen from among the many called. That means that among the many people who would be privileged to meet him, very few would experience the Gospel's riches and bring forth fruit in themselves and for others. The chosen or approved are those who persevere and strive for perfect freedom.

Many choose the road leading to perdition. They stray from leading a life in which Jesus is everything to them. They waste the gifts of God entrusted to them and apparently become useless for the Kingdom. Yet, even so, they are not deprived of God's mercy.

+ *False prophets* are people and trends that lead us in a wrong direction. We acclaim such a

prophet to be good, because we like the person, and easily find arguments to justify his deeds and what results from them. We become enthusiastic, without good reason, for this or that way of life and if it brings us far from the Gospel then we declare that the Gospel is not to be followed literally. Young people enslaved by sex and consumerism, common and working people divided by jealousy and egoism, families where spouses do not communicate and do not know any other relaxation than watching T.V.... these are some fruits of bad trees.

Thornbushes do not bear grapes. Plans and theories have to be tested before they can be judged: Jesus invites us to look at the facts before coming to conclusions. In discerning about socio-political ideologies and programs, it's not enough to look into the ideal purposes (they are usually appealing). One must chiefly look into their factual and historical performance. But we find it hard to examine the reality in which we live. We prefer to discuss and debate about ideas rather than to analyze particular situations. Jesus, accustomed to manual labor, distrusts ideas and theories.

Most people distrust and belittle those who belong to a party other than their own, but they justify the mistakes and even the crimes of their own party. Jesus, instead, condemns those

¹⁷A good tree always yields good fruit, a rotten tree yields bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Any tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. ²⁰So you will recognize them by their fruit.

Wise and foolish builders

(Lk 6:47; 13:26 Mk 1:22)

◆ ²¹Not everyone who says to me: Lord! Lord! will enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in Heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not speak in your name? Did we not cast out devils and perform many miracles in your name?" ²³Then I will tell them openly: I never knew you; *away from me, you wicked people!*

²⁴So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and acts accordingly is like a wise man, who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain poured, the rivers flooded, and the wind blew against that house, but it did not collapse because it was built on rock. ²⁶But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not act accordingly, is like a fool who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain poured, the rivers flooded, and the wind blew against that house, and it collapsed and the ruin was complete."

²⁸When Jesus had finished this discourse, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught with authority unlike their teachers of the Law.

Cure of a leper

(Mk 1:40; Lk 5:12)

8 When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.

²Then a leper came forward. He greeted him respectfully and said, "Sir, if only you will, you can make me clean." ³Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I will it, be clean again." At that very moment the man was cleansed from his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "Take care, do not tell anyone, but go to the priest, have yourself declared clean, and offer the gift that Moses ordered as a proof of it."

The faith of the centurion

(Lk 7:1; Jn 4:46)

⁵When Jesus entered Capernaum, an army captain approached him to ask his help, ⁶"Sir, my servant lies sick at home. He is paralyzed and suffers terribly." ⁷Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

⁸The captain answered, "I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Just give an order and my boy will be

17. Sir 27, 6; James 3, 12

19. 3, 10

20. Lk 3, 9; 13, 6; Jn 15, 6; Mt 12, 33

21. Rom 2, 13; James 1, 22; 1 Jn 2, 17

22. Jer 14, 14; 27, 15; Mk 9, 38

23. Mt 10, 33;

2 Tim 2, 12; Ps 6, 9

24. Mt 13, 41; 25, 41; James 1, 22

27. Ezk 13, 10

28. Lk 7, 1

1. Mk 1, 40; Lk 5, 12

2. 9, 30; 12, 16; Mk 7, 36

3. Lk 17, 14

4. Lev 14, 32

promoting divisions, lies and violence, even if they claim to be serving a just cause. By doing so, he affirms a basic moral principle: the end does not justify the means.

◆ *In the day of judgment many will say to me.* Jesus refers to members of the Church, and especially to the influential ones who are highly regarded by others and by themselves. Whether we teach or work miracles, these abilities and ministries given us for the good of the community do not assure us that we are in the grace of God. True faith works through love (Gal 5:6) and moves us to fulfill all the Law: James 2:8.

He who hears my words. Jesus means those who listen to his words and are converted: they believe themselves already saved. But if they do not use their initial enthusiasm to build their lives on solid foundations, such as scriptural meditation, generosity, resistance to evil inclinations, sharing in the Christian community – then everything will tumble later on.

With this paragraph Matthew closes the first Discourse wherein he gathers words of Jesus that could serve as a "call to all people of good will." A new Discourse will begin in Chapter 10.

healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under orders and I have soldiers under me. And if I say to one; 'Go,' he goes, and if I say to another: 'Come,' he comes, and to my servant: 'Do this,' he does it."

¹⁰When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those who were following him. "I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel. ¹¹I say to you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven; ¹²but those who expected the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness; there they will cry and grind their teeth."

¹³Then Jesus said to the captain, "Go home now. What you believed will happen." And that very moment his servant was healed

¹⁴Jesus went to Peter's house and found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with fever. ¹⁵He took her by the hand and the fever left her; she got up and began to wait on him.

¹⁶Towards the evening they brought to Jesus many possessed by evil spirits and with a word he drove out the spirits. He also healed all who were sick. ¹⁷This way he fulfilled what was said by the prophet Isaiah: *He took away our infirmities and our diseases.*

¹⁸When he saw the crowd around him, Jesus gave orders to cross to the other shore. ¹⁹A teacher of the Law approached him and said, "Master, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man does not even have a stone on which to lay his head."

²¹Another disciple said to him, "Lord let me go and bury my father first." ²²But Jesus answered him,

"Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Jesus calms the storm

(Mk 4:35; Lk 8:22)

²³Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴Without warning a fierce storm hit the lake, and the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was asleep.

²⁵They woke him and cried, "Lord save us! We are lost!" ²⁶But Jesus answered, "Why are you so afraid, you of little faith?" Then he ordered the waves and sea, and it was completely calm.

²⁷The people were astonished. They said, "What kind of man is this, even the winds and the sea obey him."

The demoniacs and the pigs

(Mk 5:1; Lk 8:26)

²⁸When Jesus reached Gadara on the other side, he was met by two men who came out from the tombs. They were so fierce that no one dared to pass that way. ²⁹Suddenly they shouted, "What do you want with us, you, Son of God! Have you come to torture us before the time?"

³⁰At some distance there was a large herd of pigs feeding. ³¹So the demons begged him, "If you drive us out, send us into that herd of pigs."

³²Jesus told them, "Go." So they left and went into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned.

³³The men in charge of them ran off to the town, where they told the whole story, also what had happened to the men possessed with the demons. ³⁴Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their area.



Jesus cures a paralytic

(Mk 2:1; Lk 5:17)

9 Jesus got back into the boat, crossed the lake again, and came back to his hometown. ²Here they brought a paralyzed man to him, lying on a bed. Jesus saw their faith and said to the paralytic, "Courage, my son! Your sins are forgiven."

³Then some teachers of the Law said to themselves, "This man insults God." ⁴Jesus was aware of what they were thinking, and said, "Why have you such evil thoughts? ⁵Which is easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Stand up and walk'? ⁶You must know that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." He then said to the paralyzed man, "Stand up! take your bed and go home." ⁷The man got up, and went off home.

⁸When the crowds saw this, they were filled with awe and praised God for giving such power to people.

Jesus calls Matthew

(Mk 2:13; Lk 5:27)

+ ⁹As Jesus moved on from there, he saw a man named Matthew at his seat in the custom-house, and he said to him, "Follow me." And Matthew got up and followed him. ¹⁰Now it happened, while Jesus was at table in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and other sinners joined Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw

this they said to his disciples, "Why is it that your master eats with those sinners and tax collectors?"

¹²When Jesus heard this he said, "Healthy people do not need a doctor, but sick people do. ¹³Go and find out what it means: *'What I want is mercy, not sacrifice.'* I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to him with the question, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast on many occasions, but your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁵Jesus answered them, "How can you expect wedding guests to mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? Time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, then they will fast.

¹⁶No one patches an old coat with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for the patch will shrink and tear an even bigger hole in the coat. ¹⁷Besides you don't put new wine in old wine-skins. If you do, the wine-skins will burst and the wine be spilt. No, you put new wine in fresh skins; then both are preserved."

The dead girl and the sick woman

(Mk 5:21; Lk 8:40)

■ ¹⁸When Jesus was telling them these things, the president of the synagogue came to him, greeted him respectfully and said, "My daughter has

2. 8, 6; Acts 9, 33; Lk 7, 48

3. Jn 10, 33

6. Dn 7, 10; Jn 5, 27

7. Acts 9, 33

11. 11, 19; Lk 7, 34; 15, 1; 19, 7

12. 1 Tim 1, 15

13. 12, 7; Hos 6, 6

14. 11, 18; Lk 18, 12

• See commentary Mk 2:1; Lk 5:17.

They praised God for giving such power to people (v. 8). Matthew means not only Jesus but also the members of the Christian community, because all of them share in the power of forgiveness. Christian communities of the early Church were more aware of the power given to them than we are today. Responsible ministers act more directly in forgiving or retaining sins, but they do so for the sake of the community and every Christian has to contribute to the rescue and reconciliation of his brothers and sisters (1

Cor 5:3-5; 2 Cor 2:5-11). Without denying the value of the priest's absolution, we know that the whole community enjoys the presence of Christ. When we establish relations of mercy and trust, and accept fraternal correction humbly, when there is mutual forgiveness between spouses, Christ is the one who forgives and pardons, and what is forgiven among us on earth, is forgiven in heaven (Mt 18:18).

+ See commentary on Mk 2:13.

■ See commentary for Mk 5:21.

She touched the fringe of his cloak. As a



just died, but come and place your hands on her, and she will live." ¹⁹So Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

²⁰ Then a woman who had suffered from severe bleedings for twelve years came up from behind, and touched the edge of his cloak. ²¹For she thought, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." ²²Jesus turned, saw her and said, "Courage my daughter, your faith has healed you." And from that moment the woman was cured.

²³ When Jesus arrived at the president's house and saw the flute players and the excited crowd, he said, ²⁴"Go away! The girl is not dead. She is only sleeping!" And they laughed at him. ²⁵But once the crowd was out, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. ²⁶The news of this spread through that whole area.

o ²⁷ As Jesus moved on from there two blind men followed him, shouting, "Son of David, help us!" ²⁸ When he was about to enter the house, the blind men caught up with him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I have the power to do what you want?" They answered, "Yes, sir!"

²⁹ Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, "As you have believed, so let

it be." ³⁰ And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus gave them a stern warning, "Be careful and let no one know about this." ³¹ But as soon as they went off, they spread the news about him through the whole area.

³² When they had just left, some people brought to Jesus a man who was dumb because he was possessed by a demon. ³³ When the demon was driven out, the man who had been dumb spoke. The crowds were astonished and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."

+ ³⁵ Jesus went around all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and he cured every sickness and disease. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds he was moved with pity, for they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the workers are only few. ³⁸ Ask the master of the harvest to send workers to gather his harvest."

The twelve apostles

(Mk 3:13; Lk 6:12)

♦ **10** ¹ Then he called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out unclean

20. 8, 3; Mk 6, 5; 8, 23; Lk 13, 13; Lev 15, 25	21. Acts 19, 12	22. Acts 3, 16
23. Jn 11, 11	26. Mk 1, 34	27. 20, 29
32. 12, 22	33. Mk 7, 32; 9, 17; Lk 11, 14; Mk 2, 12	34. (omitted in most manuscripts) 12, 24;
Mk 3, 22; Lk 11, 15	35. 4, 23	36. 14, 14; 15, 32; 1 K 22, 17
	37. Jn 4, 35	1. Mk 6, 7; Lk 9, 1

good Jew. Jesus had fringes on his cloak (Nm 15:38; Mt 23:5).

o They followed him shouting. In what manner, if they were blind? Stumbling and being carried by others. When you sin, shout to the Lord and keep on looking for Christ.

+ His heart was filled with pity, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. See Nm 27:7; Ez 34:5; Zac 10:2; Jn 4:35; Mk 6:34; and Lk 10:2.

God himself, in Jesus, had come down to cure humankind. Because this work would be very long and painful, it was necessary to provide some visible signs to help people believe in this almost imperceptible healing.

Jesus ought to heal sick persons and, even in our days, the Christian community should give signs of what they preach. They must cure today's world of its sicknesses. The gifts of healing are not limited to healing bodily ills and the devil is responsible for more than individual maladies.

People seek after those who can cure their illnesses, and so great crowds followed Jesus. For him, however, sickness as well as the exploitation of the human person, hunger and war, are only fruits and signs of a deeper illness attached to our heart, which is sin. Constant work and the unity of all people of goodwill are sufficient to remedy some of our misfortunes, but the only

spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew; ³ James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, thomas and Matthew, the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon, the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, the man who would betray him.

Jesus sends the first missionaries (Lk 9:1; 10:1; Mk 6:8)

o ⁵ Jesus sent these twelve on mission with the instruction: "Do not visit pagan territory and do not enter a Samaritan town. ⁶ Go instead to the lost sheep of the people of Israel.

⁷ Go and proclaim the message: the kingdom of Heaven is near. ⁸ Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons. You received this as a gift, so give it as a gift. ⁹ Do not carry any gold, silver or copper in your purses. ¹⁰ Do not carry a traveller's bag, or extra shirt, or sandals, or walking-stick, for a worker deserves his living.

¹¹ When you come to a town or a village, look for a worthy person and stay with him until you leave.

¹² When you go into the house, wish it peace. ¹³ If the people in the house deserve it, your peace will be on them; if they do not deserve it, your blessing will come back to you.

¹⁴ And if some house or town will

2. 9, 35; Mk 1, 34; Jn 1, 34	3. Jn 1, 40; 1, 43	4. 26, 25; 27, 3; Jn 6, 64
5. Lk 9, 53; Jn 4, 9; Acts 8, 5	6. Jer 50, 6; Mt 15, 24	8. 4, 17; Lk 10, 9; Is 55, 1; Acts 8, 20
10. Lk 10, 4; Num 18, 31; 1 Cor 9, 14	14. Lk 10, 10; Acts 13, 51; 18, 6	

way to eradicate evil at its roots is to restore human persons to their dignity as children of God. This requires a personal transformation which comes from God sending us his Spirit.

◆ Jesus asks each of us to serve humankind with our own talents. But he needs also *workers for the harvest* of the Kingdom, that is, to gather into the Church those who receive a call from God. "Pray," says Jesus, "and you will perhaps hear God's call."

Jesus did not say that we should pray for many priests or ministers, because, normally, every Christian community has to provide for its own heads and shepherds. He wants us to pray for missionary and apostolic workers; those are and will always be too few, especially those serving among the poor.

Till then, Jesus had spoken only in the synagogues around Capernaum. Now he has fame and followers and begins to attract multitudes. In that moment he establishes the group of the "Twelve." He needs them to prepare meetings, to spread his doctrine, to multiply the miraculous signs effected among the sick.

At the same time Jesus is planning his Church and wants to give it a head: this will be the group of the apostles. They will be the witnesses of Jesus among people and he teaches them a way of living and common life that will serve as a pattern for the Church.

He called those he wanted (Mk 3:13). These, in turn, will call others. In the Church everyone can do "apostolic work." But nobody makes himself an apostle, an official witness of

Christ: one has to be called to this responsibility.

Regarding these *twelve*, see commentary on Mk 3:19.

o In this new Discourse, Matthew gathers statements of Jesus related to Mission. In the first part (5-16) Jesus addresses the first missionaries of Galilee. After that come Jesus' words to those who will be in the future his witnesses in a hostile world.

See commentary on Mk 6:7 and Lk 10:1.

This was the first mission. The word "mission" means "sending." The Father is the one who sends messengers to the world to gather those who believe in his love and his promises.

The Father sends messengers of his word, but he also sends his Spirit to move the mind and the heart of their listeners. Through the Spirit, they will recognize the word of God in the poor speeches of these uneducated messengers.

The Father sends his Son to earth, and in turn, the Son sends his apostles. The Father entrusts to Jesus the realization of his plan, and the Church takes upon herself the continuation of the work initiated by Jesus.

Do not visit pagan territory. Jesus follows his Father's plan of salvation as described in the Bible. The Saviour should first gather the *strayed sheep of Israel*, and then bring salvation to all the *pagan nations*: Is 49:6; 60:1-10; Za 14:16; Mt 15:24.

Whoever welcomes you (v. 40). To reject the messengers is to ignore the call of the Father and to lose the greatest opportunity of one's life.

not accept you or listen to your words, leave that house and that town and shake the dust off your feet.¹⁵ I assure you, it will go easier for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than it will for the people of that town.

You will be persecuted

(Lk 12:11; Mk 13:9; 8:38)

+ ¹⁶ Look, I send you out like sheep among wolves. You must be clever as snakes and innocent as doves.¹⁷ Be on your guard with respect to men, for they will hand you over to their courts and they will flog you in their synagogues.¹⁸ You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings because of me to witness to them and the pagans.

o ¹⁹ But when you are arrested, do not worry about what you are to say;

when the hour comes, you will be given what you are to say.²⁰ For it is not you who will be speaking; but it will be the Spirit of your Father in you.

²¹ Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child; children will turn against parents and have them put to death.²² Everyone will hate you because of me, but whoever stands firm to the end will be saved.

◆ ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. I assure you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ A student is not above his teacher, or a slave above his master.

²⁵ A student should be glad to become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If the head of the family has

15. 11, 24; Lk 10, 12; Gen 18, 19; 2 Per 2, 6	16. Jn 10, 12; Acts 20, 29; Rom 16, 19
17. Mk 13, 9	18. Jn 16, 1; 15, 27
22. 24, 9	20. Ex 4, 10; Jn 15, 26; Acts 4, 8
23. 24, 13; 16, 28; 24, 27; 25, 31;	21. Mt 7, 6
	26, 64; Mk 13, 26
	24. Lk 6, 40; Jn 13, 16; 15, 20

+ In this page Jesus speaks to his disciples of all times who will be facing persecutions. "Martyr" means "witness" and we apply this word to the witnesses of Jesus who gave their lives and suffered for the faith. However, not every murdered Christian is a martyr.

Only Christians persecuted because of Christ and whose lives are consistent with the Gospel can be considered martyrs. If they showed in their death the same sentiments of Jesus in his Passion, they are really witnesses.

In some places we find ambiguous and unclear situations. On the one hand, civil authorities recognize Christianity and celebrate religious ceremonies but, on the other hand, excellent Christians and priests are imprisoned, tortured and killed. In such cases those same persons exclaim: "These are not martyrs, but they were repressed as dissenters." The same confusion existed for the martyrs of past centuries. When the Catholics of England, France and China refused to form national churches separated from the Catholic communion of Rome, were they not unfaithful to the laws of their country? But they were witnesses to Christ's will with regard to the Church. They had to obey God and not men.

We have the same ambiguity today. There are believers who do not stand up against all the inhuman policies and structures accepted by society. They would give their life for Jesus Christ, but they do not find reason enough to oppose common misbehaviour or forced submission.

Others realize the contradictions which exist between the Gospel and a situation of social corruption and inhumanity. Because of that they try to be witnesses of the Good News, and work for justice, truth and liberation in line with the Gospel. Consequently, they face the calumnies and repression by which society defends itself.

From among them, some are actively involved in uplifting the outcasts, as Jesus did; others refuse to bow before the rich and the tyrants, as Jesus did. These activities will be interpreted as political by those who have only political criteria; but they will be seen as a demonstration of faith by those who live the faith. In fact, it does not matter whether people always recognize who are the authentic martyrs of Christ and who are not: He himself will recognize them before his Father, when he comes in Glory.

o **Do not worry.** The witnesses of Jesus do not work on their own, and the more they are identified with Jesus in persecution and in prison, the more they are assisted by the Spirit. By worrying while preparing their legal case, they would hinder the freedom of the Spirit and also lose the peace that the Spirit grants the persecuted.

◆ **You will not have gone through...** (v. 23). This sentence would have been better placed in the first part of the speech, which is about the mission in Galilee. But Matthew wanted to refer it to future missionaries, giving it a different



been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of the family! So, do not be afraid of them.

²⁶ There is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be made known.

²⁷ What I am telling you in the dark, you must speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops.

■ ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but not the person. Rather be afraid of him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. ²⁹ For only a few cents you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. ³⁰ As for you, every hair of your head has been counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid: you are worth much more than many sparrows.

+ ³² Whoever acknowledges me before men I will acknowledge before my Father in Heaven. ³³ Whoever rejects me before men I will reject before my Father in Heaven.

o ³⁴ Do not think that I have come to

establish peace on earth. I have not: come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father and daughter against her mother; a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ Your enemies will be the members of your family.

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take up his cross and come after me, is not worthy of me. ³⁹ He who cares only for his own life will lose it; he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ He who welcomes you welcomes me, and he who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. ⁴¹ The one who welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive the reward of a prophet; the one who welcomes a just man because he is just will receive the reward of a just man. ⁴² And if anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because he is a disciple of mine, I assure you, he will not go unrewarded."

26. Mk 4, 22; Lk 8, 17	28. 1 Pet 3, 14; Rev 2, 10; James 4, 12	30. 1 S 14, 45; Acts 27, 34
31. 6, 26; 12, 12	32. Rev 3, 5; Lk 9, 29; 2 Tim 2, 12	34. Lk 12, 51; 2, 34; 22, 36
35. Mt, 7, 6	37. Lk 14, 26; Dt 33, 9	38. 16, 24
40. 18, 5; Jn 12, 44; Gal 4, 14; 1 K 17, 9; 2 K 4, 8	42. Mk 9, 41	39. Lk 17, 33; Jn 12, 25

meaning: though people may cast them out, they will never be short of work until the second coming of Jesus.

■ We are cowards and Jesus is aware of this. He already said, "Do not fear," when he invited us not to look for security in money. Now, dealing with the fear of repression, he adds, "If you cannot free yourselves from your cowardice, think of where the greater threat from, God or from men?"

This is the only time Jesus refers to "fear of God." When the Old Testament mentioned fear of God, it generally meant giving due respect to God. But respect is far from fear. Respect is an attitude proper to a free person. When some tyrant, however, requires our obedience, there is no place for respect but only for fear. God does not threaten, to throw us into hell; rather he reminds us that to lose him is to lose ourselves also, and this is hell.

+ If anyone acknowledges me. After stressing the sovereign power of his Father, Jesus puts

himself on the same level: He will decide our eternal fate. Jesus not only refers to recognizing him in the ultimate sense, that is, by not denying our Christian faith before others; his words also convey a day by day demand. We must not be ashamed to act or talk as people of faith, to go public about our Christian convictions when necessary.

o Do not think that I have come to establish peace. The peace of the believer comes from the certainty that he is loved by God: the angels of Bethlehem said so: Lk 2:14.

But Jesus gives no peace to the world, because the rest of the world is made out of confusions, half-truths, people in balance between greed and fear of risking. The peace of the world, whether in a family or in society, veils unjust settlement imposed by the strongest, or a shared mediocrity. The Gospel awakens everywhere a critical spirit; so that the presence of only one Christian living by the truth is enough to worry many persons: Jn 3:20; 15:18.

The Gospel moves us to make decisions with



Jesus and John the Baptist

(Lk 7:18; 16:16; 10:12)

11 ¹When Jesus had finished giving his twelve disciples these instructions, he went on from there to teach and to proclaim his message in their towns. ²When John the Baptist heard in prison about the activities of Christ, he sent a message by his disciples ³to ask him: "Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?"

⁴Jesus answered them, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life and good news is reaching the poor. ⁶And fortunate is the one who does not take offense at me."

⁷As the messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "When you went out to the

desert, what did you expect to see? A reed swept by the wind? ⁸What did you go out to see? A man dressed up in fine clothes? People who wear fine clothes live in palaces. ⁹What did you actually go out to see? A prophet? Yes, indeed, and even more than a prophet. ¹⁰He is the man of whom the scripture says: *I send my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way before you.*

¹¹I tell you this; never has a greater prophet than John the Baptist appeared, and yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful people have become part of it.

¹³The time of the Prophets and the Law extends up to John. It was the time of prophecy ¹⁴and if you accept their message, John is this Elijah, whose coming was predicted. ¹⁵If

5. Is 26, 19; 42, 18

6. 13, 57; 26, 31; Jn 6, 61

8. 14, 5; 21, 26; Lk 1, 76

9. Dt 18, 15; Mal 3, 1; Jn 1, 15; 6, 14

10. Ex 23, 20; Mal 3, 1

13. Lk 16, 16

greater freedom, disregarding the criticism of those close to us whenever we are convinced that they cannot understand the Gospel values which motivate us. Take for example, a girl in the family way resisting her parents' advice to obtain an abortion. Christians have been persecuted in many countries for teaching that divine law is above parental authority, which was considered as the supreme authority. Thus it happened with the ancient Romans, more recently, in Korea and China.

Moreover, the devil stirs up persecutions against every person who became converted, in order to scare him and make him turn away.

He is not worthy ... (v. 37). Jesus addresses this to others besides missionaries or persons with an exceptional mission. Each one must break away from forms of dependency within the family which do not nurture the human and spiritual growth of the members. One who loves Christ finds a thousand and one opportunities for freeing himself from activities wasting time, worrying about his own family, which were keeping both him and them at a mediocre level.

♦ See commentary on Lk 7:18.

Good news is reaching the poor ... (v. 5). Jesus's message includes a preferential love of God to the poor and to those who share with them in their poverty. The Gospel is not *also* for

them, but for them *first*.

EVANGELIZATION OF THE POOR AS A PRIORITY

Good news is reaching the poor. This text is to be read together with Lk 1:52; 4:18; 6:20; 10:23.

Some people misunderstand this text when they think that Jesus calls them only to catechize the poor. In the time of Jesus the Pharisees already thought their duty was to teach simple and uneducated people; Jesus instead sent his apostles, poor among the poor, to proclaim to them and enable them to discover the presence and working of God the Father. This is the context in which fundamental experiences occur that will renew the world and the religious life of everyone.

v. 6 – See another way of translating this sentence in Lk 7:23.

v. 11 – Matthew says literally: never has *arisen* someone greater than John. This verb refers to a prophet.

v. 12 – The Kingdom of God is the moving force that makes history progress, taking advantage of both gentle and violent changes in human condition. The believers are called to participate actively in this constant transformation. Death and Resurrection are at work among us and all over the world.

anyone has ears to hear, let him listen.

¹⁶ Now, to what can I compare the people of this day? They are like children sitting in the market place and some others complain to them: ¹⁷ 'We played the flute for you but you would not dance. We sang a funeral-song but you would not cry!'

¹⁸ The same way John came fasting and people said: 'He is possessed.' ¹⁹ Then the Son of Man came, he ate and drank, and people said: 'Look at this man! A glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet the wisdom of God has been vindicated by the results."

■ ²⁰ Then Jesus started to denounce the cities in which he had performed most of his miracles, because the people there did not change their ways, ²¹ "Alas for you Chorazin and Bethsaida! If the miracles worked in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, the people there would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I assure you, for Tyre and Sidon it will be more bearable on the day of judgement than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to heaven? You will be thrown down to hell! For if the miracles which were performed in you had taken place in

Sodom, Sodom would still be in existence today! ²⁴ But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgement than for you."

Take my yoke upon you

(Lk 10:21)

◆ ²⁵ On that occasion Jesus said: "Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, I praise you, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to simple people. ²⁶ Yes, Father, this is what pleased you.

²⁷ Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ Come to me, all of you who work hard and who carry heavy burdens and I will refresh you. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart; and you will find rest. ³⁰ For my yoke is good and my burden is light."

Jesus Lord of the Sabbath

(Mk 2:23; 3:1 Lk 6:1; 14:1)

12

¹ It happened that Jesus walked through the wheat fields on a Sabbath. His disciples felt hungry, so

14. Mal 3, 23; Mk 9, 11; Lk 1, 17; Jn 1, 21; Rev 2, 7
19, 9, 11; Lk 15, 1; 19, 17 20. 13, 58; Jn 15, 24
Zac 9, 2; Est 4, 1 23. Is 14, 13; Gen 19; 2 Pet 2, 6
26. 28, 18; Jn 3, 35; 13, 3; 17, 2 27. Phlm 2, 9; Jn 1, 18; 10, 15; Wis 2, 13
29. Jer 31, 25; Hos 10, 11; Pro 3, 17 30. Jer 6, 16; 1 Jn 5, 3

17. Lk 1, 15 18. 3, 4; 9, 14
21. Is 23, 1; Ezk 26-28; Jl 3, 4; Am 1, 9;
25. Jn 7, 48; 1 Cor 1, 17; 1, 26

■ Chorazin and Bethsaida: these two cities were the seats of higher schools of religion but had not received the Gospel. Tyre and Sidon: two pagan cities, cursed by the prophets.

◆ Jesus' intimacy with the Father is highlighted in the many occasions when Jesus gave himself to prayer. Jesus' prayer impressed the disciples. In this text it's a short prayer, prompted by the most recent events; events and daily life are also a source of prayer. This prayer teaches us an important lesson: the conditions for Christian discipleship are humility of heart and openness to God. Proud, over-rational and self-sufficient people are not well disposed to be enlightened by Jesus' revelation.

He is the Son, who knows the Father as the Father knows him. Being God himself, he can demand everything of us, because he does not come to us from outside: his influence reaches the depths of our heart. See Lk 10:21.

Come to me: I will not relieve you of your load, but by placing my yoke on you, I give you the means of carrying the load.

Jesus plays with the two words *yoke* and *load*, for the Jews used to call 'load' the divine teachings imparted to pupils, and *yoke* the balancing of the teacher's sentences, which should be learned by heart.

Jesus, the patient and humble teacher, enables us to see the mercy of God in our lives and in our own cross. He shows us the love of God

they began to pick some heads of wheat and eat the grain.² When the Pharisees noticed this, they said to Jesus, "Look at your disciples; they are doing what is prohibited on the Sabbath!"

³Jesus answered, "Have you not read what David did when he and his men were hungry?⁴ He went into the house of God, and ate the bread offered to God, although neither he nor his men had the right to eat it, but only the priests.⁵ And have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the Temple break the Sabbath rest, yet they are not guilty?"

⁶I tell you, there is something greater than the Temple here.⁷ If you really knew the meaning of the words: *It is mercy I want, not sacrifice*, you would not have condemned the innocent.

⁸Besides the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

⁹Jesus then left that place and went into their synagogue.¹⁰ A man was there with a paralyzed hand, and they asked Jesus, "Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath?" These people wanted to bring a charge against him.

¹¹But he said to them, "What if one of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath? Will you not take hold of your sheep and pull it out?"

¹²But a human person is much more valuable than a sheep! It is therefore permitted to do good on the Sabbath."

¹³Then Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your arm." He stretched it out and it was as sound as the other one.

¹⁴Then the Pharisees left and made

plans to kill him.¹⁵ Jesus was aware of the plot, so he went away from that place. Many people followed him. He cured all who were sick¹⁶ and gave them strict orders not to give publicity to him.

¹⁷In this way was fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy:

¹⁸*Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, and with whom I am pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him and he will announce my judgment to the nations.*

¹⁹*He will not argue or shout, nor will his voice be heard in the streets.*
²⁰*The bruised reed he will not crush; nor snuff out the smouldering wick. He will persist until justice is made victorious.*
²¹*And in him all the nations will put their hope."*

The unforgivable sin

(Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15)

■ ²²Then some people brought to him a possessed man who was blind and who could not talk. Jesus healed the man, so that he was able to talk and see.²³ All in the crowd were amazed and wondered, "Could he be the Son of David?"²⁴ When the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is by Beelzebul, prince of the devils, that this man drives out devils."

²⁵Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said to them, "Every kingdom that is divided against itself will fall apart, and every town or household that is divided against itself cannot last.²⁶ So if one Satan drives out the other Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can

3. 1 S 21, 2; Lev 24, 5	5. Num 28, 9	7. Hos 6, 6; Mt 2, 41; Lk 11, 31	8. Jn 5, 16
9. Lk 14, 3	12. 6, 26; 10, 31; Lk 12, 7	13. Lk 13, 16; Jn 5, 9; 7, 23; 9, 14	14. 27, 1;
Mk 11, 18; Jn 5, 16	15. 8, 4; 9, 30	16. Mk 3, 12; 5, 43; 7, 36	18. Is 42, 1

even in the requirements of the Law. Only God is Good; good, likewise, is the authority of Christ.

■ See commentary on Mk 3:22.

Your own people (v. 27). Jesus refers here to the Jewish exorcists who also cast out demons with prayers and formulae, as told in Acts 19:13.

The slander against the Holy Spirit. This



his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if it is by Beelzebul that I drive out devils, by whom do your own people drive them out? They themselves will give you the answer.

²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out devils, then the kingdom of God has already come upon you. ²⁹ How can anyone break into a strong man's house and make off with his belongings unless he first ties up the strong man? Only then can he plunder his house.

³⁰ He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

³¹ And so I tell you this: people can be forgiven any sin and any evil thing they say, but whoever says evil things against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

³² He who says something against the Son of Man, will be forgiven; but he who says something against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

³³ Make a tree sound and its fruit will be sound; let a tree rot and its fruit will be rotten. For you can know a tree by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you say anything good, when you are so evil? For the mouth speaks

of what fills your heart. ³⁵ A good person produces what is good from the store of good within himself, and an evil person produces evil from his evil store.

³⁶ I tell you this; on the judgement day people will have to give an account of any unjustified word they have spoken. ³⁷ Your own words will be used to judge you – to declare you either innocent or guilty."

Jesus criticizes his own generation

(Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16)

o ³⁸ Then some teachers of the Law and some Pharisees spoke up, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹ Jesus answered them, "An evil and unfaithful people want a sign, but the only sign that will be given is that of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ In the same way that Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of the big fish, so will the Son of Man spend three days and three nights in the depth of the earth.

⁴¹ At the judgment, the people of Niniveh will rise with this generation and condemn it, because they reformed their lives at the preaching of

28. Acts 10, 38

29. Is 49, 24; Jer 12, 31

30. Mk 9, 40; Lk 9, 50

32. 1 Tim 1, 13; Lk 12, 10

34. 3, 7; 23, 33; Lk 3, 7

35. 15, 18; Mk 7, 21;

36. James 3, 1

39. Jon 1, 17

means attributing to the devil the good actions of the Spirit, as we see in Mk 3:30. Who could save him whose conscience is perverted?

In this age or in the age to come (v. 32). This is a Jewish idiom, meaning that this sin cannot be forgiven, before God or people. How can God forgive one who puts himself out of reach of the forgiving God.

Make a tree sound (v. 33). There is another application of the sentence read in 7:16. It deals here with the accusation against the Pharisees: they slander whatever is good because they have an evil heart. You will be judged by your words (37). God will judge each one according to his conscience. One who always criticizes and accuses will be accused. He who forgives will be forgiven. God will not judge us from outside, as people do; from inside will come the light that will show our sins. We are, by this, far, far away from God the Judge, as perceived by many.

o Jesus did not perform any miracle that day because the experts in religion were demanding an account of him, instead of listening to him. Jesus had already performed many miracles and they had not believed.

An evil and unfaithful people. This expression in the Bible means the unfaithful believe who, without denying God in words, retain other gods in himself.

The line about the evil spirit, that is the devil points to the contemporaries of Jesus. The came to him and welcomed his message for while. In time they will return to their former blindness.

The Ninivites: see Jonah 3:5.

The Queen of the South: 1 Kings 10.

The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus. The similarity between the three days the Jonah was in the belly of the fish and the time Jesus spent in the tomb is somewhat forced.



Jonah, and here there is greater than Jonah. ⁴²At the judgment, the Queen of the South will stand up and condemn you. She came from the other side of the world to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and here there is greater than Solomon.

⁴³When an evil spirit goes out of a person, it wanders over arid wastelands looking for a place to rest. If it cannot find one, ⁴⁴it says to itself: 'I will go back to my house which I had to leave.' So it goes back and finds the house empty, clean, and in order. ⁴⁵Off it goes again to bring back with it this time seven spirits, more evil than itself. They move in and settle there, so that this person is finally in a worse state than he was at the beginning. This is what will happen to this evil generation."

◆ ⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the people, his mother and his brothers came to speak to him and they waited outside. ⁴⁷So someone said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are here outside; they want to speak with you."

⁴⁸Jesus answered, "Who is my

mother? Who are my brothers?"

⁴⁹Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "Look! Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰Whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother, my sister, and my mother."

The parable of the sower

(Mk 4:1; Lk 8:4; 10:23; 13:26)

+13 ¹That same day Jesus left the house and sat down by the lakeside. ²As many people gathered in front and around him, he got in a boat. There he sat while the whole crowd stood on the shore, ³and he spoke to them in parables about many things.

⁴Jesus said, "The sower went out to sow and, as he sowed, some seed fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground where there was little soil, and the seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was not deep. ⁶Then the sun came up and the plants were scorched and withered because they had no roots. ⁷Again other seeds fell among thistles; and the thistles grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other

42. 1 K 10, 1

45. Mk 5, 9; Lk 8, 2; 2 Pet 2, 20

46. Jn 2, 12; Acts 1, 14

50. Lk 2, 49

1. Lk 5, 1

◆ *His mother and his brothers.* If they were true brothers of Jesus, sons of Mary, the Gospel would say: "his mother and the sons of his mother," for this was the Jewish manner of speaking. See com. on Mk 3:31.

+ Here begins the third Discourse in Matthew's Gospel, which includes seven parables of Jesus about the kingdom of God. Each parable presents a different aspect of the Kingdom and, by putting them together, we can come to some understanding of this multifaceted reality which is growing secretly among us all throughout history.

Jesus now spoke by means of comparisons, as farmers and labourers are accustomed to do. This mode of teaching is very appropriate for presenting moral teachings and the religious teachers of that time made great use of comparisons, or parables.

However, when Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God had come, the multitudes who gathered around him wanted to hear a clear

message. For them the term *kingdom of God* sounded like "liberation" does in our time, as being politically tainted. And everyone wondered why Jesus was making use of parables instead of speaking plainly.

Among the listeners were spies who would relate to Herod or the Romans any seditious word. Was Jesus afraid of them? He was more concerned because these people looked only for political solutions; they did not see anything but their own dreams and were unable to receive the gift of God: *When they hear, they do not listen; they do not want to change nor that I should heal them.*

Christ is sowing and the seeds are words of truth and eternal life which need to grow and mature in human hearts. The seed grows even today and with it the Kingdom of God spreads on earth. It does not require spectacular success (in many listeners it does not sprout or grow at all) – but where it grows, what a marvelous harvest! See commentaries on Mk 4:1; 4:14.

seeds fell on good soil and produced a crop; some yielded a hundredfold, others sixty and others thirty. ⁹If you have ears, then hear!"

■ ¹⁰Then his disciples came to him with the question, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

¹¹Jesus answered them, "To you it is given to know the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven, but not to these people. ¹²For the one who has will be given more and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have will be deprived of even what he has. ¹³That is why I speak to them in parables, because they look and yet do not see; they hear, but they do not listen or understand.

¹⁴In them the words of the prophet Isaiah come true: *Much as you hear, you do not understand; much as you see, you do not perceive.*

¹⁵*For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears hardly hear and their eyes do not dare to see. If*

they could see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, they would turn back and I would heal them.

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears, because they hear.

¹⁷For I tell you that many prophets and upright people would have liked to see the things you see, but they did not, and to hear the things you hear, but they did not hear it.

◆ ¹⁸Now listen to the parable of the sower.

¹⁹When a person hears the message of the Kingdom but fails to commit himself to it, the devil comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the seed that fell along the footpath.

²⁰The seed that fell on rocky ground, stands for the one who hears the word and accepts it at once with joy. ²¹But it has no roots in him, and lasts only for a short while. When he

9. Mt 11, 15; 13, 43
19, 26

14. Is 6, 9; Jn 12, 40; Acts 28, 26

11. 1 Cor 4, 1; Eph 3, 3;
16. Lk 10, 23

6, 19; Col 2, 2
16. Lk 10, 23

12. 4, 3; Mk 4, 25; Lk 8, 18;
17. Eph 3, 5; 1 P 1, 12

■ *It has been given to you to know the secrets of the Kingdom.* To you who took Christ's call seriously and decided to follow him. And because you came to be the fellow workers of Christ, the Father will reveal to you his secrets.

The Kingdom of Heaven. We already said that "Heaven" was a Jewish expression referring to God. The kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom of God, as the Father of Heaven is God the Father. Not realizing this, many have been mistakenly thought that the Gospel announced only the kingdom of God in Heaven after our present life. Actually Jesus came to tell us that God had come to rule freely and clearly among us.

Kingdom or Reign of God? See commentary on Lk 8:10.

◆ If the seed brings forth fruit in some and not in others, it is not because some are intelligent and others are not, some disposed toward devotion and others not. The seed grows where there is Hope, and not in people unable to hope.

A person of hope is one who can strive all his life for a great ideal; who is capable of risking and works tirelessly to attain that which cannot yet be seen (Heb 11:1). The person of hope is at the same time a person of faith, capable of loving in the way God does.

Those along the footpath are those not interested in the word they have received, perhaps because they cannot see further than their own interests (they are selfish), or perhaps they have taken another direction in life.

Next come those who do not dare to face contradiction and are easily discouraged and cowed: these are soon burnt. Yet to hope means to be firm despite any obstacle. If God puts us on a road in life, this road will lead somewhere, no matter how great the difficulties along the way. Hope is courage and endurance.

Next are those *sown among thistles*. They are believers, but the fruits to be harvested along the difficult path seem not to satisfy them. They want to "save their lives," to serve God and Money at the same time. How many good children and young people educated in Catholic colleges or formed in parishes will remain within the Church all through their lives, but be fruitless for the Kingdom of God? They are dragged down by their aim of winning material success, and hope in the Kingdom of God becomes but a flimsy desire for them.

◦ With the parable of the *weeds*, Jesus answers those who are scandalized at seeing evil everywhere. Good and bad will be mixed till the

is harassed or persecuted because of the word, he backs out in no time.

²² The seed that fell among the thistles is the one who hears the word, but then the concern for this world and the empty promises of wealth choke the word, and it does not bear fruit.

²³ But the seed that fell on good soil is the one who hears the word and understands it; he bears fruit and yields a hundred, or sixty, or thirtyfold.

The parable of the weeds

o ²⁴ Jesus told them another parable. "The kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ While everyone was asleep, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and left.

²⁶ When the plants sprouted and began to yield grain, the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ Then the servants of the owner came to him and said: 'Sir, it was good seed that you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ He answered them: 'This is the work of an enemy.' They asked him: 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?' ²⁹ He told them: 'No, when you pull up the weeds, you might take the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let them just grow together until harvest; then I will tell the workers: Pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them; then collect the wheat into my barn.'

The mustard seed and the yeast

(Mk 4:30; Lk 13:18)

♦ ³¹ Jesus put another parable before them, "The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field.

³² It is smaller than the rest of the seeds, but once it has fully grown, it is bigger than any garden plant; like a tree, the birds come and rest in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable, "The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast which a woman took and buried into three measures of flour until the whole mass of dough began to rise."

22. Lk 12, 16; 1 Tim 6, 9
Ezk 17, 23; 31, 6; Dn 4, 12

23. Jn 15, 8; Gal 5, 22
33. 1 Cor 5, 6; Gal 5, 9

30. Jn 15, 6

32. 17, 20; Lk 17, 6

end of the world. Good and evil will always be found together in persons and institutions.

God respects people. He knows that temptation is often stronger than their good intentions and they need time to find and to choose steadily what is good.

God is patient. The reconciliation of so many contradictory groups, forces and cultural currents active in the world, will be attained only at the end of time. In the meantime we are not to label any of them as "the" good ones and "the" bad ones.

Jesus himself commented on this parable: see v. 36.

♦ With the parable of the *mustard seed* Jesus shows us that the Kingdom of God must be a sign: it has to be something very noticeable in the world.

Any spiritual aspiration, cultural innovation or revolutionary movement must be expressed concretely through one or several institutions to make it a clearer and more visible entity. Likewise Jesus projects his Church as the bearer (not

the exclusive owner) of the Kingdom of God. Church means: "Assembly of those called together." Two of the characteristics of this Church as indicated here:

- First it must be very visible and fruitful for the world, like a tree giving shade to birds.
- Secondly, it must be immersed in human reality.

Believers are not to separate from those who do not believe, for they are the yeast of the world.

Jesus does not want an "invisible Church," that is an emotional fellowship and spiritual communion among all those in the whole world who believe in him. He wants a gigantic tree (in another place Jesus says: a city built on a hill), so that everyone can recognize that the seed was good and full of life. We need organized Christian communities, and ties between these communities, a hierarchy... Nevertheless the believers are not to enclose themselves in their chapels or little communities or to spend all their energies working for "their" Church. They must be



■³⁴ Jesus taught all this to the crowds by means of parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So what the Prophet had said was fulfilled: *I will speak in parables. I will proclaim things kept secret since the beginning of the world.*

+ ³⁶ Then he sent the crowds away and went into the house. And his disciples came to him with the question, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." ³⁷ Jesus answered them, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world; the good seed are the people of the Kingdom; the weeds are those who belong to the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who sows them is the devil; the harvest is the end of time and the workers are the angels.

⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of time. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom all that is scandalous and all who do evil. ⁴² And these will be thrown in the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the just will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. If you have ears, then hear.

The treasure, the pearl and the net

◆⁴⁴ The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. The man who finds it buries it again; and so happy is he, that he goes and sells everything he has, so that he may buy that field.

35. Ps 78, 2

36. 15, 15; Mk 4, 10

39. Jn 8, 44

40. 3, 10; 7, 19; Jn 15, 6; 1 Jn 3, 10;

Rev 14, 15

42. Zeph 1, 3; Dn 3, 6; Rev 21, 8

43. Mt 8, 12; 22, 13; 24, 51; 25, 30; Dn 12, 3;

44. Pro 2, 4; 4, 7

useful and fruitful in the world they have to save, together with all people of good will working in every area of human promotion.

Let them be yeast for the dough and not small separate and finer dough. The yeast transforms human history, not by bringing all people into the Church, but by infusing into human activity the spirit which gives life to humankind.

■ *He taught them by means of parables.* On reading Matthew 13:12, we could think that Jesus speaks in parables in order to hide his teaching. But here we find another explanation that corrects and completes the first. Jesus spoke in parables because that was the best method to convey a teaching relevant for all times.

I will speak in parables. These are the first words of Psalms 78, as adapted by the evangelist. He means that the secrets of the Kingdom of God revealed by Jesus answer the most important questions of humankind.

From the beginning of civilization, man was confronted with problems and challenges he could not solve on his own, and Jesus offers him the key to these contradictions. Science has discovered many elements of human destiny, but it cannot explain the mystery of evil within.

Jesus answers, not with theories, but with figures and enigmas for each one to ponder during his life, and for people to learn from till the end

of history. For only as time progresses will we come to understand their whole meaning.

+ *The field is the world.* This parable does not refer to what happens within each of us, or only in the Church, as described in the net (13:47). Rather it teaches that the Kingdom of God is and grows in the world, in all dimensions of the secular world. Sacred history is not only an ancient history in the land of Jesus, but entire human story, of which the risen Christ is Lord.

Jesus denounces our secret violence which prevents us from understanding the ways of God. *The servants* do not realize that the same violent spirit which they condemn in others is also animating them. They think only of repressing and excluding those whom they see as bad, so that goodness can win out. God, on the other hand, lets evil develop all its potential before being defeated by the mystery of the cross. Justice will win out at the end. We are taught to conquer evil with good (Rom 12:21).

◆ *The parables of the treasure and the pearl* invite us not to let opportunities pass by, when the kingdom of God comes to us.

Some had been waiting for years for that word, or person or sign of hope that would give new meaning to their lives. One day they found it. Sometimes it was found through simple things: a forgiving word, a friendly smile, a first commitment offered to them and accepted. Then they understood that this was the way to

⁴⁵ Again the kingdom of Heaven is like a trader who is looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ Once he has found a pearl of exceptional quality, he goes away, sells everything he has and buys it.

+ ⁴⁷ Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a big fishing net let down into the sea, where every kind of fish have been caught in it. ⁴⁸ When the net is full, it is dragged ashore. Then the men sit down and gather the good fish into the buckets, and throw the worthless ones away. ⁴⁹ That is how it will

be at the end of time; the angels will go out to separate the wicked from the just, ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where they will cry and gnash their teeth."

⁵¹ Jesus asked, "Have you understood all these things?" "Yes," they answered. ⁵² So he said to them, "You will see that every teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom is like a householder who can produce from his store both new and old."

50. Dn 3, 6; Mt 13, 42

gain all they were waiting for, and they entered the Kingdom happily.

But the parable says: *he hides it again*. Obviously it is God who hides the treasure again after having shown it to us, for it will be really ours when we have worked for it and persevered.

Everything must be sold. We have to divest ourselves of all those habits, pleasures... that occupy our hearts without filling them. And when trials come upon us like a frosty, icy night, we should not forget the treasure we have once seen, until we recover it. Plato, the great pagan philosopher, said, "It is during the night that it is beautiful to believe in the light."

The pearl in some sense is Christ himself. Those who enter the religious life are aimed at meeting him again and possessing him definitely.

EVIL IN THE CHURCH

+ The Church has attracted a great many people, but not all who become Catholic are good, nor do all of them become children of the Kingdom. Part of them belong to the visible family of the chosen ones, without having the spirit of the Kingdom.

By speaking of the net, Jesus reminds us that the first activity of the Church must be mission: "to catch people." Every mission brings in all kinds of people. Some will withdraw soon, but some persevere and become active and committed members, and the Church is renewed.

How we would like a perfect Church, made of upright persons, in which each one would have discovered the gifts of God! Christ, however, did not want a Church like that, nor is that the way for the Church to save the world. This parable tells us not to be surprised at scandals existing in the Church, but it does not tell us to tolerate them passively.

Some will be thrown out. The blazing furnace means the unbearable suffering and desperation of those put out of the Kingdom where love is the Law. The separation will be definitive, as the kingdom will become definitive on that very day.

At the end Jesus talks about the teacher of the Law, that is, about the man devoted to go deeper into the things of God. By meditating constantly on these words, he will gain new insights adapted to different circumstances.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD. A SUMMARY

As we read Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God in the light of Church tradition, what overall picture do we get? How can we synthesize what the Kingdom of God is all about?

- From our end (not from God's end) the Kingdom is complex. It cannot be simplified, by saying: "the Kingdom of God is justice and fraternity in societies," or it is "to live in the grace of God," and such like. Because the Kingdom seems complex to us, Jesus explained it through so many parables and examples.
- The Kingdom of God is God himself fully at work in the world through the Spirit of Christ, "making everything anew" (Rev 21:5).
- The fountain and the full expression of the Kingdom is Jesus Christ himself. He not only inaugurates the Kingdom by his coming; he also embodies the Kingdom and its riches perfectly.
- As God's Incarnation, the Kingdom of God is also a mystery, and therefore a paradox to us. It is a gift from God ("the sown seed" of the parables), it is also our doing (Mt 13:19-23). It is already present (Mt 4:17; 12:28; Mk 1:15...), but men, history and creation are waiting for its fulfillment in future life (parables of the wheat and the weeds, of the net and the fish; also Mk 14:25; Rom 8:18-25). The Kingdom is an absolute that relativizes everything (parables of the treasure and the pearl), but is in fact mingled with human condition and history (parable of the leaven...).

Synthesizing, the Kingdom of God entails

o⁵³ When Jesus had finished these parables, he left the place.⁵⁴ He went to his hometown and taught the people in their synagogue. They were amazed and said, "Where did he get this wisdom and these special powers?"⁵⁵ Is he not the carpenter's son? Is not Mary his mother and are not James, Joseph, Simon and Judas his brothers?⁵⁶ Are not all his sisters living here? How did he get all this?"⁵⁷ And so they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is respected everywhere except in his hometown and in his own family."⁵⁸ And he did not perform many miracles there, because of their lack of faith.

John the Baptist beheaded

(Mk 6:4; Lk 9:7)

◆14¹ At that time the news about Jesus reached King Herod.² And he said to his servants, "He is John the Baptist. John has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

³ Herod had in fact ordered that John be arrested, bound in chains and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.⁴ For John had said to him, "It is not right for you to have her as wife."⁵ Herod wanted to kill him, but he did not dare because

he feared the people who regarded John as a prophet.

⁶ On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst of the guests; she so delighted Herod⁷ that he promised under oath to give her anything she requested.⁸ The girl, following the advice of her mother, said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a plate."

⁹ The king felt sad, but because he had made this promise under oath in the presence of the guests, he ordered it to be given her.¹⁰ So he had John beheaded in the prison¹¹ and his head brought on a plate and given to the girl. The girl then took it to her mother.

¹² Then John's disciples came to take his body and bury it. And they went to bring the news to Jesus.

First miracle of the loaves

(Mk 6:32; Jn 6)

■¹³ On hearing this, Jesus set out secretly by boat for a secluded place. But the people heard of it, and they followed him on foot from their towns.¹⁴ As Jesus went ashore, he saw the crowd gathered there and he had compassion on them. And he healed their sick.

¹⁵ When it was evening, his disciples came to him and said, "We are

54. Jn 7, 15 55. Lk 3, 23; Jn 6, 42 57. Jn 4, 44 1. 16, 14 4. Lev 18, 16 14. 9, 36; 15, 32

four dimensions, which are inseparable and dependent on one another:

- The Kingdom is eternal life. The only future is the plenitude of the Kingdom and its values.
- The Kingdom is embodied in the Catholic Church, as the sacrament of Christ in this life, and as the privileged place of the Spirit. We find, of course, values and achievements of the Kingdom outside the visible Church, but the Church remains, nevertheless, the "fatherland" of the Kingdom, its full explicitation in history, its sacrament and generator.
- The Kingdom of God is in our hearts. It comes to each of us by way of conversion, faith, hope, charity and grace. The King-

dom entails our personal sanctification and spirituality.

- The Kingdom of God comes not to individual souls, but to human persons. Change of heart initiates a progressive transformation of the whole person, that includes all relations with the surrounding world. So the riches of the Kingdom come about in social life: more fraternity and solidarity, justice and peace, humanization of cultures, and so on.

◆ Compare Lk 4:14. See commentary on Mk 3:31.

◆ For chapter 14 & 15 see commentaries on Mk 6 & 7.

■ See commentary on Mk 6:32 & John 6.

in a lonely place and it is now late. You should send these people away so they can go to the villages and buy something for themselves to eat."

¹⁶ But Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷ They answered, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fishes." ¹⁸ Jesus said to them, "Bring them here to me."

¹⁹ Then he had everyone sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fishes, raised his eyes to heaven, pronounced the blessing, broke the loaves and handed them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ²⁰ And they all ate, and everyone had enough; then the disciples gathered up the leftovers, filling twelve baskets. ²¹ About five thousand men had eaten there without counting women and children.

Jesus walks on the water

(Mk 6:45; Jn 6:16)

+ ²² Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the crowd away.

²³ And having sent the people off, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. At nightfall, he was there alone.

²⁴ Meanwhile, the boat was by now very far from the land, dangerously rocked by the waves for the wind was against it.

²⁵ By daybreak, Jesus came to them walking on the lake. ²⁶ When they saw

him walking on the lake, they were terrified, thinking that it was a ghost. And they began to cry. ²⁷ But at once Jesus said to them, "Courage! Do not be afraid, it is I." ²⁸ Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you walking on the water."

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Come." And Peter got out of the boat, walking on the water to go to Jesus. ³⁰ But, in face of the strong wind, he was afraid and began to sink. So he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately stretched out his hand and took hold of him, saying, "Man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ Then those in the boat bowed before Jesus saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God!"

³⁴ They came ashore at Genesareth. ³⁵ The men of that place recognized Jesus, so they spread the news throughout the region. They brought to him all the sick, ³⁶ begging him to let them touch just the fringe of his cloak. All who touched it became perfectly well.

God's command and human tradition

(Mk 7:1)

15 ¹ Then some Pharisees and teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. And they said to him, ² "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders? In fact,

19. Jn 11, 41; 17, 1	20. 2 K 4, 43	23. Lk 6, 12; 9, 28	26. Lk 24, 37	29. Jn 21, 7
32. 8, 26; Mk 4, 39	33. 16, 16; 26, 63; 27, 54; Mk 14, 61		34. 15, 39; Lk 22, 70; Jn 1, 49	
2. Lk 11, 38; Gal 1, 14; Col 2, 8				

+ See commentary on Mk 6:45.

They were terrified. By their lack of faith, the disciples took Jesus for a ghost, and were scared. To believe in ghosts and such like is a form of superstition. Lack of faith or an ill-formed faith might lead to superstition and fear, but strong faith overcomes fear and the danger of superstition.

Order me to go to you. Matthew is not interested in emphasizing Peter's doubt, but his faith.

Peter alone dared to attempt something that seemed to be reserved for Jesus, and after joining his companions again in the boat he was, though soaked, the happiest of them.

Man of little faith. Once more Jesus' reproaches are addressed to his best disciples (as in 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20) – in order to convince future disciples, like us, that much is still lacking to our faith.

■ See commentary on Mk 7:1.



they do not wash their hands before eating."

³ Jesus answered, "And you, why do you break God's command for the sake of your traditions? ⁴For God commanded: *Do your duty to your father and your mother*, and: *whoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death*. ⁵ But you say that anyone may say to his father or mother: 'I cannot help you for I have kept all I possess for the Temple.' ⁶ In this case, according to you, this person is free from his duty to his father and mother. And so, you have nullified the command of God for the sake of your traditions.

⁷ Hypocrites! Isaiah rightly prophesied of you when he said: ⁸*This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*. ⁹*The worship they offer me is worthless, for they only teach man-made rules*."

Washing hands and cleanness of heart (Mk 7:14; Lk 6:39)

+ ¹⁰ Jesus then had the people come near him and said to them, "Listen and understand: 'what enters into the mouth does not make a person unclean, but what comes out of his mouth may defile him.'"

¹² After a while the disciples gathered around Jesus and said, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended by what you said?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be uprooted. ¹⁴ Pay no attention to them! They are blind leading the blind. When a blind man leads another, the two will fall into a pit."

¹⁵ Peter said to him, "Explain this sentence to us." ¹⁶ Jesus replied, "Are you still so dull? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach, and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But that which comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and that is what makes a person unclean."

¹⁹ Indeed, it is from the heart that evil desires come – murder, adultery, immorality, theft, lies, slander. ²⁰ These are the things that make a person unclean; but eating without washing the hands does not make a person unclean.

The faith of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7:24)

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Now a Canaanite woman came from those borders and began to cry:

3. Ex 20, 12; 21, 17; Eph 6, 2 8. Is 29, 13; Ps 78, 36 14. 23, 16; Lk 6, 39; Rom 2, 19
19. 1 Cor 5, 10; 6, 9; Eph 3, 3; Col 3, 5; 20. 1 Tim 1, 9; 2 Tim 3, 2; Rev 21, 8; 22, 15
22. 9, 27; 20, 30; Mk 10, 47

+ See commentary on Mk 7:14.

All societies have felt the necessity of separating good from evil, but they have done so according to human criteria. Jesus judges that criteria.

For the Jewish people, the worship of God was everything and they felt very much concerned about exactly who and what things were worthy of being part of this worship. Thus they made a distinction between the clean and the unclean. Jesus shows that true purity does not depend on external conditions. People become unclean not because of *what goes into them*: food, money, social relationship, religious rites... but by *what comes out of them*: good intentions that produce good feelings and actions.

We live in a different world. Modern societies worship money and operate according to laws imposed by money. Advertising and experience show that only the rich are treated like persons. The poor, the labourers are looked upon as inferior persons and excluded as unclean from whatever "decent" place.

These classist criteria are adhered to not only by the rich. The poor also accept them unwittingly when they strive to appear well-to-do despite their poverty. They are ashamed to do manual work and feel inferior because they live in conditions that society considers as proper for the poor. Jesus would tell modern Christians that they must rid themselves of such thinking before they can bring others to liberation and salvation.



out, "Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³ But Jesus did not answer her, not even a word. So his disciples approached him and said, "Send her away: see how she cries out after us."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel."

²⁵ But the woman was already kneeling before Jesus and said, "Sir, help me!" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is not right to throw the children's bread to the dogs." ²⁷ The woman replied, "It is true, sir, but even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus said, "Woman, how great is your faith! So be it as you want." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Second miracle of the loaves

(Mk 7:31)

²⁹ From there Jesus went to the shore of Lake Galilee, and then went up into the hills where he sat down. ³⁰ Great crowds came to him, bringing the dumb, the blind, the lame, the maimed, and persons with many other infirmities. The people carried them to the feet of Jesus, and he healed them. ³¹ All were astonished when they saw the dumb speaking, the lame walking, the maimed healed and the blind able to see; so they glorified the God of Israel.

³² Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "I am filled with compassion for these people; they have already followed me for three days and now have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away fasting, or

they may faint on the way." ³³ His disciples said to him, "And where shall we find enough bread in this wilderness to feed such a crowd?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They answered, "Seven and a few small fish."

³⁵ So Jesus ordered the people to sit on the ground. ³⁶ Then he took the seven loaves and the small fish and gave thanks to God. He broke them and gave them to his disciples, who distributed them to the people.

³⁷ They all ate and were satisfied, and the leftover broken pieces filled seven wicker baskets. ³⁸ Four thousand men had eaten, not counting the women and children. ³⁹ Then Jesus sent away the crowd, got into the boat and went to Magdala.

The Pharisees ask for a sign

(Mk 8:11; Lk 11:16; 12:54)

16 ¹ The Pharisees and Sadducees appeared. They wanted to put Jesus to the test and asked him for some heavenly sign.

² Jesus answered, "(When evening comes, you say: 'It will be a good day for the sky is red.' ³ And in the morning you say: 'Stormy weather today, for the sky to the east is red.' Hypocrites! If you know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, why can you not interpret the signs of the times?) ⁴ What an evil and adulterous generation! They ask for a sign, but no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah."

So Jesus left them and went away.

27. Lk 16, 21

28. 8, 10; 8, 13; 9, 29

4. 12, 38; Jn 6, 30; 1 Cor 1, 22; Mt 12, 39; Lk 11, 29

30. 5, 1

32. 9, 36; 14, 14

1. 19, 3

o They asked for some heavenly sign. They want a miracle that would be undoubtedly the work of God.

No sign will be given to them. Jesus refuses to prove his authority by multiplying miracles. People who love truth and seek what is right will

recognize the seal of God in the deeds of Jesus – and of his followers, no matter how many speak ill of them.

The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus (see 12:40). Yet this resurrection which is the most decisive sign, will be understandable only

■ ⁵ When the disciples went to the other side, they saw they had forgotten to take bread. ⁶ It was then that Jesus said to them, "Beware and do not trust the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ⁷ And the disciples said to one another, "He means the bread we did not bring."

⁸ Jesus was aware of this, so he said to them, "You of little faith! Why do you speak about the bread you haven't got?" ⁹ Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many wicker baskets were filled with what was left?

¹¹ How can you fail to understand that I was not talking of bread when I told you: Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees?" ¹² Then they understood that he was not talking of yeast for bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Peter's faith; Jesus' promises (Mk 8:27; Lk 9:18; Jn 6:69)

◆ ¹³ After that Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi. He asked his disciples, "What do people say of the Son of Man? Who do they say I am?" ¹⁴ They said, "For some of them you are John the Baptist, for others Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ Jesus asked them, "But you, who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "You are a happy man, Simon Barjona, for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you but my Father in Heaven."

¹⁸ And now I say to you: You are Peter (or *Rock*) and on this rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of the netherworld overcome it.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and what you unbind on earth shall be unbound in Heaven."

19. 18, 18; Rev 3, 7

to the believers. Thus people who demand miracles before they will believe, receive no answer.

■ *Beware of the Pharisees' yeast:* see on Mk 8:11.

The apostles could not understand that they should worry more about sin than about lack of bread; neither can we.

◆ One parable of the Kingdom of God already foretold the Church (Mt 13:31-33). This present text openly refers to the Church.

- It tells us what its foundation is: faith in Jesus, the Christ and Son of God.
- It focuses on the primacy of Peter among all the apostles.
- It suggests that the Church will always need a visible head. This is the successor of Peter, the Pope.

Faith in Christ, the Son of God, which Peter is among the apostles, the first to proclaim, really comes from God. This faith is not a human opinion, or a sentimental attachment. It does not come from *flesh and blood*, an expression which for the Jews meant what is purely human, what a human being does and understands from his own capacity. And the words by which Jesus greets Peter, *happy are you, Simon*, are true for

all the believers. For it is *the Father* who has chosen us and has brought us to Christ: see John 6:37; 6:44.

Then the primacy of Peter is emphasized. We address him as Peter (that means Rock, or Stone), in spite of the fact that his name was Simon. Jesus upon meeting him (Jn 1:40), gave him this surname of Rock, foreseeing that he would be for his Church a foundation rock. Other texts attest to the leadership and faith of Peter: Mt 10:2; 14:28; 17:25; Lk 5:8-10; 22:32; Jn 6:68 & 22:15-19.

But what Jesus tells Peter, is it true also of his successors? No one can deny that even in the Old Testament God wanted his people to have a visible head. Jerusalem and the nation had as their center the Temple and the kings, sons of David. When God chose David, the first king of Israel, he promised him that his sons would rule the Kingdom of God forever: this promise was fulfilled in Christ. Now Jesus chooses Peter to be forever the visible foundation of the building. In the future his successors will be the visible head of the Church in the same way that Peter was in the early Church.

Obviously, for the Church to continue through the centuries it must necessarily have

²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Jesus predicts his death

(Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22; 12:9; 14:27)

+ ²¹ From that day Jesus Christ began to make it clear to his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem; he would suffer many things from the Jewish authorities, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. He would be killed and be raised on the third day.

²² Then Peter took him aside and began to reproach him, "Never, Lord! No, this can never happen to you."

²³ But Jesus turned to him and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You would have me stumble. Your thoughts are not from God but from man."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For he who chooses to save his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life for my sake will

find it. ²⁶ What will a man gain by winning the whole world if he destroys himself? There is nothing he can give to recover his own self.

²⁷ Know that the Son of Man will come in the Glory of his Father with the holy angels, and he will reward each one according to his deeds. ²⁸ Truly, I tell you, some of you will not die before they see the Son of Man coming as king."

The transfiguration of Jesus

(Mk 9:2; Lk 9)

17 ¹ Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John, and led them apart up a high mountain. ² Jesus' appearance was changed before them: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became bright as light. ³ Then Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter spoke and said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. If you so wish, I will make three tents:

20. 17, 9; Mk 9, 9	21. 17, 12; 20, 17; Lk 2, 38; 13, 33	24. 10, 38; Lk 14, 27
25. Lk 17, 33; Jn 12, 25	26. 4, 8	27. 25, 31; 2 Thes 1, 7; Ps 62, 13; Ps 28, 4; Rev 22, 12
28. 10, 23; 20, 21	1. 2 Pet 1, 17; 4, 8; 28, 16	2. 28, 3

some persons in authority to determine who belongs and who do not belong to the body of the believers; how to understand the faith and the demands of the Gospel. For the Jews, to bind and to unbind meant to state what is forbidden and what is allowed. This is the duty of Peter and his successors. In spite of the fact that as men they can commit mistakes, Christ does not like to ignore what they ultimately decide on: *what you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.*

But, in acknowledging this special mission, we do not say that the Pope's preaching should silence other voices in the Church, or that his authority requires a strongly centralized Church. Peter is the *doorkeeper* (Mk 13:34) but not the *Master or the Father* (Mt 23:9).

The powers of the netherworld. These are forces at the service of the devil which keep the world under the power of sin and death. They cannot overcome one who seeks shelter in the Church. And no matter how they try to crush the Church, they will not prevent her from fulfilling her salvific mission. This confrontation is described in Rev 12:17.

The fact that Peter is the foundation of the

Church does not contradict other verses which say that its basis are the Twelve Apostles (Eph 2:20 and Rev 21:4). They also receive the power to bind or loose in Jn 20:21, but in this case it refers to the forgiveness of sins which is needed to maintain communion among the believers.

There are more words of Christ directed to Peter: Lk 22:31; Jn 21:15.

Upon reading the narratives in Mk 8:27 & Lk 9:18, some questions regarding Peter's faith arise: see commentary on Lk 9:18.

Jesus, Rock and Foundation: Mk 10:12; 1 Cor 3:11; 1 Pet 2:6.

+ See commentary on Mk 8:31.

Who could accept that Jesus would ultimately be defeated? Yet to defeat the power of the devil there is no other way but through self-sacrifice.

Get behind me, Satan ... When Peter stands in front of Jesus to block the way to the cross, Jesus recognizes in his words the same spirit that tempted him in the desert. And Jesus calls him Satan, meaning tempter. Let Peter get behind Jesus and follow him as is proper for a disciple.

■ See commentaries on Mk 9:2; Lk 9:28.

one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

⁵Peter was still speaking when a bright cloud covered them in shadow, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, my Chosen One. Listen to him."

⁶On hearing the voice, the disciples fell to the ground, full of fear.

⁷But Jesus went near, touched them and said, "Stand up, do not be afraid."

⁸When they raised their eyes, they no longer saw anyone except Jesus.

⁹And as they came down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had just seen, until the Son of Man be raised from the dead.

¹⁰The disciples asked him, "Why do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹And Jesus answered, "Elijah must come first to set everything as it has to be. ¹²But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they did not recognize him but treated him as they pleased. And they will also make the Son of Man suffer."

¹³Then the disciples understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist.

Jesus heals an epileptic boy

(Mk 9:14; Lk 9:37)

◆ ¹⁴When they met up with the people, a man approached Jesus,

◆ See commentary on Mk 9:14.

○ Several times Jesus announced his death: see 16:21; 20:17. Never did he present it as a misfortune that could counteract his mission. Neither can we see it as passive resignation, for he accepted it from the beginning, in fact, he even looked for it as the means for giving glory to his Father and reconciling humankind. Jesus speaks of himself in the third person: *the Son of Man*, because he looks at his destiny as an outsider. This is the will of his Father, and he is not concerned about himself.

■ All the Jews paid a tax for the main-

knelt before him and said, ¹⁵"Sir, have pity on my son who is an epileptic and is in a wretched state. He has often fallen into the fire and at other times into the water. ¹⁶I brought him to you, disciples but they could not heal him."

¹⁷Jesus replied, "You, faithless and evil people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me."

¹⁸And Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave the boy, and the boy was immediately healed.

¹⁹The disciples then gathered around Jesus and asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive out the spirit?" ²⁰Jesus said to them, "Because you have little faith. I say to you: if only you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you would tell that mountain to move from here to there, and the mountain would obey. Nothing would be impossible to you. ²¹Yes, only prayer and fasting can drive out this kind of spirit."

○ ²²While Jesus was in Galilee, with the Twelve, he said to them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, ²³and they will kill him. But he will rise on the third day." So they were deeply grieved.

The Temple tax

■ ²⁴On returning to Capernaum, the Temple tax collectors came to

5. Ex 40, 35; Mt 24, 30; Dt 18, 15; Is 42, 1; Mt 12, 18;	Mk 1, 11	10. 16, 14; Mal 3, 23; Sir 48, 10
12. 16, 21; 17, 22	17. Dt 32, 5	20. Lk 17, 6; 1 Cor 13, 2
13. 11, 14; Lk 1, 17	24. Ex 30, 13	
22. Mk 9, 30	23. 16, 21; 17, 12; 20, 17	

tainance of the Temple.

The collectors approach Peter as owner of the house where Jesus also lives. But they are not sure what answer Jesus will give and are somehow ashamed to confront him about taxes. Besides, if these collectors are honest and faithful Jews, they are personally interested in knowing what Jesus thinks of this religious duty.

Jesus observes the Law, but takes this opportunity to give a hint as to who he is: the collectors do not realize they are addressing "the Son." Notice how the Lord has control over all creatures even fish, and see also his intimate solidarity with Peter.



Peter and asked him, "Does your master pay the tax?" ²⁵ He answered, "Certainly."

Peter then entered the house, but immediately Jesus asked him, "What do you think, Simon? Who pay taxes or tributes to the kings of the earth: their sons or the foreigners?" ²⁶ Peter replied, "The foreigners." And Jesus told him, "The sons, then, are tax-exempt. ²⁷ But so as not to offend this people, go to the sea, throw in a hook and open the mouth of the first fish you catch. You will find a coin in it, take it and you have to pay for you and for me."

Who is the greatest? Scandals

18 ¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"

² Then Jesus called a little child, set him in the midst of the disciples, ³ and said, "I assure you that unless you change and become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven. ⁴ Whoever makes himself like this child is the greatest in the

kingdom of Heaven, ⁵ and whoever receives such a child in my name receives me.

⁶ If anyone should cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble and fall, it would be better for him to be thrown into the depths of the sea with a great millstone around his neck.

⁷ Woe to the world because of so many scandals! These scandals necessarily come, but woe to the one who causes others to fall!

⁸ If your hand or foot drags you into sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with your two hands and two feet. ⁹ And if your eye drags you into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to be thrown into the fire of hell with your two eyes.

¹⁰ See that you do not despise any of these little ones, for I tell you: their angels in Heaven continually see the face of my heavenly Father.

¹¹ (The Son of Man has come to save the lost).

1. Lk 22, 24

2. 19, 14

3. Mk 10, 15;

Lk 18, 17; Jn 3, 5

4. 20, 26

5. 10, 40; Lk 10, 16; Jn 13, 20

7. Lk 17, 1

10. Acts 12, 15; Heb 1, 14

♦ THE LITTLE ONES

For commentary on the first paragraph of this page, refer to Mk 9:33.

Later, Jesus passes from the *children* to the *little ones*, that is, simple people. They are little, because they do not count for much in society, and because their faith is more sincere than that of people of a higher economic level.

Jesus thinks about those who make little ones fall either deliberately or through their bad example, because influence, money or power enable them to exert pressures upon the poor.

Jesus also speaks (v. 7) of the harm caused by social pressures. Many times the little ones strive to raise their standard of living and become more self-reliant, better educated and to earn more. But, often enough, society puts obstacles in the way of anyone who does not want to play dirty and who refuses to imitate the lifestyle of selfish persons. Because of this, the *little ones* will have to give up, to accept failure, to lose an eye before losing the most important thing,

which is to live in the sight of God.

It is better for you to enter life without a foot. Jesus stresses the incomparable value of eternal life. Our destiny is won in this life, and there will be no other place between the Kingdom of God and the final condemnation. At times, to gain the Kingdom we will have to sacrifice even our job, our security and our life.

Woe to the world, because of so many scandals. Sometimes it is an individual who leads others to sin; at other times it is society itself with its corruption, violence and unjust social structures. Jesus invites us to be aware of sin, personal and social.

Woe to the world, because the bad structures will be destroyed, no matter how, by tears and blood (Lk 23:28). Woe to man, because everything will be accounted for (see also Mt 26:24).

These scandals necessarily come. Jesus lived in a world of violence but, apparently, he did not complain about the situation. He did not

o ¹² What do you think of this? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains to go and look for the stray one? ¹³ And I tell you: when he finally finds it, he is more pleased about it than about the ninety-nine that did not get lost. ¹⁴ For your heavenly Father will not have one of these little ones lost.

Living together in the church (Lk 17:3)

■ ¹⁵ If your brother has sinned against you, go and speak to him alone, and if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ If he does

not listen to you, take with you two or three others so that *the case may be decided by the evidence of two or three witnesses*. ¹⁷ If he still refuses to listen to them, inform the assembled church about him. But if he does not listen to the church, then regard him as a pagan or a publican.

¹⁸ I say to you: whatever you bind on earth, Heaven will keep bound; and whatever you unbind on earth, Heaven will keep unbound.

¹⁹ In like manner, I say to you: if on earth two of you are united in asking for anything, it will be done for them by my heavenly Father. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there in their midst."

12. Ezk 34, 1; Lk 15, 3	15. Lk 17, 3	16. Dt 19, 15; Jn 8, 17; 2 Cor 13, 1; 1 Tim 5, 19
17. 1 Cor 5, 11; Tit 3, 10	18. 16, 19	19. 7, 7; 21, 22; Mk 11, 24; Jn 15, 7
		20. 28, 20; Jn 14, 23

encourage us to dream of a paradise on earth. While some Christian communities aspire to be a flock of sheep meekly surrounding their shepherd, Jesus has a different vision of Christian life.

The real world, the one created by God and which he is saving, was not created to be an oasis of happiness, but a place where free persons grow through their struggles. Scandals are part and parcel of this world, but the power of evil does not diminish in any way the glory that God will receive in the end. Through suffering and hunger for justice God will awaken love and make it grow.

o The parable of the *one hundred sheep* is also found in the gospel of Luke (Lk 15:1). It teaches us several things: Jesus' special concern for sinners and those who stray, and, therefore the missionary dimension of his apostolate. In fact, Jesus came "to seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10), "to call the outcasts, not the respectable people" (Mt 9:13). This attitude should impel our parishes and Christian communities to constantly reach out to the unchurched and far away, instead of just working with those who already are in touch with the Church.

THE CHURCH AS SACRAMENT OF GOD

■ If your brother has sinned ... Jesus had told Peter before: Whatever you tie on earth will be tied in Heaven. He declares it now for the whole Church. The believers must attempt to settle their cases among themselves first, before going to legal arbiters (1 Cor 6:1).

Gathered in the name of Jesus. The prayer of the community, of the apostolic group, of the Christian couple. It is necessary to arrive at

deep understanding among ourselves before we present our common desire to God.

Generally people seek God in temples, or in the contemplation of nature, or in peace of soul. But God wants us to first seek his presence in the Christian community. He is present when we gather to pray "in the name of Jesus." He is present in the development of the community in its crises, in its problems. He is present in the history of the Church.

While we participate in the common activities, overcoming unavoidable conflicts, and persevering in apostolic work, we grow as children of God in truth, thus knowing the Father in truth. The Church, therefore, is that sacred place where we find God, and to express this reality we say that the Church is "the sacrament of God."

We also speak of several "Sacraments": Baptism, Eucharist ... Some people want to receive the sacraments without having any commitment to the Church; they forget that baptism and religious rites are sacraments and confer the grace of God because they are gestures of the Church, which is "The" sacrament of God. God is not contained inside things, but rather reveals himself through the family of Christ, where he wants us to find him: Whatever you tie on earth... Our faithfulness within the Christian community, even if we have to dissent from it, is a sign that we are in the grace of God.

+ *Seventy-seven times.* Compare with Gen 4:24. Forgiveness must replace the thirst for revenge.

This is about the forgiveness of one who returns repentant: see Lk 17:1. The text of 18:15 is doubtful. Perhaps it was written if your

+ ²¹ Then Peter asked him, "Lord, how many times must I forgive the offenses of my brother? Seven times?"

²² Jesus answered, "No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

The unmerciful servant

o ²³ This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven. A king decided to settle the accounts of his servants. ²⁴ Among the first ones brought was one who owed him ten thousand pieces of gold. ²⁵ As the man had nothing to repay him, the king commanded that he be sold as a slave with his wife, children and all his goods as payment.

²⁶ The official threw himself at the feet of the king and said, "If you give me time, I will pay back everything to you." ²⁷ The king took pity on him and not only set him free but even cancelled his debt."

²⁸ This official then left the king's presence and he met one of his companions who owed him a hundred pieces of money. He grabbed him by the neck and almost strangled him, shouting, "Pay me what you owe!" ²⁹ His companion threw himself at his

feet and asked him, "If you give me time, I will pay back everything to you." ³⁰ The other did not agree, but instead sent him to prison until he had paid back all his debt.

³¹ The others saw what happened. They were indignant and so they went and reported everything to their lord. ³² Then the lord summoned his official and said, "Wicked servant, I forgave you all that you owed when you begged me to do so. ³³ Should you not have had pity on your companion as I had pity on you?" ³⁴ The lord was now angry, so he handed his servant over to the court until he had paid all his debt."

³⁵ Jesus added, "So will my heavenly Father do with you unless each of you sincerely forgives his brothers."

Jesus speaks about divorce

(Mk 10:2; Mt 5:31; Lk 16:19)

19 ¹ When Jesus had finished teaching this, he left Galilee and went to the province of Judea, beyond the Jordan River. ² A great crowd followed him, and there too he healed their sick.

21. Lk 17, 3

Eph 4, 32; Col 3, 13

23. 25, 19

27. Lk 7, 42

34. 5, 25; Lk 12, 58

35. 6, 15; Mk 11, 15;

brother has sinned, go talk ... In which case it would refer to the effort of the Christian community to correct one who has gone astray.

o THE PARDON

The offenses we suffer from our companions are nothing compared with our offenses towards God. And while God *forgives all*, we do not even give others some breathing space. God does not demand his rights, but we, in demanding them behave like *wicked servants* (see Mt 5:43).

This parable goes beyond personal problems. The world needs above everything else the forgiveness of God, and those who want a more just society will not achieve it through accusations and hatred.

The parable helps us understand much better another verse in the Bible: *Revenge is mine, says the Lord; I will pay each one according to his own conduct*. God will not demand an account regarding his own rights, (what we owe

him), but regarding the rights of the *little ones* who, unable to pay, were deprived. And he will also demand an accounting regarding those who were sorry for their sins, but were not forgiven by others.

The fourth Discourse of Matthew's Gospel ends with this parable on the duty to forgive. The Church has not always been as holy as she should have been. And yet nobody could deny that, at all times, in the Church the mercy of God has been preached and people have learned to forgive.

◆ See commentary on Mk 10:2; Mt 5:31.

For the Christian, total faithfulness is not servitude, because Jesus came to give us the spirit which makes us able to fulfill the law.

Jesus, who did not marry and who never knew woman, manifested throughout his life what the law of married spouses should be: faithfulness, understanding, love, sacrifice for each other (Eph 5:22). Without this spirit, the



³ Some Pharisees approached him. They wanted to test him and asked, "Is a man allowed to divorce his wife for whatever reason?"

⁴ Jesus replied, "Have you not read that in the beginning the Creator *made them male and female*,⁵ and he said: *Man has now to leave father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one body?*⁶ So they are no longer two but one body; let no one separate what God has joined."

⁷ They asked him, "Then, why did Moses command us to write a bill of dismissal in order to divorce?"⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses knew your stubborn heart, so he allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not so in the beginning.⁹ Therefore I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, unless it be for infidelity, and marries another, commits adultery."

¹⁰ The disciples said, "If that is the condition of a married man, it is better not to marry."¹¹ Jesus said to them, "Not everybody understands what you have just said, but only those who have received this gift.¹² Some are born incapable of marriage. Others have been made that way by men. But there are others who have given up the possibility of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. He who can accept this, let him accept it."

Jesus and the children

(Mk 10:13; Lk 18:15)

¹³ Then little children were brought to Jesus that he might lay his hands on them with a prayer. But the disciples scolded those who brought them.¹⁴ Jesus then said, "Let them be! Do not stop them from coming to me, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to people such as these."¹⁵ So Jesus laid his hands on them and went his way.

The rich young man

(Mk 10:17; Lk 18:18; 1:33; 22:29)

¹⁶ At that moment, a young man approached him and asked, "Master, what good work must I do to receive eternal life?"¹⁷ Jesus answered, "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Only one is Good. If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments."¹⁸ The young man said, "Which commandments?" Jesus replied, "*Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honour your father and mother, and love your neighbour as yourself.*"

²⁰ The young man said to him, "I have kept all these commandments. what else should I do?"²¹ Jesus answered, "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all that you possess and give

3. Lk 9, 51; 16, 1; Lk 11, 54; Jn 8, 6

9. 1 Cor 7, 10; 5, 32

Lev 18, 5

18. Lk 10, 28; Rom 13, 9; Ex 20, 12

Jn 12, 5; Acts 2, 45; 4, 34; 6, 20; Ps 62, 11

4. Gen 1, 27; 2, 24; Eph 5, 31; 1 Cor 6, 16

14. Lk 9, 47; 1 P 2, 1

19. Lev 19, 18

7. Dt 24, 1

16. 19, 29; Lk 10, 25;

21. Mk 14, 5; Lk 12, 33;

law of God would become a chain for the spouses.

Better not to marry. Jesus does not apologize for these demanding words. He only proposes something more difficult to understand. He praises those who choose celibacy as a way of life for love of the Kingdom. He recognizes, however, that this is a special vocation and grace.

• See commentary on Mk 10:17.

Only one is Good. The man comes to Jesus and Jesus sends him back to the Father, as he

always does. This is a very dangerous distortion – because it is very subtle – of Christian faith: to speak only of Jesus: "Jesus is looking at you.... Jesus loves you.... Jesus is love...." as if we should not live for God. Loving the Father means doing his will and working for his Kingdom, perhaps by taking the path of true poverty. We are not here to seek sentimental consolation by looking at a picture of a green-eyed Jesus very similar to Ramakrishna who saves those who look at him. Let us not wait for Jesus: "to understand us," but let us, instead, try to understand others and give our lives to fulfill the loving plan of the Father, as his Only Son did.



the money to the poor to become the owner of a treasure in Heaven. Then come back and follow me."

²² On hearing this answer, the young man went away sorrowful for he was a man of great wealth.

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I say to you: it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven. ²⁴ Yes, believe me: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven."

²⁵ On hearing this the disciples were astonished and said, "Who, then, can be saved?" ²⁶ Jesus looked steadily at them and answered, "For man it is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

²⁷ Then Peter spoke up and said, "You see we have given up everything to follow you: what will be our lot?"

²⁸ Jesus answered, "You who have followed me, listen to my words: on the Day of Renewal, when the Son of

Man sits on his throne in glory, you too, will sit on twelve thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or property for my Name's sake will receive a hundredfold and be given eternal life. ³⁰ Many who are now first will be last, and many who are now last will be first."

The workers in the vineyard

20 ¹ This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven. A landowner went out early to hire workers for his vineyard. ² The workers accepted the salary offered, a piece of silver for the day, and he sent them to his vineyard.

³ He went out again at about nine in the morning, and as he saw men idle in the square, ⁴ he said to them: 'You too go to my vineyard and I will pay you what is just.' And they went to work.

⁵ The owner again went out at mid-

25. Lk 13, 23

26. Job 42, 2; Gen 18, 14; Lk 1, 37

28. Wis 3, 8; Dn 7, 9; Mt 20, 21; Lk 22, 28;

1 Cor 6, 2; Rev 3, 21

30. 20, 16

2. 20-21, 28

■ THE MASTERS

Many are surprised at this parable. They find it unfair to give the same retribution to everyone, without taking into account the labour and sacrifices of everyone. But they do not grasp the meaning of the parable. Jesus makes a comparison, not of several labourers, but of several groups of labourers. Each group represents a nation or a social class, and while some of them have long ago received the word of God, others have just become believers.

All throughout history, God has been calling different people to work in his vineyard. He called Abraham first and placed his descendants in charge of his work in the world. But that did not make the race of Abraham the owner of the Kingdom of God. God was the owner of the vineyard and they were his labourers.

Later on, during Moses' time, many people of all kinds, together with the descendants of Abraham became the people of Israel. They were convinced that they were the people of God and thus continuously claimed their right to be treated better by God than other people were. God was bound to make the other nations submissive to them. But the vineyard had not

been entrusted to them exclusively.

Then, with the coming of Christ, the Gospel was brought to other nations which were until then pagan. They came into the Church and shaped Christianity. They also claimed to be owners of the Kingdom of God and the Church. Christian colonizers could hardly understand how other people who were newly converted should have the same rights in the Church as they had.

To this day, many families consider themselves catholic by birthright. There are also social groups, generally the wealthy and powerful ones, who are amazed when the Church criticizes their demand for privileges and does not assign them the first benches in the temple. They complain of the Church's treason, for they had always believed that the Church was theirs.

In this parable, Jesus says that people already inside the Church must allow others to come in on equal terms (all receive one silver coin). Let them be happy with the honour of working with Christ. Of course, those who built the chapel are mistaken if they think that they have rights over the community; as the clergy are mistaken when they do not accept the participation of lay persons.

day and at three in the afternoon, looking for more workers. ⁶ Finally he went out at the last working hour and he saw others standing there. So he said to them: 'Why do you stay idle the whole day?' ⁷ They answered: 'Because no one has hired us.' The master said: 'Go and work in my vineyard.'

⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager: 'Call the workers and pay them their wage, beginning from the last and ending with the first.' ⁹ Those who had come to work for the last hour turned up and were given a denarius each (a silver coin). ¹⁰ When it was the turn of the first, they thought they would receive more. ¹¹ But they also received a denarius each. So, on receiving it, they began to complain against the landowner.

¹² They said: 'These last hardly worked an hour, yet you dealt with them as you did with us who endured the day's burden and heat.' ¹³ The owner said to one of them: 'Friend, I have not been unjust with you. Did we not agree on a denarius a day?' ¹⁴ So take what is yours and go. I want to give to the last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Do I not have the right to do as I please with my money? Why are you envious when I am kind?'

¹⁶ So will it be: the last will be first, the first will be last."

Third prophecy of the passion

(Mk 10:32; Lk 18:31)

¹⁷ When Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he took his twelve apostles aside and said to them on the way, ¹⁸ "See, we are going to Jerusalem. There the Son of Man will be given over to the chief priests and the teachers of the

Law who will condemn him to death. ¹⁹ They will hand him over to the foreigners who will make fun of him; scourge him and crucify him. But he will rise on the third day."

The mother of James and John asks for the first seats

(Mk 10:35)

²⁰ Then the mother of James and John came to Jesus with her sons, and she knelt down to ask a favour. ²¹ Jesus said to her, "What do you want?" And she answered, "Here are my two sons. Grant that they may sit one at your right and one at your left when you are in your kingdom."

²² Jesus said to the brothers, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I have to drink?" They answered, "We can." ²³ Jesus replied, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right or at my left is not for me to grant. That will be for those for whom the Father has prepared it."

²⁴ The other ten heard all this and were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵ Then Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and the powerful oppress them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you; whoever wants to be more important in your group shall make himself your servant. ²⁷ And whoever wants to be first must make himself the slave of all. ²⁸ Be like the Son of Man who has come, not to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many."

²⁹ As they left Jericho, a great crowd followed them on the way. ³⁰ Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that

8. Lev 19, 13; Dt 24, 14	16. 19, 30	19. 16, 21; 17, 12; Lk 9, 22; 24, 7; 1 Cor 15, 4
21. Lk 22, 30	22. 26, 39; Jn 18, 11	26. 23, 11; Mk 9, 35
Rom 5, 6	29. Mk 10, 46; Lk 18, 35	30. 9, 27; 15, 22
		28. 26, 28; Phil 2, 7; 1 Tim 2, 6;

o See commentary on Mk 10:35. Compare Mt 20:23 and Mk 10:40.

Jesus was passing by, they began to call out, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"³¹ The people told them to keep quiet. But they shouted even louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"³² Jesus stopped to call them and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"³³ They said, "Lord, open our eyes."

³⁴ Jesus was moved with compassion and touched their eyes. Immediately they recovered their sight and they began to follow Jesus.

Jesus enters Jerusalem

(Mk 11:1; Jn 12:12; Lk 19:12)

21 ¹When they drew near Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage, on the mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ²saying, "Go to the village on the other side, and there you will find a donkey tied up with its colt by its side. Untie them and bring them here. ³If anyone says anything to you, say: The Lord needs

them but he will send them back immediately."

⁴This happened in fulfillment of what the prophet said: ⁵*Say to the daughter of Sion: See, your king comes to you in all simplicity, riding on a donkey, a beast of burden, with its colt.*

⁶The disciples went as Jesus had instructed them, ⁷and they brought the donkey with its colt. Then they threw their cloaks on its back, and Jesus sat upon it.

⁸Many people also spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the ground. ⁹The people who walked ahead of Jesus and those who followed him began to shout: *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna, glory in the highest!"*

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, all the city was disturbed. The people

5. Gen 49, 11; Is 62, 11; Zech 9, 9; Mt 11, 29

9. 1 K 1, 33; 2 K 9, 13; Ps 118, 25; Mt 23, 39

◆ See commentary on Mk 11. Matthew, Mark and Luke place the incident about those selling in the Temple at the time of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. John, on the other hand, situates this event at the beginning of Jesus' mission. It is difficult to determine who is right. Each evangelist groups events according to his own plan, and not always according to the time when it actually happened.

Besides, there are several details in this triumphant entrance of Jesus that remind us more of the Feast of the Tabernacles (which was celebrated in September), than of the days before the Passover:

- The joyous spirit of the people is more appropriate to said feastday, which was the most popular of all.

- The branches and Palms, as in the procession of said feastday, on the way to the fountain of Siloe, while singing Psalms 118: "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!" and shouts of "Hosannah!" (that is: Save us!).

- Mention of the Mountain of Olives, where tents of branches and leaves were erected for the feast.

See, in this respect Za 14 which refers to this feastday (14:16) and foretells the purification of the Temple.

Very possibly, the evangelists placed the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on the eve of the Passover for the simple reason that they only related one trip of Jesus to Jerusalem.

They arrived at Bethphage. The small village of Bethphage was the entrance to the district of Jerusalem towards the east. According to the Law, the Passover should be celebrated in Jerusalem, but the city was not big enough to accommodate more than a hundred and fifty thousands pilgrims for the festival. So it was necessary to enlarge the juridical limits of Jerusalem, embracing therefore some small villages like Bethphage. During those days, Jesus also used to lodge in Bethany (21:17).

You have found praise. These words of Psalm 8 were addressed to God, but Jesus applies them to himself, as he did in some other circumstances.

+ See commentary on Mk 11:15.

Jesus cleanses the Temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Zac 14:21. Malachi 3 also foretold this event: The Lord would come to purify his people and his temple. Jesus comes as a prophet to demand respect for God. Also, as God, he inaugurates the new era of religion in spirit and in truth. That is how John also understood this



asked, "Who is this man?" ¹¹ And the crowd answered, "This is the Prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."

Jesus expels the dealers

(Mk 11:11; Lk 13:35; Jn 2:14)

+ ¹² So Jesus went into the Temple and drove away all who were buying and selling in the temple area. He overturned the tables of the money changers, and the stools of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ And he said to them, "*My house will be called a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a den of thieves.*"

¹⁴ The blind and the lame also came to him in the Temple and Jesus healed them.

¹⁵ The chief priests and the teachers of the Law saw the wonderful things Jesus had just done and heard the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

¹⁶ They became indignant and said to Jesus, "Do you hear what they say?" Jesus answered them, "Yes. Have you never read this text: *From the mouths of children and infants you have found perfect praise?*"

¹⁷ So leaving them he went out of the city and came to Bethany where he spent the night.

Jesus curses the fig tree

(Mk 11:12; Lk 1:6)

■ ¹⁸ On returning early to the city, Jesus felt hungry. ¹⁹ He noticed a fig tree by the road, went up to it and found nothing but leaves. Then he cursed the tree, "May you never bear

fruit!" And immediately, the fig tree withered.

²⁰ When the disciples saw this, they were astonished and they said, "How did the fig tree dry up at once!" ²¹ Jesus told them, "Truly, I say to you: if you had faith and did not doubt, not only could you do what I have done with the fig tree, but you could even say to that mountain: 'Get up and throw yourself into the sea!' and it would be done. ²² Whatever you ask in prayer, full of faith, you will receive."

Jesus' response to the authorities

(Mk 11:27; Lk 20:1)

²³ As Jesus was entering the Temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the Jewish authorities, came to him and asked, "What right have you to do all this? Who gave you this authority?"

²⁴ Jesus answered them, "I will also ask you a question, only one. And if you give me an answer, then I will tell you by what right I do these things. Was John's ministry and baptism from God, or was it merely something human?"

²⁵ They reasoned out among themselves, "If we answer that the baptism of John was from God, he will say: 'Why, then, did you not believe him?'"

²⁶ And if we say: The baptism of John was merely something human, we will turn the people against us, since all hold John as a prophet." ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what right I do these things."

13. Is 56, 7; Jer 7, 11	14. 2 S 5, 8	15. Jn 12, 19	16. Ps 8, 3	19. Lk 13, 6
21. 17, 20; Lk 17, 6; 1 Cor 13, 2; James 1, 6		22. 7, 7; 18, 19; Jn 14, 13		23. Jn 2, 18
25. Jn 1, 6; 3, 27	26. 21, 32	27. Lk 3, 12; 27, 7, 30; 19, 1		

event in Jn 2:21, where he speaks of the new Temple, Christ.

■ This incident helps us understand the strange behaviour of Christ in looking for figs out of season and then cursing the tree as if it were

responsible. Jesus behaved this way for a purpose: to call something to the attention of the apostles, through a teaching method used by the prophets. The fig tree is a figure of the Jewish people, who did not produce the fruits expected by God.



The parable of the two sons

+ ²⁸ Jesus went on to say, "What do you think of this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said to him: 'Son, today go and work in my vineyard.' ²⁹ And the son answered: 'I do not want to.' But later he thought better of it and went. ³⁰ Then the father went to the second and gave him the same command. This son replied: 'I will go, sir.' But he did not go."

³¹ Jesus then asked, "Which of the two sons did what the father wanted?" They answered, "The first." And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you: the publicans and the prostitutes are ahead of you on the way to the kingdom of Heaven. ³² For John came to show you the way of goodness but you did not believe him, yet the publicans and the prostitutes did. You were witnesses of this, but you neither repented nor believed him."

The parable of the tenants

(Mk 12:1; Lk 20)

³³ Listen to another example: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress, built a watchtower, leased the vineyard to tenants and then went to a far country. ³⁴ When the harvest time came, the landowner sent his servants to the tenants to collect his share of the harvest. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his

servants, beat one, killed another and stoned another.

³⁶ Again the owner sent more servants, but they treated them in the same way.

³⁷ Finally, he sent his son, thinking: 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they thought: 'This is the heir. Let us kill him and the property will be ours.' ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do with the tenants when he comes?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will have no mercy on those wicked men and will kill them, and lease the vineyard to others who will pay him in due time."

⁴² And Jesus replied, "Have you never read what the Scriptures say? *The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone. This was the Lord's doing; and we marvel at it.*

⁴³ Therefore I say to you: the kingdom of Heaven will be taken from you and given to a people who will bear fruit.

⁴⁴ (Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and he on whom it falls will be ground to dust.)"

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard these parables, they realized that Jesus was referring to them. ⁴⁶ They would have arrested him but they were afraid of the crowd who regarded him as a prophet.

28. Is 5, 1 31. 22, 6 37. Jn 3, 16
 42. Ps 118, 22; Is 28, 16; Acts 4, 11; 1 P 2, 4-7
 46. 16, 14; 21, 11; Lk 7, 16; Jn 4, 19

38. Gal 3, 16; 4, 7; Heb 1, 2; Heb 13, 12
 43. Acts 13, 5; Rom 11, 11 45. 14, 5; 21, 26

+ This parable refers to the refusal of the chief priests to recognize John the Baptist as a messenger of God.

A good number of sinners were converted by John's preaching, and confessed their sins. Such people were well disposed to receive the message of Jesus which opened for them the Kingdom of God and showed them the true face of God the Father. Because of that, they were ahead of the priests, who were indifferent to

John's call, for they felt neither the desire nor the need to change.

Every parish organizing a mission experiences the same thing: many uncommitted Christians will neither work among the missionaries, nor receive them, believing they do not need conversion.

• THE BANQUET

This parable contains two parts. In the first part, God invites us to a banquet

The wedding feast

(Lk 14:15)

22 ¹Jesus went on speaking to them in parables:

²"This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven. A king celebrated the wedding of his son. ³He sent his servants to call the invited guests to the wedding feast, but the guests refused to come.

⁴Again he sent other servants ordering them to say to the invited guests: 'I have prepared a banquet, slaughtered my fattened calves and other animals, and now everything is ready; come then, to the wedding feast.' ⁵But they paid no attention and went away, some to their fields, and others to their work. ⁶While the rest seized the servants of the king, insulted them and killed them.

⁷The king became angry. He sent

his troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants: 'The wedding banquet is prepared, but the invited guests were not worthy. ⁹Go, then, to the exits of the ways and invite everyone you find to the wedding feast.'

¹⁰The servants went out at once into the streets and gathered everyone they found, good and bad alike, so that the hall was filled with guests.

¹¹The king came in to see those who were at table, and he noticed a man not wearing the festal garment. ¹²So he said to him: 'Friend, how did you get in without the wedding garment?' But the man kept silent. ¹³So the king said to his servants: 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the dark where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

+ ¹⁴Know that many are called, but few are selected."

1. Pro 9, 1-6 3. 21, 34 8. Rev 19, 7 10. 13, 47 12. Rev 19, 8 13. 8, 12; 25, 30; Lk 13, 28

where there is a place for everyone. He has been sending his prophets all through history to preach justice, the mercy of God and trust in him. The Jewish nation, however, did not heed God's call through these prophets and now will give less heed to Jesus. But God's plan will not fail. He will send his apostles to preach the Gospel in foreign nations (*go to the exits of the ways*) so that non-Jews, too, may enter the Church. Some Jews, however, the *selected few* among so *many called*, will be the first members of the Church.

The king celebrates the wedding of his son, Christ, who deserves to be called the bridegroom of humankind (Mk 2:19), because he has become one body with it. All throughout history the Risen Christ gathers together mortal and divided human beings. The Spirit of God will transform and raise them from the dead, so that they may sit at the table of the living, according to the parable.

The only table of Christ that Christians usually know is the Eucharist. But while taking part in it, we must not forget what has been said above. Our meeting in the Mass has to remind us that God calls us to prepare, in our daily lives, for the banquet reserved by him for all humankind. Ours is the task of uniting and reconciling all people.

What if we do not answer? Then, little by little, the life of the Holy and Universal Church will be withdrawn from our assemblies of com-

fortable Christians, and others will be called to take charge of the Work of God: *invite to the wedding*.

The second part of the parable points this out: You Christians, who are already inside the Church, do you wear the new garment – a life of justice, honesty and truthworthiness?

Let us not believe that the surprised guest who was not properly dressed for the occasion was some kind of poor person. No, for it was customary during those times to supply all guests with the robe they should wear at the banquet. This one could have put on the robe but did not, so he had nothing to answer.

o *Many are called* (v 14). Some are disturbed upon reading this: does it mean that only a few persons will be saved?

If we associate this sentence with the first part of the parable, it means that, of those first invited, few will enter the banquet. These guests were the Jews and very few, indeed, entered the Church of Jesus. Interpreted in connection with the second part of the parable, it would mean that few of those entering the Church have the necessary dispositions, so the majority would be condemned at the time of judgement. But this contradicts what was related, because only one of the guests was thrown out.

It is better not to associate this saying too much with the parable of the banquet, because we find it also in other places in the Gospel. Here

Paying taxes to Caesar

(Mk 12:13; Lk 20:20)

¹⁵ The Pharisees withdrew and took counsel on how they could trap Jesus with his own words. ¹⁶ They then sent their disciples with the members of Herod's party for this purpose.

¹⁷ They said to Jesus, "Master, we know that you are an honest man and truly teach God's way: you are not influenced by others nor are you afraid of anyone. Tell us, then, what you think: is it against the Law to pay taxes to Caesar? Should we pay them or not?"

¹⁸ But Jesus understood their evil intent, and said to them, "Hypocrites! why are you testing me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin with which you pay taxes."

They showed him a denarius, ²⁰ and Jesus said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose name?" ²¹ They answered, "Caesar's." Then Jesus replied, "Therefore, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

²² They were greatly astonished at his answer, so they left him and went away.

The resurrection of the dead

(Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27)

²³ That same day, some of the Sadducees came to Jesus. Since they claim that there is no resurrection, they questioned him in this way, ²⁴ "Master, Moses said that if anyone dies without any children, his brother must take the wife and have a child who will be considered the dead man's child. ²⁵ Now, there were seven brothers. The first married a wife, and he died; since he had no children, he

left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second and to the third until the seventh. ²⁷ Then, last of all, the woman also died. ²⁸ Now, in the resurrection of the dead, to which of the seven will she be wife, for all had her as wife?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "You are totally wrong because you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ First of all, in the resurrection of the dead, neither men nor women will marry, but they will be like the angels in Heaven. ³¹ And about the resurrection of the dead, have you never reflected on what God said to you: *'I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob'*? He is God, not of the dead but of the living."

³³ The people who heard him were astonished at his teaching.

³⁴ The Pharisees saw how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, so they agreed to gather around him. ³⁵ One of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to test him with this question, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus answered, "*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.*" ³⁸ This is the first and the most important of the commandments. ³⁹ But after this there is another one very similar to it: *You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* ⁴⁰ The whole Law and the Prophets are founded on these two commandments."

The Messiah Son of David

(Mk 12:35; Lk 20:41)

⁴¹ As the Pharisees were gathered there, ⁴² Jesus asked them, "What do

21. Rom 13, 7

23. Acts 23, 8

24. Dt 25, 5; Gen 38, 8

32. Ex 3, 6

33. 7, 28; 13, 54

37. Dt 6, 5

39. Lev 19, 18; Mt 5, 43; Rom 13, 10; Gal 5, 14; Mt 7, 12

Jesus advises us (as in 7:13) that only a few discover through the Gospel true freedom and new life. Then, are the others saved? Yes and no

because salvation, for Jesus, does not mean to escape from the punishment of hell, but to reach perfection.



you think of the Christ? Whose son is he to be?" They answered, "David's."

⁴³Jesus then asked, "Why did David, inspired by God, call the Christ Lord? For he says in a psalm: *⁴⁴The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right until I put your enemies under your feet.* ⁴⁵If David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

⁴⁶No one could answer him, not even a word. From that day on, no one dared question him anymore.

Do not imitate the teachers of the Law (Lk 20:45; Mk 12:38)

23 ¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

+ ²"The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees occupy the seat of Moses. ³Listen and do all they say,

but do not imitate them, ⁴for they do not practise what they teach. They prepare heavy burdens that are very difficult to carry, and lay them on the shoulders of the people. But they do not even raise a finger to move them. ⁵They do everything in order to be seen by people; so they wear very wide bands of the Law around their necks, and robes with large tassels. ⁶They like to occupy the first places at feasts and reserved seats in the synagogues; ⁷they also enjoy being greeted in the marketplace and to be called 'Master' by the people.

⁸But do not let yourselves be called *Master* because you have only one Master, and all of you are brothers. ⁹Neither should you call anyone on earth *Father*, because you have only one Father, he who is in

42. 2 S 7, 16
Lk 11, 46

44. Ps 110, 1; Acts 2, 34; 1 Cor 15, 25; Heb 1, 13
5. 6, 1; Num 15, 38; Lk 14, 7

3. Rom 2, 17

4. 11, 30;

◆ The fifth Discourse of Matthew's Gospel begins here. We are within a few days of Jesus' departure from this world, and he is looking at the course his Church will follow in history. He points to two events:

The first will be fairly soon: the Church, just born, is to face strong opposition from the Jewish powers, especially the Pharisees. Then, she must follow her own road and depart from the Jewish communities. This is the substance of chapter 23.

The second event will take place at the end of history: the Judgment of God. This is presented in chapter 25.

Chapter 24 deals with both events.

+ RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES

Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, to which the priests and those in charge of religious activities belonged. He did not, likewise, belong to any religious association, as the Pharisees did. He stood among common people, watching the behaviour of the chiefs and of the educated society.

Jesus was critical of the Pharisees (Mk 8:11). In disclosing their failures, he warned beforehand the authorities of the Church and any group pretending to be the best, or the most aware, or the most prepared, or the most efficient in the Church. The Pharisees wanted to be, and were somehow, the most instructed and the most efficient among the Jewish believers.

The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees occupy the seat of Moses. The Gospel says it

with more precision: *they have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.* Ironically this line means that their authority comes from God somehow, but in fact they strived strongly to win it. Matthew, in writing these words of Jesus, wants to preserve in the Church fundamental equality. It is the community which enjoys the Holy Spirit, and the heads or *doctors* will have no authority unless they are deeply rooted in the community's life.

Do what they say. The bad example of the authorities does not discredit the word of God. Nor does it lessen the principle of authority. What discredits and lessens it is a pretense at being superior to others.

Then Jesus speaks of the form of authority.

Do not let yourselves be called Master or Father. In fact, the title is not the most important thing. One can be called simply "brother" or "companion," and demand the blind obedience which is due only to God.

They do everything in order to be seen. The teacher is also human and a sinner, so he can easily neglect the words of God that require from him a true, interior conversion. Then he may pay more attention to external things which are easy to accomplish for one whose life is comfortable, as happens with many ministers of religion. Such were the Pharisees who loved money, but were severe with the common people who did not know or fulfill all the religious rules.

The heads of the Church serve only in the name of Jesus. They have authority as the



Heaven. ¹⁰Nor should you be called *Teacher*, because Christ is the only *Teacher* for you. ¹¹Let the greatest among you be the servant of all. ¹²For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be made great.

Seven woes for the Pharisees (Lk 11:39)

o ¹³Therefore, woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You close the door and prevent people to enter the kingdom of Heaven. You neither enter nor allow those who were entering to do so.

¹⁴Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! ¹⁵You travel by sea and land to win a pagan, yet once he is converted, you turn him into a son of hell, much worse than yourselves.

¹⁶Woe to you, blind guides! You say: To swear by the Temple is not binding, but to swear by the treasure of the Temple is. ¹⁷Blind fools! Which is of more worth? The gold in the Temple or the Temple which makes the gold a sacred treasure? You say:

¹⁸If anyone swears by the altar, he is not bound; but if he swears by the offering on the altar, he is bound. ¹⁹Blind men! Which is of more value: the offering on the altar or the altar which makes the offering sacred? ²⁰Whoever swears by the altar is swearing by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹Whoever swears by the Temple is swearing by it and by God who dwells in the Temple. ²²Whoever swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it.

²³Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You do not forget the mint, anise and cummin seeds when you pay the tenths of everything, but then you do not fulfill what is most important in the Law: justice, mercy and faith. These you must put into practice, without neglecting the others. ²⁴Blind guides! You strain a mosquito, but swallow a camel.

²⁵Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You fill the plate and the cup with theft and violence, and then pronounce a blessing over them. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! Pu-

11. 20, 26

12. Lk 14, 1; 1, 52; Lk 22, 26; Job 22, 29; Pro 29, 23; Ezk 21, 31; Lk 14, 11

16. 15, 14; Rom 2, 19

20. Ex 29, 37

22. 5, 33

23. Lev 27, 30; Mi 6, 8; Am 5, 21

25. Mk 7, 4

apostles had, to safeguard the faith and shepherd the sheep. If Jesus commanded the Israelites to listen to the successors of Moses, how much more are we to listen now to the successors of the apostles. These cannot renounce their authority under pretense of humble service, to become the executors of the will of the majority. For their service is precisely to serve and to command.

The Church must remain, however, a community of free persons, who express themselves with frankness and retain the right to criticize even the highest authority.

Authorities in the Church must not obscure the *only father* and they are not exempt from listening sincerely to their brothers and sisters, in order to discern manifestations of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church. The Church would be sinning if it regarded its bishops and apostles according to the "cult of personality" with which human societies affirm the power of their leaders.

o *You close the door to the Kingdom of God* (v. 13). Let us remember that the *Kingdom of Heaven* means the Kingdom of God. These teachers close the path to true knowledge of God the Father, and the way to freedom and confidence which is proper for the children of God. How can we forget that even in the Church, teachers sometimes developed a way of religious education that primarily urged moral behaviour and the performance of civic duties instead of awakening in Christian people the desire for more instruction in the faith, more personal contact with the word of God, more apostolic creativity. How many millions of Christians lived with scruples, fear and human traditions!

You say: To swear by the Temple (v. 16-22). Jesus refers to common practices in his times. Some teachers found ways to circumvent certain oaths. In that manner, clever people could swear falsely and deceive their opponents by swearing firmly without promising much.

rify the inside first, then the outside too will be purified.

²⁷ Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs beautiful in appearance, but inside there are only dead bones and uncleanness. ²⁸ In the same way you appear as religious men before people, but you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness within.

◆ ²⁹ Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of holy men. ³⁰ You say: Had we lived in the time of our fathers, we would not have agreed when they killed the prophets. ³¹ So, you yourselves confess to be sons of

those who murdered the prophets. ³² And now, finish off what your fathers have begun!

³³ Serpents, race of vipers! How can you escape condemnation to hell? ³⁴ From now on, I will send you prophets, wise men and teachers, but you will behead and crucify them, and flog others in the synagogues or drive them from one city to another.

³⁵ Because of this you will be accountable for all the innocent blood that was shed on the earth, from the blood of upright Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berachiah, whom you murdered by the altar within the Temple. ³⁶ Truly, I say to you: the present generation will pay for all this.

27. Acts 23, 3
35. 10, 23; 27, 25; Gen 4, 8; Heb 11, 4; Rev 16, 6

28. Lk 16, 15

32. Acts 7, 52

33. Lk 3, 7

34. 1 Thes 2, 15

THE DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

How could Jesus call such men hypocrites when they were so versed in the knowledge of the Holy Bible?

In the language of Jesus, the word "hypocrite" does not only mean to appear to be what one is not, but, more than anything else, it refers to him who makes fun of the things of God and who causes loss of respect for them. Not all the Pharisees were hypocrites, of course, but Jesus attacks their institution: it was a bad tree (Mt 15:13). Why? Because it was an elitist group, a group that felt themselves to be better than the rest, the group of the "defenders of the faith."

The mystery of God is so deep that no man can present himself as his lieutenant. When our time comes to serve him we should do it with humility, knowing that our way to serve him and to sacrifice ourselves for him is not free from mistakes that may cause some loss or respect for the things of God. The Pharisees practised, taught, and won new followers to the faith, but they did not notice that they nullified all they did because of their pride and their love for money; they did not develop a spirit of the poor nor did they give to God the key to their heart.

One who stays away from sinners and the humble, stays away from the mercy of God and from God himself.

THE PROPHETS

◆ On one side, the *Prophets*, on the other, those who *kill the Prophets*; and they kill the prophets to defend religious institutions!

We need religious institutions like the parishes, the schools, the apostolic groups to keep

ourselves on the right path. These institutions, however, while helping us to live with faith, excuse us from making great efforts. So we easily accustom ourselves to live according to the norms of "conventional" and "comfortable" Christianity.

The best among us want to respond with more generosity to the calls of God, but they know that the group gathered in this or that institution and parish is not ready to go beyond the safe paths or to accept risks.

As soon as they try a new way, our conscience feels tormented because it becomes clear that until then we had been living a life of half-lies and mediocrity. Then we can listen and change or we can also oppose. This is how the very institutions of the Church often ignore the prophets, that is to say, those who have heard the call of God. However, after fifty or a hundred years, everybody will honour him who was rejected in his own day.

The Jewish people, cornered by foreign pressure, closed ranks around the Temple, the religious practices and the association of the Pharisees. Moved by fear, the Jews did what any other society would do when threatened: they became fanatical conservatives. They felt secure with the institutions that God gave them. (It is the same thing we now observe in so-called fundamentalist groups.)

As for the chiefs and defenders of the faith, they were not ready to listen. It was one thing to honour past prophets and keep the Holy Scriptures but quite another thing to accept criticisms that God gave them in those days, not written in books, but spoken by a carpenter, Jesus.

So they let the hour pass in which God *visited!*

+ ³⁷ Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You murder the prophets and stone those sent to you by God. How often would I have gathered your children, yet you refused! ³⁸ Now you will be left with an empty Temple. ³⁹ I tell you that you will no longer see me until you say: "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

The ruin of Jerusalem and the end of the world

(Mk 13; Lk 21; 17:23; 12:36)

•24 ¹ Jesus left the Temple and as he was walking away, his disciples came to him and pointed out the imposing Temple buildings. ² But he said, "You see all this? Truly I say to you: not one stone will be left upon another here. All will be thrown down."

³ When Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and asked, "Tell us when this will take place. What signs will be given us before your coming and the end of history?"

⁴ Jesus answered, "Be on your guard and let no one mislead you. ⁵ Many will present themselves as *the Saviour*, and say: 'I am the Messiah,'

and they will deceive many people. ⁶ You will hear about war and threats of war, but do not be troubled, for it is not the end yet. ⁷ Nations will fight one another, and kingdom oppose kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in several places, ⁸ but all these will be like the first pains of childbirth.

⁹ Then they will arrest you, and they will torture and kill you. All nations will hate you for you bear my name. ¹⁰ In those days, many will stumble and fall; they will betray one another and become enemies. ¹¹ Besides, false prophets will appear and mislead many people.

¹² And because of such great wickedness, love will grow cold in many people. ¹³ But the one who holds out to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ This Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world for all the nations to know; then the end will come.

¹⁵ When you see *the idol of the invader set up in the Temple* according to what the prophet Daniel foretold (may the reader understand!), ¹⁶ then let those in Judah flee to the mountains.

¹⁷ If you are on the housetop, do not

37. Lk 13, 34; Jer 7, 14; 1 K 9, 7; Tob 14, 4; Ezk 11, 23; Mk 11, 10	39. Ps 118, 25	2. Lk 19, 44
3. 13, 39	5. Jn 5, 43	8. Jn 16, 21; Rom 8, 22; 1 Thes 5, 3; Rev 12, 2
11. Lk 18, 8; 2 Thes 2, 3	14. 28, 19; 10, 18; Rom 10, 18	9. 10, 17; Jn 16, 2
17. Lk 17, 31		15. 1 Mac 1, 54; 6, 7; Dn 9, 27

them, and went on a road that brought their nation to ruin. Henceforth they could find God neither in their books nor in the Temple of Jerusalem *left empty* (like in Ezk 8) and there would be no other intervention of God to restore and gather the Jewish people until the day that they would recognize Christ.

The example of the Jewish nation must serve as a warning to us. We also shall be lost, if we remain too attached to the past; if we refuse to build a poorer church, more demanding, less worried for its own security than for the salvation of the world.

+ What aggressiveness in the words of Jesus! Jerusalem had been destroyed in the year 587 b.c. If we read the prophets, we find that Jerusalem's destruction was a punishment for its crimes. Now, Jesus announces another destruc-

tion, that will be a punishment for bloodshed, the blood of the prophets, the blood of Christ, the blood of the first Christians killed by the Jews.

Jesus came to gather the scattered children of Israel, but they did not recognize the hour in which God visited them. The presence of God would abandon them to reside among the converted pagans as happened in the past (Ezek 8).

◆ With reference to this great discourse see commentary on Mk 13.

For the Jews of Jesus' time, to announce the destruction of the Temple (that had just been reconstructed more beautifully and luxuriously) was a subversive thing to do, for the whole nation lived only for the Temple; so, the closest friends of Jesus question him in private (v. 3).

They have two questions: *when will this happen? When will the end of history be?* The



come down to take anything with you.¹⁸ If you are in the field, do not turn back to fetch your cloak.¹⁹ How hard it will be for pregnant women and mothers nursing their babies!²⁰ Pray that it may not be in winter or on a sabbath when you flee.

²¹For this will be a time of great trial as never known from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be known again.²² And if that time were not to be shortened, no one would survive. But God will shorten it for the sake of his chosen ones.²³ Then, if anyone says to you: 'Look! The Messiah is here! He is there!' do not believe it.²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders able to deceive even God's chosen people, if that were possible.²⁵ See, I have told you everything ahead of time.

²⁶ So, if anyone tells you: 'He is in

the desert,' do not go. If they say: 'He is in such a secluded place,' do not believe it.²⁷ For the coming of the Son of Man will instead be like the lightning which flashes from the east even to the west.²⁸ And you know the saying: 'Wherever the body is, the vultures will gather.'

The coming of the Son of Man (Mk 13:28; Lk 17:29)

²⁹ For later, after that distress, *the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall out of the skies, and the whole universe will be shaken.*³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heaven: *as all the nations of the earth beat their breasts, they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with divine power and the fulness of Glory.*³¹ He will send his angels to sound the trumpet and gather the

21. Dn 12, 3; Jl 2, 2; Rev 7, 14

24. 1 Jn 2, 18; Dt 13, 2; 2 Thes 2, 9; Rev 13, 13

28. Lk 17, 37

29. Am 8, 9; Is 3, 10; Ezk 32, 8; Jl 3, 4

30. 1 Thes 3, 13; 2 Thes 2, 1; 2 P 3, 4; Rev 6, 12; Zech 12, 10;

Rev 1, 7; Dn 7, 13

31. Is 27, 13; 1 Cor 15, 52; 1 Thes 4, 16

apostles confuse somewhat the 2 questions, but Jesus makes a clear distinction:

In paragraph 24, 4-28 Jesus speaks of the *days of anguish* (21 & 29), that will conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem which the listeners of Jesus will witness. It will be possible to run away before the disaster occurs (15-20). It will be a time for evangelization, a time for persecutions and for Christians' testimony before the Jewish and pagan worlds (9-14). The Jewish people who did not recognize Jesus as their Saviour, will let other saviours, or messiahs, stir them up against the Romans.

In paragraph 26-28. Jesus shows that this general confusion about the true saviour is very far moved from what will happen when he returns at the end of time.

In paragraph 29-31 Jesus talks about his glorious coming. Then Jesus reasserts two things: the events and signs which refer to the end of Jerusalem will take place in the present generation (32-35). But the *day of Jesus* (36 & 42) will come much later.

The comparison of the *two men* (or *women*) working together means that, upon the coming of Jesus, the Judgement will take place, then there could be a separation within the same social or family group: some headed towards the Lord, others to be condemned (37-41).

How is it that Jesus related the destruction of

Jerusalem to the end of time? Simply, because each event concludes one phase of Holy Scripture.

First, we have the time of the Old Testament. God taught the people of Israel and nurtured their development in order that their history and experiences might serve as a model for other peoples. At the end of this period, Jesus came during a national crisis, to help this people take a definite step, in a situation where people were engaged in more and more violent and divisive antagonisms. Jesus preached the Gospel to them: "Believe or die." A minority believed but the nation perished.

Then the message was brought to other nations and thus began the era of the New Testament. The Church became the educator of all nations who had to mature as a people and as Christians. When the world has reached a certain stage (as in the case of the Jewish people), the Church will also have a new awareness of what the Gospel means for humankind and will have it as the centre of all her teachings and actions. Amid a crisis, universal this time, in which all humankind will be submerged in violence and hatred, a new era of intense evangelization will take place with reconciliation as its main theme: "Believe or perish." This will be the time when the New Testament and history will be fulfilled: with the coming of Jesus.



chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other.

³² Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches become tender and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. ³³ In the same way, when you see all that I have told you, know that the time is near, even at the door. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away.

³⁶ But as for that day and that hour, no one knows when it will come, not even the angels of God nor the Son, but only the Father.

³⁷ At the coming of the Son of Man it will be just as it was in the time of Noah. ³⁸ In those days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, and marrying, until the day when Noah went into the ark. ³⁹ Yet they did not know what would happen until the flood came and swept them away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Of two men in the field, one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Of two women grinding wheat together at the mill, one will be taken and the other left.

Be on the alert

⁴² Stay awake, then, for you do not know on what day your Lord will

come. ⁴³ Just think about this: if the owner of the house knew that the thief would come by night around a certain hour, he would stay awake to prevent him from breaking into his house. ⁴⁴ So be alert, for the Son of Man will come at the hour you least expect.

⁴⁵ Imagine a faithful and wise servant whom his master has put in charge of his household to give them food at the proper time. ⁴⁶ Fortunate indeed is that servant if his master on coming finds him carrying out his duty. ⁴⁷ Truly, I say to you, his lord will entrust him with everything he has.

⁴⁸ Not so with the bad servant who thinks: My master is delayed. ⁴⁹ And he begins ill-treating his fellow servants while eating and drinking with drunkards. ⁵⁰ But his master will come on the day and at the hour he least expects. And he will dismiss that servant. ⁵¹ His lot will be with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The ten bridesmaids

(Mk 13:35; Lk 13:25)

25 ¹ This story throws light on what will happen in the kingdom of Heaven. Ten bridesmaids went out with their lamps to receive the bridegroom. ² Five of them were careless while the others were foreseeing.

31. Is 27, 13; 1 Cor 15, 52; 1 Thes 4, 16	34. 10, 23; 16, 28	36. Acts 1, 7; 1 Thes 5, 12
37. Gen 7	39. James 5, 7; 2 Pet 3, 4; 1 Jn 2, 28	40. 25, 13
Rev 3, 3	45. Lk 12, 43	47. 19, 28; 13, 42
		1. Lk 12, 35

■ FAITHFULNESS

The following three parables present three aspects of God's judgment. The first one is addressed to the members of the Church.

The kingdom of God is compared to a wedding, in which some young girls are chosen to form part of the entourage. Like them, we have also been selected by God to prepare for the wedding of the Lord Jesus with humanity.

The girls were ready for the wedding, but Jesus delays, and time passes by. The sleep which takes possession of the girls is not the

result of negligence on their part but it simply means that the time when they could have entered without problems was over. We, likewise, when we began our journey in faith, could not foresee that we would meet trials. Young people do not believe that some day it will cost them everything to remain faithful to their commitment. They do not realize that, as time goes by, their attitudes and obedience to the faith will change.

The careless ones did not take extra oil. They did not think of building up their lives, or surrendering themselves; nor did they make the

³The careless bridesmaids took their lamps as they were without providing extra oil. ⁴But those who were foreseeing, brought with their lamps flasks of oil. ⁵As the bridegroom delayed, they all grew drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶But at midnight, a call rang out: 'The bridegroom is here, come out and meet him!' ⁷All the maidens woke up at once and trimmed their lamps. ⁸Then the careless ones said to the sensible ones: 'Give us some oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹The provident ones answered: 'There may not be enough for both you and us. You had better gone to those who sell and bought some.'

¹⁰They had gone to buy it when the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him to the wedding feast, and the doors were shut.

¹¹Later the rest of the maidens arrived and called out: 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' ¹²But he answered: 'Truly I do not know you.'

¹³So, stay awake, for you do not know the day or the hour."

The parable of the talents

(Lk 19:12; Mk 4:25; 13:34)

¹⁴"Imagine a man who, before going abroad, summoned his servants to entrust his property to them. ¹⁵He gave five talents of gold to the first, then two to the other, and one to the third, each one according to his ability; and he went away.

¹⁶He who received five talents did business with the money and gained another five. ¹⁷The one who received two did the same and gained another two. ¹⁸But the one with one talent dug a hole and hid his master's money.

¹⁹Long after, the master of those servants returned and asked them for reckoning. ²⁰The one who received five talents came with another five talents, saying: 'Lord, you entrusted me with five talents, but see I gained five more with them.' ²¹The master answered: 'Very well, good and faithful servant; since you have been faithful in a few things, I will entrust much more to you. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²²Then the one who had two ta-

10. Rev 19, 7

12. Lk 13, 25

13. Mk 13, 35

14. Mk 13, 34

20. 18, 23

commitments that would allow them to endure. The oil for the flame is lacking; so also is the giving of oneself and of everything one has: faith, hope and love are like the fire that fades away when there is nothing left to burn.

I do not know you. Neither baptism nor a period of fervent devotion are of value to us, if afterwards we are content with a life of routine religious practices. The Lord demands faithfulness and perseverance of those he has chosen: this is how we save a world which seeks everywhere for truth, and does not know to which Lord to surrender.

o TO WORK – TO TRUST ONESELF

During the time of Jesus, a talent was a coin worth thirty kilograms of precious metal but in this parable, when Jesus spoke of talents he meant the abilities given by God to each of us. Since then, people came to understand the word *talent* in this sense.

The way to wait for the Kingdom is to work for it to be realized. The servant who hid his talent represents the lazy or the indifferent person who

considers faith as a family inheritance, or the coward who never dares to take initiatives that would be helpful for everyone. God needs the cooperation of all of us.

We build by our faith, by our work, by our capacity to understand others, but what we build on earth is not definitive and so God says: *I will entrust you with more.* The justice of the kingdom and the dignity of man will be different and likewise the wealth that is to be distributed. We work in little, and God will establish us in plenty.

You knew that I reap where I have not sown. Apparently God is represented here as a hard master who takes advantage of his servants. But when God demands something from us, is it because he lacks something or because he wants us to surpass ourselves? God does not tolerate mediocrity. This demanding master does not oppress people, as atheists want us to believe, but rather he spurs them to action.

To trust God is also to trust oneself. God has given me many qualities and abilities for the good of others and whenever I accept responsibilities without fear of criticism or failure, he will entrust me with more, because there are many.

lents came and said: 'Lord, you entrusted two talents to me; I have two more which I gained with them.'

²³ The master said: 'Well, good and faithful servant; since you have been faithful in little things, I will entrust you with much more. Come and share the joy of your master.'

²⁴ Finally, the one who had received a talent came and said: 'Master, I know that you are an exacting man. You reap what you have not sown and gather what you have not invested. ²⁵ I was afraid, so I hid your money in the ground. Here take what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master replied: 'Wicked and worthless servant, you know that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not threshed. ²⁷ Then, you should have deposited my money in the bank, and you would have given it back to me with its interest on my return.'

²⁸ Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the other who has ten. ²⁹ For to him who is productive, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but he who is unproductive, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰ As for that useless servant, throw him out into the dark where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The last judgement (Lk 9:26)

◆ ³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on the throne of Glory. ³² All the nations will be brought before him, and as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ so will he do with them, placing the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ The King will say to those on his right: 'Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. ³⁶ I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you went to see me.'

³⁷ Then the upright will ask him: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food; thirsty and give you drink, ³⁸ or a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to see you?' ⁴⁰ The King will answer, 'Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to one of the least, to my brothers, you did it to me.'

⁴¹ Then he will say to those on his

24. Jn 4, 37
34. Lk 22, 30; Rom 8, 17; Eph 1, 4
41. 7, 23; Mk 9, 48; Rev 20, 10

29. 13, 12

32. Zech 14, 5;

Rev 3, 21; 20, 11

33. Ezk 34, 17; Lk 12, 32

35. Is 58, 7

40. Pro 19, 17; Mk 9, 41; Lk 10, 16; Acts 9, 5

who do not use their talents. It is possible that in the future I may be entrusted with work for which I am not qualified. But if those who were qualified ran away, then: *take away from him the talent and give it to another person.*

◆ THE JUDGMENT OF NON-CHRISTIANS

How will God judge the 1 billion Chinese, officially atheist? And what about the 800 million Hindus, and the Muslims and all the others who have not heard about Jesus? We know that Christians are a minority in the world. As we do now, the Jews thought about the majority of people in the world who were not among the Chosen People and did not know about God or

his promises. The Jews envisioned a huge multitude, ready to "devour them," a restless world where God should one day impose His law. They used to call them: the nations.

Jesus answers these fears in the last parable of the Gospel of Matthew, saying that he will return as King of all the nations. All those who, without knowing Christ, have shared in the common destiny of humankind, will be judged by him. In fact, he never abandoned them, but placed at their side "those little ones who are his brothers," as his representatives.

Who are these less important ones? Christians who live among pagans? Or perhaps, the less important ones of all kinds whom we find in all sectors of society? Yet Jesus is present



left: 'Cursed people, go away from me into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels!

⁴²For I was hungry and you did not give me anything to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me into your house; I was naked and you did not clothe me; I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

⁴⁴They, too, will ask: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or a stranger, sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵The King will answer them: 'Truly, I say to you: whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, who are my brothers, you did not do to me.'

⁴⁶And these will go into eternal punishment, but the just to eternal life."

26 ¹When Jesus had finished all he wanted to say, he told his disciples, ²"You know that in two

days' time it will be the Passover and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

³Then the chief priests and the Jewish authorities gathered together at the palace of the High Priest whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they agreed to trap Jesus and kill him. ⁵But they said among themselves, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uprising among the people."

The anointing at Bethany (Jn 12; Mk 14:9)

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman came up to him carrying a precious jar of expensive perfume and she poured it on Jesus' head. ⁸Seeing this the disciples became indignant, protesting, "What a useless waste!" ⁹The perfume could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."

¹⁰But Jesus was aware of this, so

41. 7, 23; Mk 9, 48; Rev 20, 10 46. Dn 12, 2; Jn 5, 29 1. Ex 12, 1 | 3. Jn 11, 47; Acts 4, 25 | 7. Lk 7, 3

through them in the most indifferent and unbelieving environments, and people are judged by the way they have cared for these little ones.

See, Christ reveal the innumerable human deeds that have built what is best in our civilization, and people brought before him, look with amazement at the God whom they loved or despised in the person of their neighbour. Although the majority of them never thought of the afterlife, the Kingdom of God is presented to them with its only law: Love.

There is no neutral place. The fire means the torment of those who condemned themselves by closing and freezing their hearts so that they became incapable of love. During their lives, they became indifferent to the misfortune of their rejected and hungry brothers and sisters: now the splendour of God who is love burns and pains them.

What you did to one of my brothers. Jesus talks of looking after our neighbour, be he friend or foe, not of serving the community, or a class, or a nation in general, because a nation or a class or even humankind are just human concepts we have created and which we form and deform according to our ideology. Using these words, we often exclude a group of our brothers, who do not belong to our nation or to our class. On

the other hand, one who really loves, acknowledges his brothers and sisters without giving too much importance to these labels: it is the person who exists and lives for God.

Another insight into the above statement Jesus identifies himself "with the least of our brothers and sisters." On the one hand, there is a mysterious identification between Jesus and all human beings, regardless of their social condition. On the other hand, the least of our neighbours – the forsaken, the suffering and the oppressed – bring a privileged and more radical presence of Christ.

What Jesus says on judging these non-Christian people likewise applies to us. But we would be mistaken if we repeatedly presented this parable as expressing the totality of Christian duties. What the world needs above all is no bread and water and clothing, but the truth and the hope that God entrusted to his chosen people. Christians would be unfaithful to their mission if they confined themselves to merely talking about assistance, housing and such like and forgot what is really life for humankind – first, the knowledge and love of their Lord. He takes to himself everything we do for our brothers and sisters but does not want to be confused with them.



he said to them, "Why are you troubling this woman? What she has just done for me is indeed a good work. ¹¹ You have always the poor with you but you will not have me forever. ¹² And she has anointed my body as a part of my funeral care. ¹³ Truly, I say to you: wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, all over the world, what she has done will be told in praise of her."

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went off to the chief priests and said, ¹⁵ "How much will you give me if I hand him over to you?" They promised to give him thirty pieces of silver, ¹⁶ and from then on, he kept looking for the best way to hand him over to them.

The last supper

(Mk 14:12; Lk 22:7; Jn 13:1)

¹⁷ On the first day of the Festival of the Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and said to him, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?" ¹⁸ Jesus answered, "Go into the city, to the house of a certain man, and tell him: 'The Master says: My hour is near, and I will celebrate the Passover with my disciples in your house.'"

¹⁹ The disciples did as Jesus had ordered and prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰ When it was evening, Jesus sat at table with the Twelve. ²¹ While they were eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you: one of you will betray me."

²² They were deeply distressed and asked him in turn, "You do not mean me, do you, Lord?"

²³ He answered, "He who will betray me is one of those who dips the bread in the dish with me. ²⁴ The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say

he will. But alas for that man who betrays the Son of Man; better for him if he had never been born." ²⁵ Judas, who was betraying him, also asked, "You do not mean me, Master, do you?" Jesus replied, "You have said it."

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said a blessing and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷ Then he took a cup and gave thanks, and passed it to them saying, "Drink this, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ Yes, I say to you: I will not taste the fruit of the vine from now until the day I drink with you new wine in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰ After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "Your trust in me will fail tonight, all will fall. For the Scripture says: *I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.* ³² But after my resurrection I will go to Galilee ahead of you."

³³ Peter responded, "Even though all doubt you and fall, I will never fall." ³⁴ Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you: this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."

³⁵ Peter said, "Though I have to die with you, I will never deny you." And all the disciples said the same.

Gethsemane

(Mk 14:26; Lk 22:39)

³⁶ Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over to pray."

³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he be-

11. Dt 15, 11	15. Jn 11, 57	16. Zech 11, 11;	Gen 37, 28; Mt 27, 3	17. Ex 12, 14	18. Jn 2, 4
23. Ps 41, 10; Jn 13, 18	24. Ps 22; Is 53, 9; Jn 17, 12	26. 14, 19; 15, 36	27. 1 Cor 10, 16		
28. Ex 24, 8; Jer 31, 31; Zech 9, 11; Heb 9, 20	29. Jn 12, 23; 13, 1; 17, 1	31. Zech 13, 7			
35. Jn 11, 16	36. Jn 12, 27; Jn 18, 1	37. 17, 1; Mk 5, 37			



gan to be filled with anguish and distress.³⁸ And he said to them, "My soul is filled with sorrow even to death. Remain here with me and stay awake."

³⁹He went a little farther and fell to the ground with his face touching the earth, saying this prayer, "Father, if it is possible, take this cup away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want."⁴⁰ He went back to his disciples and found them asleep, and he said to Peter, "Could you not stay awake with me for even an hour?"⁴¹ Stay awake and pray, so that you may not slip into temptation. The spirit indeed is eager, but nature is weak."

⁴²He again went to pray and said, "Father, if this cup cannot be taken away from me without my drinking it, let your will be done."⁴³When he came back to his disciples, he found them asleep again, for they could not keep their eyes open.⁴⁴ He left them and again went to pray the third time, saying the same words.

⁴⁵Then he came back to his disciples and said to them, "You can sleep on now and take your rest! The hour has come and the Son of Man is now given over into the power of sinful men."⁴⁶ Get up, let us go. Look: the betrayer is here."

Jesus arrested

◆⁴⁷ Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a mob armed with swords and clubs, who had been sent

by the chief priests and the Jewish authorities.⁴⁸ The traitor had arranged a signal for them: "The one I kiss, he is the man; arrest him."⁴⁹ And he went directly to Jesus and said, "Good evening, Master" and he gave him a kiss.⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Friend! do what you came for." Then they surrounded and arrested Jesus.

⁵¹One of those who were with Jesus drew his sword and struck at the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his ear.⁵² So Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for he who uses the sword will perish by the sword."⁵³ Do you not know that I could call on my Father, and he would at once send me more than twelve legions of angels.⁵⁴ But how would the Scriptures be fulfilled? This is what has to be."

⁵⁵At that moment, Jesus said to the crowd, "Why do you come to arrest me with swords and clubs, as if I were a robber? Day after day I was seated among you teaching in the Temple, yet you did not arrest me."⁵⁶ But all this has come about in fulfillment of what the Prophets said." Then all his disciples deserted him and fled.

Jesus before the Sanhedrin

(Mk 14:53; Lk 28:54)

■⁵⁷ Those who had arrested Jesus brought him to the house of the High Priest Caiaphas where the teachers of the Law and the Jewish authorities were assembled.

39. Heb 5, 7

41. Jn 4, 34; 6, 38; Rom 5, 19; Phil 2, 8

42. Mt 20, 20

44. 6, 13; 2 Cor 12, 8

45. Jn 14, 20

52. Gen 9, 6; Rev 13, 10

53. Jn 18, 36

55. Lk 19, 47; 21, 37; Jn 18, 20

56. Zech 13, 7; Jn 16, 32

◆ See commentary on Mk 14:43.

The kiss of Judas: this was the usual way a disciple greeted his master.

He drew his sword. Peter, like other apostles who had taken part in resistance movements against Roman oppression, had brought swords (Lk 23:38).

He who uses the sword. This sentence does not condemn soldiers and policemen in a world

of violence but Jesus asserts that power does not establish the kingdom of God, nor does it lead to life. It always brings death (one way or another) to him who uses it, even when done out of necessity.

■ We find two accusations against Jesus. The first: *I can destroy* (v. 61) is false in one sense, but it refers to the words Jesus had spoken about replacing the Temple of Jerusalem with another



⁵⁸ Peter followed him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the High Priest; he entered and sat with the guards, waiting to see the end.

⁵⁹ The chief priests and the whole of the Supreme Council needed some false evidence against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. ⁶⁰ But they were unable to find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. ⁶¹ At last, two men came up and declared, "This man said: I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days."

⁶² The High Priest then stood up and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer at all? What about this evidence against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus kept silent.

So the High Priest said to him, "In the name of the living God, I command you to tell us: Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" ⁶⁴ Jesus answered, "It is just as you say. I tell you more: from now on, you will see the *Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Most Powerful God and coming on the clouds of heaven.*"

⁶⁵ Then the High Priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has blasphemed. What more evidence do we need? You have just heard these blasphemous words. ⁶⁶ What is your decision?" They answered, "He must die!" ⁶⁷ They began to spit on Jesus

and strike him, ⁶⁸ saying, "Christ, tell us who hit you."

Peter disowns Jesus (Mk 14:66; Lk 22:56)

+ ⁶⁹ Meanwhile, as Peter sat outside in the courtyard, a young servant-girl of the house said to him, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." ⁷⁰ But he denied it before all, saying, "I do not understand what you are talking about."

⁷¹ And as Peter was going out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and told the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

⁷² Peter denied it the second time, swearing, "I do not know that man."

⁷³ After a little while, those who were standing there approached Peter and said to him, "Of course you are one of the Galileans; your accent gives you away." ⁷⁴ Peter began to justify himself with curses and oaths protesting that he did not know that man. Just then a cock crowed.

⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went away weeping bitterly.

27 ¹ Early in the morning all the chief priests and the Jewish authorities met to look for ways of

58. Jn 18, 15 61. 27, 40; Jn 2, 19; Acts 6, 14
65. Num 14, 6; Err 9, 3; Jer 36, 24; Acts 14, 14

63. Is 53, 7 64. 24, 30; Ps 110, 1; Dn 7, 13
66. Jn 19, 7; Lev 24, 16 69. 26, 34 1. 12, 14

religion centered in his own person (John 2:10) and that was very subversive.

Nothing was more sacred to the Jews than the Temple of Jerusalem, and to attack the Temple was, at the same time, to threaten the position of the priests whose power was based on the fact that they alone could perform sacrificial rites in the Temple. In defending the holy things they were also protecting their own interests.

For the second accusation which is the most important, see commentary on Mark 14:53.

Jesus remained silent. Not out of contempt for those men, who were the religious authorities, but because he saw it was useless to argue with them. He remained silent and felt assured as those who put their cause in the hands of God.

It is just as you say. Perhaps this answer of

Jesus should be translated: "You are the one saying it," which is to say that Jesus did not agree with the terms used by Caiaphas. The expression "Son of God" signified the kings and saviours of Israel, and Jesus is the Son of God in a very different sense. Jesus identifies himself with the prophecy of Daniel 7:13, announcing a Saviour, a Son of Man, who comes directly from God from all eternity.

+ This denial by Peter is most amazing. His friend John is well known in the house of the High Priest and Peter was introduced as his friend (John 18:16). The young girl knows very well who John is and does not say anything, only an ironic word to Peter. Nobody is threatening him, least of all the men; instead they mock him for his provincial Galilean accent, the same as

putting Jesus to death.² They had him bound and led him away to be handed over to Pilate, the governor.

The death of Judas

■³ When Judas, the traitor, realized that Jesus had been condemned, he was filled with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders,⁴ saying, "I have sinned, betraying an innocent man to death." They answered, "What does it matter to us? That is your concern."⁵ So, throwing the money into the Temple, he went away and hanged himself.

⁶ The priests picked up the money, and said, "This money cannot be put into the Temple treasury, for this is the price of blood."⁷ So they agreed to buy the Potter's Field with the money and make it a cemetery for the foreigners.⁸ This is why that place has been called *Field of Blood* until today.

⁹ And what the prophet Jeremiah said was fulfilled: *They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price the sons of Israel set on him.*¹⁰ And they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord commanded me.

Jesus before Pilate

(Mk 15:1; Lk 23:2; Jn 18:29)

¹¹ Jesus stood before the governor who questioned him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "You say so."

¹² The chief priests and the Elders accused him, but he made no answer.¹³ Pilate said to him, "Do you hear all

the charges they bring against you?"¹⁴ But he did not answer even a single question, so that the governor wondered.

○¹⁵ It was customary for the governor to release any prisoner the people asked for on the occasion of the Passover.¹⁶ Now there was a well-known prisoner called Barrabas.¹⁷ As the people had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Whom do you want me to set free: Barrabas, or Jesus called the Christ?"¹⁸ For he realized that Jesus had been handed over to him out of envy.

¹⁹ As Pilate was in the tribunal, his wife sent him this message, "Do not interfere with that holy man. Last night I had a terrible dream because of him."

²⁰ But the chief priests and the Elders stirred the crowds to ask for the release of Barrabas and the death of Jesus.²¹ When the governor asked them again, "Which of the two do you want me to set free?" they answered, "Barrabas."²² Pilate said to them, "And what shall I do with Jesus called the Christ?" All answered, "Crucify him!"²³ Pilate insisted, "What evil has he done?" But they shouted louder, "Crucify him!"

◆²⁴ Pilate realized that he was getting nowhere and that instead there could be a riot. He then asked for water and washed his hands before the people, saying, "I am not responsible for his blood. It is your doing."²⁵ And all the people answered, "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children."

3. Acts 1, 18 5. 27, 24 9. Zac 11, 12 11. 2, 2 14. Jn 19, 9 17. Acts 3, 14

Jesus! But that was enough to make Peter lose his composure.

■ Judas, as soon as he betrays Jesus, disappears from the scene and dies. We do not even know what happened to the thirty coins: See Acts 1:18.

○ According to very old texts of the Gospel of

Matthew the name of the troublemaker was Jesus, his nickname being Barrabas: Pilate proposes to the people a choice between Jesus called Barrabas and Jesus called the Christ.

◆ *Pilate asked for water...* (v. 24). The Jews understood this gesture as a clear expression of his refusal to become the judge or accuser of



⁴⁴ Even the robbers who were crucified with him insulted him.

⁴⁵ From midday darkness fell over the whole land until midafternoon.

⁴⁶ At about three o'clock, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lamma Sabbachthani?*" which means: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' ⁴⁷ As soon as they heard this, some of the bystanders said, "He is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸ And one of them went quickly, took a sponge and soaked it in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave him to drink. ⁴⁹ Others said, "Now, let us see whether Elijah comes to his rescue."

⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

After the death of Jesus

■ ⁵¹ Suddenly the curtain of the Temple sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, rocks were split, ⁵² tombs were opened, and several holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after the resurrection of Jesus, entered the Holy City and appeared to many.

⁵⁴ The captain and the soldiers who guarded Jesus were greatly terrified when they saw the earthquake and all

that had happened, and said, "Truly, this man was Son of God."

⁵⁵ There were also some women who watched from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and saw to his needs. ⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

The burial

(Mk 15:42; Lk 23:50; Jn 19:38)

⁵⁷ It was now evening and there arrived a wealthy man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and the governor ordered that the body be given him. ⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb which had been cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and left. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there in front of the tomb.

The guards at the tomb

⁶² On the following day (the day after the Preparation for the Passover), the chief priests and the Phari-

44. Jn 5, 18; 10, 36; 19, 7
 54. Rev 11, 2; 21, 2; 22, 19
 61. Jn 19, 25

46. Mk 15, 34; Ps 22, 2
 56. Lk 8, 2; 13, 55; 20, 20

51. Ex 26, 3
 58. Dt 21, 22

53. 1 P 3, 19
 59. Acts 13, 29

speaks of wine with bile (a detestable drink) to give us an inkling of all the bitterness that Jesus had to swallow, and also to recall Ps 69:22.

They crucified him with two robbers (v. 38). Perhaps they were, like Barrabas, nationalist terrorists opposed to the Romans. They could have been the companions of Barrabas, and their execution enhanced the favour done to Barrabas. If so, they would have to die along with Jesus instead of Barrabas. They could also have belonged to the group of bandits who assaulted and robbed pilgrims in the hills of Palestine.

This is the king of the Jews (v. 37). For Pilate and the people in general, this expression signified a nationalist leader in the movement for liberation from the Roman yoke.

The Jews are the people of God and the Father arranged that they would be associated,

in a very special way, with the salvation Christ brings. In fact, they were later subjected to many trials and persecutions. Many Jews suffered like Jesus without believing in him, but confident in the promises of God and in the kingdom of Justice. Jesus is really their king.

In Latin, the letters I.N.R.I. (that we read on crucifixes) are the initial letters of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

■ When Jesus rose from the dead some apparitions of dead persons were interpreted as a sign of fulfillment of the Prophecies of Dan 12:2 referring to the Day of Salvation. It also means that Jesus, before his resurrection, descended to the dead. He found the souls of the good people who died before him and were awaiting him in order to enter the presence of God.



sees went to Pilate⁶³ and said to him, "Sir, we remember that when that liar was still alive, he said: I will rise after three days."⁶⁴ Therefore, have his tomb secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal the body and say to the people: He rose from the dead. This would be a worse lie than the first."⁶⁵ Pilate answered them, "There you have the soldiers, go and take all the necessary precautions."⁶⁶ So they went to the tomb and secured it, sealing the stone and placing it under guard.

Jesus appears to the women

(Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1)

28 ¹ After the sabbath, at the appearance of the first star, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to

visit the tomb.² Suddenly there was a violent earthquake: the Angel of the Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb and rolled away the stone from the entrance of the tomb and sat on it.³ His face was like lightning and his garment white as snow.⁴ The guards trembled in fear and became like dead men when they saw the Angel.

⁵ The Angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.⁶ He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him.⁷ Now go at once and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead and is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. This is my message for you."

⁸ They left the tomb at once in holy

4. 17, 2; Acts 1, 10

7. 26, 32; Mk 14, 28; Jn 21, 1

◆ THE RISEN CHURCH

The evangelist mentions the names of Mary of Magdalene and the other Mary, the mother of James the Minor, a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Before they arrived at the tomb, the angel of the Lord had come down: this was a biblical way of saying that a supernatural manifestation had taken place. But of course nobody, not even the guards, saw Jesus coming out of the Tomb. The risen Christ cannot be seen, unless he allows himself to be seen.

The women looking for Christ will see him: the soldiers and chiefs, who did not look for him, will not understand.

Then Jesus met them on the way (v. 9). It is obvious that Matthew is combining two different events: one, the discovery of the empty tomb, and the other, which happened later on, the apparition of Jesus to Mary Magdalene alone as related in John 20:11-18.

Go to Galilee (v. 10). why did Jesus say this date if he was going to appear later that same day in Jerusalem? (Lk 24:13-42). It is not clear and probably the evangelists have combined several apparitions to simplify the description. Anyway, time was needed for the apostles to believe in the Resurrection and understand something about it. After the two apparitions in Jerusalem, in which Jesus tried to convince them that he was not a phantom or a spirit, they would have to return to their provinces and environments, far away from the city that had caused them such trauma, in order to ponder what they had experienced. In Galilee, Jesus will

manifest himself differently, making them understand that he was already glorified, that his existence was earthly no more.

A woman, Mary of Magdalene, conveys the message, in order to indicate that, in the Church, not everything will come from the authorities. God communicates with whomever he wishes, giving prophetic messages to simple people and to women.

The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal point of the Gospel; yet Matthew reports it briefly. Why? Because when Matthew wrote his Gospel, the Resurrection was considered too great an event to put into writing: rather, it should be proclaimed and witnessed to by the Spirit at work in the Christian communities.

Are we in a different situation? The Church that talks of the Risen Christ should never be a powerful Church but a Risen Church. If the Church finds itself in a situation where there is no apparent hope of salvation, and yet, revives by the power of God; if in each generation, the Church seems doomed to die because of its ancient structures, its worldly ways or the persecution it undergoes, but nevertheless is given new energies and new apostles by the Lord, then the Church is a witness that the Lord has risen and has given her the power to rise.

The Christian communities proclaim the resurrection, better when, for instance, they keep on in spite of the fact that their leaders have gone, or their most valuable apostles are opposed by the mediocre and the bad ones; when the community suffers but, in spite of this, does not lose its happiness.

fear, yet with great joy, and they ran to tell the news to the disciples.

⁹ Then, Jesus met them on the way and said, "Peace." The women approached him, embraced his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰ Jesus immediately told them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

¹¹ While the women were on their way, the guards returned to the city and some of them reported to the chief priests all that had happened. ¹² They met with the Jewish authorities and decided to give the soldiers a good sum of money, ¹³ with this instruction, "Say that while you were asleep, his disciples came by night and stole the body of Jesus. ¹⁴ If Pilate comes to know of this, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."

¹⁵ The soldiers accepted the money and did as they were told. This lie has circulated among the Jews until this day.

Jesus sends the apostles

¹⁶ As for the Eleven disciples, they went to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw Jesus, they bowed before him, although some doubted.

¹⁸ Then Jesus approached them and said, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples from all nations. Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teach them to fulfill all I have commanded you. I am with you always until the end of this world."

18, 11, 27; Jn 3, 35; 13, 3; 17, 2; Eph 1, 20; Acts 1, 8

20, Ex 3, 12; Jos 1, 5; Jn 14, 23; 13, 39; 24, 3

● EVANGELIZATION – THE TRINITY

Jesus sent his apostles to evangelize the world. *Although some doubted.* With this, Matthew sums up the last apparitions of Jesus. Not all the disciples of Jesus (the Eleven and the rest) believed so quickly in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Make disciples from all nations. Jesus, following the example of Jewish teachers of his time, gathered around him a group of disciples who lived with him. The teacher knew his disciples and the disciples knew the teacher by sharing everyday life. The same holds true today: evangelization implies interpersonal sharing.

To evangelize means to help someone ponder on his former experiences until he can recognize in the person of Christ, in his death and resurrection, the truth that lights up his own life. That was what Jesus did with his apostles, showing them that the whole Bible, all the past experiences of their race, foretold his death and resurrection. (Lk 24:27; 44).

That is what the Church of today does when she reveals to people the meaning of this world and its tensions: only Christ reveals to us the way towards reconciliation.

Those who believe will be baptized in the one Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the Three Persons Christ taught us about. Of course, he named them separately because the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit; in spite of that the Three are the same God. Upon entering the Church, the baptized will enter into communion with the

Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. The Church is, before anything else, communion.

See Acts 19:6 regarding baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus speaks of his commandments to the Church; but he did not give any other commandments than these, which are precisely designed to promote and sustain life in communion.

I am with you all the days. The first Christian generation thought that Christ would not delay in coming back, but by the time the Gospels were written, they already understood that history had not yet reached its end. Jesus had committed himself totally to the Church of his apostles, just as God, in former times, had committed himself to the children of Israel.

The Catholic Church is different from other Christian churches, because it was founded by the apostles of Jesus. Only she feels obliged to remain united around the successors of the apostles, the bishops; this unity and continuity are at times hard to maintain, especially in situations where it would seem easier to form a new reformed community alongside her. But obedience to the will of the Father is the means by which he purifies and strengthens our faith. Jesus is and remains "Lord" regarding the destiny of "His" Church.

Christ, God and Lord, is with her in the painful and fruitful experiences that he wants her to go through. As a pilgrim Church she moves from century to century till the end of time and the work of salvation.



1 ¹This is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²This beginning had been foretold in the book of Isaiah, the prophet, *"I am sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way. ³Let the people hear the voice calling in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord, level out his paths."*

⁴So John the Baptist appeared in the desert, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵All the people from the country of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to John to confess their sins and be baptized by him in the river Jordan.

⁶John was clothed in camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his

waist. His food was locusts and honey. ⁷He preached to the people saying, "After me there will come one who is mightier than I am; ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. As for me, I am not worthy to bend down and untie his sandals."

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth, a town of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And the moment he came up out of the water, Heaven opened before him and he saw the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. ¹¹And these words were heard from Heaven, "You are my Son, my beloved one, whom I have chosen."

2. Ex 23, 20; Mal 3, 1; Is 40, 3	4. Acts 13, 24; Is 1, 16; 4, 4; Eek 36, 25	5. Lev 5, 5; Ps 32, 5
6. 2 K 1, 8	8. Is 11, 2; Jn 1, 26; Acts 1, 5	9. Mt 3, 13; Lk 3, 21
11. 12, 6; Ps 2, 7; Is 42, 1		10. Is 63, 19; Jn 1, 32

INTRODUCTION

When the apostles first presented Jesus' message to the world, they used the spoken word, proclaiming what they had seen and heard of him. None of them even thought of writing a "Life of Jesus." Perhaps some of them did not even know how to write. Yet, in various places, there appeared written discourses, parables and acts of Jesus.

Mark, who was with Peter and Paul in Rome, put together his Gospel from these accounts, adding many details about Jesus he had received from Peter.

Above all else, the Gospel of Mark shows us a Jesus who acts. It does not speak of Jesus' birth or his life in Nazareth, neither does it contain his long discourses; but he tries to show us Jesus in all his expression.

Jesus is the Son of God. This is confirmed in the first line of the Gospel; and the Roman official who watched Jesus die declares it again in the last page of the Gospel.

But what does this mean, Son of God? The entire Gospel of Mark tries to deal with this question answering it with a narration of Jesus' actions.



¹² Then the Spirit drove him into the desert, ¹³and Jesus stayed in the desert forty days and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, but angels ministered to him.

Jesus calls his first disciples

(Mt 4:12; Lk 4:14)

o ¹⁴ After John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee and began preaching the Good News of God. ¹⁵ He said, "This is the time of fulfillment; the kingdom of God is at hand. Change your ways and believe the Good News."

¹⁶ As Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake for they were fishermen.

¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

¹⁸ At once, they left their nets and

followed him. ¹⁹ Jesus went a little farther on and saw James and John the sons of Zebedee; they were in their boat mending their nets. ²⁰ Immediately, Jesus called them and they followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men.

Jesus teaches and drives out an evil spirit (Lk 4:31; Mt 7:28)

■ ²¹ They went into the town of Capernaum and Jesus began to teach in the synagogue during the sabbath assemblies. ²² The people were astonished at the way he taught, for he spoke as one having authority and not like the teachers of the Law.

+ ²³ It happened that a man with an evil spirit was in their synagogue. ²⁴ and he screamed, "What do you

13. Heb 2, 18; 4, 15; Job 1, 6	14. Jn 3, 24	15. Rom 1, 1; Gal 4, 4; 1 Thes 1, 5; Col 1, 5
16. Lk 5, 1; Jn 1, 40	18. 1 K 19, 19	21. Jn 2, 12
		22. Mt 7, 28; Jn 7, 46
		24. Jn 6, 69; Acts 3, 14

+ Here Mark sums up three important events that are the point of departure for Jesus' preaching and public life.

1. John the Baptist's preaching
 2. Jesus' Baptism by John
 3. The Desert Experience
- See Commentary on Lk 3:4.

o After this desert experience, Jesus returns to his province, Galilee, and establishes himself in Capernaum. Jesus lives in the house of Simon who appears to be already the leader of a group of fishermen and Jesus finds among them his disciples.

What would Jesus say in his first preaching? *This is the time of fulfillment.* Israel's long wait while God's promises were always delayed has come to an end. Jesus affirms that today a new time has begun. *The Kingdom of God is at hand.* There is no more waiting because we are at the threshold; but now, it is we who must take the first steps to enter this new world, a world in which God reigns (see commentary on Matt 5:1).

Believe in the Good News. God has come to us in order to reconcile us. God brings no more laws but only asks us to believe in his words.

Follow me (v. 17) Jesus' first words to his disciples are a call to commit themselves. *And they began to follow him* (1:18) sharing their lot with him, leaving behind their families and work. Jesus, like the religion teachers of his time, teaches them and has them memorize the

teaching which they will pass on to others in the Church.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John: Jesus already knew them, for he had seen them where John preached. They were not idlers but responsible workers who, like many generous youth today, commit themselves fully to a great work.

They did not yet know what the Reign of God would mean but they trusted that Jesus would guide them. This for them was the beginning of faith. "I have much faith," say the people. "I believe that God will protect me, and I believe all will be well." That's all right but it's the same faith that other people of other beliefs have. It is not Christian faith. Christian faith starts when we take seriously Jesus' calling to "follow him," and change our way of life according to his ways.

■ Wherever Jesus goes, he leaves in everyone an impression of strength and confidence. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus preaches in the synagogues. *The synagogue* is the Jewish house of prayer. They gather each Saturday for the chanting of the Psalms and the reading of the Bible. The one in charge preaches and invites others to join. This is where Jesus reveals himself. He is not like the teachers of the Law who repeat, interpret, and give others' opinions. Jesus speaks on his own and he speaks *with authority*, "In truth, I tell you."

+ With the same authority Jesus *drives out demons*. This act also signifies a teaching: Jesus-



want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: You are the Holy One of God." ²⁵ Then Jesus faced him and said with authority, "Be silent and come out of this man!" ²⁶ The evil spirit made the man shake violently and, after giving a loud shriek, came out of him.

²⁷ All the people were astonished and they wondered, "What is this? With what authority he preaches! He even orders evil spirits and they obey him!" ²⁸ And Jesus became famous throughout all the country of Galilee.

Jesus heals many

(Mt 8:14; Lk 4:38)

o ²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, Jesus went to the home of Simon and Andrew with James and John. ³⁰ As Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever, they immediately told him about her. ³¹ Jesus went to her and taking her by the hand, raised her up. The fever left her

and she began to wait on them. ³² That evening just as the sun had set, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had evil spirits. ³³ The whole town was gathered near the door. ³⁴ Jesus healed many who had various diseases, and drove out many demons; but he did not let them speak, for they knew who he was.

Jesus' prayer at night

(Lk 4:42)

+ ³⁵ Very early in the morning, before daylight, Jesus got up and went away to a lonely place where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and the others went out, too, searching for him; ³⁷ and when they found him they said, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Let's go to the nearby villages so that I may preach there also; for that is why I came." ³⁹ So Jesus set out for Galilee where he preached in all the synagogues and cast out demons.

26. Lk 10, 18; Lk 4, 41

29. 9, 2; 13, 3

34. 3, 11; 5, 7

35. 6, 46

38. Jn 18, 37

delivers us from the influence of the Devil, who strives to destroy man created in the likeness of God.

This *Master of this world* (Jn 14:30) is present in the entire human business and culture to deceive human purposes and convert any progress to the cause of a new slavery.

In Jesus' times, but much more rarely in the Church's times (our times), there were some persons possessed by the Devil. This is a slavery and a disease, and Jesus freed quite a number of those persons. But physical possession is not the usual way of the devil's activity in men. The Devil operates (far more dangerously because we do not feel it) in the moral life of people. He blinds and confuses them with regard to the truth, under the disguise of the *angel of light* (2 Cor 11:14).

Not that the Devil is the cause of every sin and evil that people do. There is also the selfishness of our "flesh" and the lure of the false promises of "the world" but the Devil, as enemy of God's kingdom, is never at rest. He is always fostering our temptations. With holier persons who are not easy to tempt in a direct way, he goes about deceiving them: he persuades them to give more importance to their own good purposes than to the advice of others and the teaching of the Church.

The Devil notices at once those who are capable of weakening or destroying his empire. Then he awakens the bad, the mediocre, the foolish and the ill-fated against them. That is why wherever Jesus goes the Devil also appears. This first and impressive encounter with the Devil takes place in the House of Prayer. Actually this is not the first encounter with Evil: (see Mk 1:12). There will be others until the day the Jewish society agrees to eliminate the Son of God.

o Peter's simple faith is manifested. Jesus enters the house, bringing with him peace and health. Jesus shows us how to visit the sick. What a natural thing to do when Mass ends – to go to see the sick. The care and the love of their Christian brothers attracts God's favours upon them.

+ The apostles knew God since childhood through the Bible's teachings; perhaps they had not discovered God within their own lives but prayed to God as to a distant stranger. When they joined Jesus, immediately they understood that there was something extraordinary about him. They were especially taken with his apparent intimacy with God. The most extraordinary thing they noted in his manner and actions was his intimate and faithful union with his Father.

Jesus cures a leper

(Mt 8:2; Lk 5:12)

◆ ⁴⁰A leper came to Jesus and begged him, "If you so will, you can make me clean." ⁴¹Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." ⁴²The leprosy left the man at once and he was made clean. ⁴³As Jesus sent the man away, he spoke strongly to him, ⁴⁴"Don't tell anyone about this, but go and show yourself to the priest and for the cleansing bring the offering ordered by Moses; this will be an evidence for everyone."

⁴⁵However, as soon as the man went out, he began spreading the news everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer publicly enter the town. But even though he stayed in the rural areas, people came to him from everywhere.

40. Lev 13, 45	44. Lev 14	1. 1, 29	2. 3, 20	4. Acts 4, 29; 8, 25	5. Lk 7, 48
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Living with Jesus, they begin to desire to know the Father more fully, a little like Jesus knows Him. (Mt 11:1, Jn 14:8, 15:15).

◆ THE MARGINALIZED

Jesus leaves Capernaum to announce the Good News to the most isolated and ignored families in the open country. There he finds the lepers. Leprosy is not only a grave disease that slowly rots the body but it is also contagious. Because of this, lepers had to live on the outskirts of the towns, far from the population. It was also a worldwide belief that leprosy was an affliction from God, so that the Jewish religion declared lepers unclean.

By Jesus' act, the flesh of the leper becomes clean. This is a true miracle much more important than lowering the fever of Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus achieves something far more important still: the leper is no longer marginalized. From now on, he will be like others and people will no longer avoid him. Both people and the Law of God will acknowledge his dignity.

The Good News does not remain mere words but it effects a change. From now on, they will no longer be marginalized people.

Don't tell anyone (see 5:42; 7:36; 8:26). Jesus invites us to seek the true riches (see commentary on Mt 9:35). But people are more concerned with these marvels than with receiving the Good News. So Jesus reserves himself for those who seek the Truth. Such people recognize him for his unique way of living and

Jesus forgives and cures a paralytic

(Mt 9:1; Lk 5:17)

2 ¹After some days Jesus returned to Capernaum. As the news spread that he was at home, ²so many people gathered that there was no longer room even outside the door. While Jesus was speaking the Word to them, ³some people brought to him a paralyzed man.

⁴The four men who carried him couldn't get near Jesus, so they opened the roof above the room where Jesus was and, through the hole, lowered the man on his mat.

⁵When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralyzed man "My son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶Now, some teachers of the Law who were sitting there wondered within themselves, ⁷"How can he

speaking (Jn 4:48). They pay little attention to his fame and miracles.

Jesus does not want them to call him *Son of God* (1:24; 8:30) because this title can be interpreted in various ways – but none of his contemporaries would give it its true meaning. The apostles will proclaim Jesus as Son of God when his death and resurrection have shown what this means.

○ With this miracle on the paralytic cured and forgiven, Jesus gives three answers at the same time: to the sick man, to his friends and to the Pharisees.

When Jesus noticed the faith of these people. These are the friends of the paralytic who had convinced their companion to go to Jesus, and Jesus rewards their faith.

Apparently, the paralytic did nothing more than consent to their advice. At once, Jesus tells him – *your sins are forgiven*. What a strange thing to say! How can Jesus forgive sins if the man is not conscious of any fault and, at the same time repentant and awaiting forgiveness? Certainly during his long infirmity, the man had asked himself why God was punishing him (the people of his time believed sickness was a punishment from God). Probably he was also aware of some sin that frightened him and while his friends prodded him to seek a cure, he probably doubted that for him there would be a miracle. But he is no sooner in the presence of Jesus than Jesus looks at him and assures him that he is forgiven, which is of more concern to him than



speaking like this? He has no respect for God, because who can forgive sins except God?"

⁸At once Jesus knew in his spirit what they were thinking and asked, "Why do you wonder? ⁹Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man: 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say: 'Rise, take up your mat and walk?' ¹⁰But now you shall know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

And he said to the paralyzed man, ¹¹"Rise, take up your mat and go home." ¹²The man rose and, in the sight of all these people, he took up his mat and went out. All of them were astonished and praised God saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

The call of Levi

(Mt 9:9; Lk 5:2)

■ ¹³When Jesus went out again beside the lake, a crowd came to him and

he taught them. ¹⁴As he walked along, he saw a tax collector sitting in his office. This was Levi, the son of Alphaeus. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵And it so happened that while Jesus was eating in Levi's house, tax collectors and sinners were sitting with him and his disciples – there were indeed many of them. ¹⁶But there were also teachers of the Law of the Pharisees' party among those who followed Jesus, and they said to his disciples, "Why! He eats with tax collectors and sinners!"

¹⁷Jesus heard them and answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

New wine, new skin

(Mt 9:14; Lk 5:33)

◆ ¹⁸One day, when the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees

7. Ts 103, 3; Is 43, 25

8. Mt 12, 25; Jn 2, 25

12. Mt 9, 33

16. Lk 7, 34

17. 10, 45; Jn 9, 39

his physical healing.

Later, the Pharisees arrive. When Jesus forgave the paralytic, the simple people did not realize how scandalous his words were. They did not have enough religious formation to realize immediately that only God could give absolution. It was the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law who were scandalized. Their indignation is justified because neither they, nor the others, nor the disciples yet understand that Jesus is the true Son of God. Jesus silences them: If I restore health in the same way God does, why would I not forgive also in the way God does?

Jesus disconcerts those who ask who he is. Better still, he shows that only he can save the whole person, body and soul.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Happy this man who was assured of his pardon through the glance and the words of Jesus! God is he who lives and loves and we need to meet him so that forgiveness can be true – his eyes meeting our eyes. Because of this God had to make himself man – Jesus forgives sins because he is a son of man (Jn 5:27) and from him we receive the pardon both of God and of men within the Christian community.

PUBLICANS

■ To enter into the family of God, we must

change some of our values. This conversion is not as conspicuous as participation in religious practices but is much more valuable. First, we must liberate ourselves from prejudice which classifies people. Let us stop dividing people into good or bad; those we can greet and those we cannot; those whom we can love and help and those we cannot. Let us learn that God does not hate the rich or the uneducated, those on the left or those on the right. For God's merciful plan sees to the salvation of all.

The Gospel speaks about the *publicans* or the *tax collectors*, who served the foreign powers. For Jesus' nation was under the domination of the Roman Empire and the tax collectors were Jews who worked for foreigners.

Patriots considered them traitors. The people knew they filled their pockets; even the beggars refused to receive from the publicans. Yet Jesus did not condemn them but chose one of them, Levi, as one of his apostles of whom the majority were committed patriots.

The *Teachers of the Law* were like catechists or professors of religion. They were well versed in religion and they admired Jesus' teachings, but they did not consider as brothers the publicans and other sinners (that is to say people who did not fulfill the religious precepts).

Levi is probably the apostle Matthew (Mt 9:9).



were fasting, some people asked Jesus, "Why is it that both the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but yours do not?" ¹⁹Jesus answered, "How can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and on that day they will fast.

²¹No one sews a piece of new cloth on an old coat, because the new patch will shrink and tear away from the old cloth, making a worse tear. ²²Also no one puts new wine into old wineskins, for the wine would burst the skins and then both the wine and the skins would be lost. But new wine, new skin!"

(Mt 12:1; Lk 6:1)

o ²³One sabbath Jesus was walking through some grainfields. As his disciples walked along with him, they began to pick the heads of grain and crush them in their hands. ²⁴Then the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look! they

are doing what is prohibited on the sabbath!"

²⁵And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did in his time of need, when he and his men were very hungry?" ²⁶He went into the house of God when Abiathar was High Priest and ate the bread of offering which only the priests are allowed to eat, and he also gave some to the men who were with him." ²⁷Then Jesus said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is master even of the sabbath."

Cure of the man with a withered hand

(Lk 6:6; Mt 12:9; Lk 14:1)

+3 ¹Again Jesus entered the synagogue. A man who had a paralyzed hand was there ²and some people watched Jesus; if he would heal the man on the sabbath, they could accuse him.

³Jesus said to the man with the paralyzed hand, "Stand here in the centre." ⁴Then he asked them, "What

19. Jn 3, 29; 2 Cor 11, 2 23. Dt 24, 20 26. 1 S 21, 1 Lev 24, 5 27. Dt 5, 14 2. Lk 14,

♦ Many religious leaders sympathized with Jesus. How they would have liked that he rekindle the faith of the nation! But Jesus did not feel that his primary task was to reorganize worship and multiply the devotions.

The Pharisees were fasting. Fasting, a sign of penance and repentance, supported the petitions to God that he come and liberate his people. But God comes in the form of Jesus: Joy and celebration are more appropriate than fasting. The prophets had announced the wedding feast of God with his people when he should come to visit us (Is. 62:4-5). Because of this, in presenting himself as the bridegroom, Jesus identified who he really is.

What is the new wine? It is of course the Gospel, and the intoxication with the Holy Spirit that leads the disciples to every kind of madness to make apparent the love of the Father and the freedom that they have acquired. In order to understand this, let us read the Acts of the Apostles and the lives of the saints, the real saints of course, not sad saints who are false.

Old skins: Those who blindly defend the ways

of their fathers, those who fear the modern world, those who do not try to discover the causes of failure in things for fear that there would be much to change, those who are incapable of acquiring new ideas.

o It was normal that passersby when hungry would pick fruit or wheat. But the Pharisees were scandalized because Jesus' disciples did this on the sabbath, a day when all work was prohibited.

Sabbath was made for man. No law, no matter how holy it is, should be applied in a way that would oppress a person.

The Son of Man is master of the sabbath. For the Jews, the observance of the sabbath was the pillar of the Law, established by God. Why did Jesus think he was?

+ HUMAN ADVANCEMENT AND THE SABBATH

Some ask if Jesus was interested in the material advancement (well-being) of people or only in their spiritual progress. Actually, it is impossible to separate one from the other.

Jesus did not leave specific plans for bettering



does the Law allow us to do on the sabbath? To do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill?" But they were silent.

⁵Then Jesus looked around at them with anger and deep sadness because they had closed their minds. And he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was healed. ⁶But as soon as the Pharisees left, they met with Herod's supporters, seeking how to destroy Jesus.

(Mt 12:15; Lk 6:17)

⁷Jesus and his disciples retired to the lakeside and a large crowd from Galilee followed him. A great number of people also came from Judea, ⁸Jerusalem, Idumea, Transjordan and from the region of Tyre and Sidon, for they had heard of all that he was doing.

⁹Because of the crowd, Jesus told his disciples to have a boat ready for him, to prevent the people from crushing him. ¹⁰He healed so many

that all who had diseases kept pushing towards him to touch him. ¹¹Even the people who had evil spirits, whenever they saw him, would fall down before him and cry out, "You are the Son of God." ¹²But he warned them sternly not to tell anyone who he was.

The twelve apostles

(Mt 10:1; Lk 6:12)

◆ ¹³Then Jesus went up into the hill country and called those he wanted and they came to him. ¹⁴So he appointed twelve to be with him; he also wanted to send them out to preach. ¹⁵And he gave them authority to drive out demons.

¹⁶These are the Twelve: Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter; ¹⁷James, son of Zebedee, and John his brother, to whom he gave the name Boanerges, which means "men of thunder;" ¹⁸Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alpheus, Thaddeus, Simon the Cananean ¹⁹and Judas Scariot, the man who betrayed him.

5. 5, 32 10. 1, 34; Lk 4, 41; 6, 46; 9, 2; 5, 28
 16. Mt 16, 18; Jn 1, 42 17. Lk 9, 54

13. 5, 18

15. Lk 10, 17

the economy, education or the social organization but in this case, as in many others, he attacked the prejudices that prevent us from lifting up our fellow brothers and sisters. This was important to him and was a better way of liberating the human person than by making external changes only which are not accepted by the people.

People, then, have the capacity and the means to better their condition, but they use them poorly because they remain prisoners of principles or institutions that are considered sacred, and in order to respect them, they allow half the world to die.

Jewish law prohibited all work on the Sabbath, because that was the day of the week consecrated by God. Yet the Jews reinforced and added to the prohibitions of past generations, to the extent of not even allowing people to light a fire, or walk more than 1,000 paces or pick wheat, or heal the sick on the Sabbath.

Jesus looked at them with anger. Because God desires to give life. So then the Pharisees and the partisans of Herod unite against Jesus even though they are enemies, because it is not to their best interest that he awaken the people from their passivity.

◆ THE TWELVE

On the one hand are the countless afflicted who seek relief, and on the other is the group of the *Twelve* whom Jesus asks to be his co-builders of the kingdom of God.

What do we know of these twelve who would become Jesus' messengers, the foundations of the Church, the teachers of the faith? The nucleus of the group were fishermen and with them a tax collector, Matthew; a Teacher of the Law, Bartholomew; and some others of whom we only know that Jesus chose them from among the people.

He came in order to save all, but his work began with the poor. Jesus did not belong more to the poor than to the rich but, like all humans, he had to locate himself within a specific environment and social class.

Being a son of an artisan, he grew up among simple, humble people. In addition, Jesus made an important decision when he was eighteen or twenty years old. He chose to remain a manual worker rather than enter a school for Teachers of the Law. For these religious schools were open to all.

Jesus could have begun his preaching as a

The sin against the Spirit

(Mt 12:24; Lk 11:15; Mt 9:34)

o ²⁰When they went home, the crowd began to gather again and they couldn't even have a meal. ²¹Then his relatives came to take him away since people were saying, "He is out of his mind." ²²Moreover, the teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem said, "He is under the power of Beelzebul, the chief of the demons, and he drives out demons in the name of their chief."

²³Jesus called them to him and began teaching them by means of stories or parables, "How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴If a nation is divided by civil war, that nation cannot stand. ²⁵If a family divides itself into groups, that family will not survive.

²⁶In the same way, if Satan has risen against himself and is divided, he will not stand; he is finished. ²⁷No one can break into the house of the Strong one in order to plunder his goods, unless he first ties up the Strong one. Then indeed, he can plunder his house.

²⁸Truly, I say to you, every sin will be forgiven humankind, even insult to God, however numerous. ²⁹But whoever slanders the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven: he carries the guilt of his sin forever. ³⁰This was their sin for they said, "He has an evil spirit in him."

Jesus' true family

(Mt 12:46; Lk 8:19)

■ ³¹Then his mother and his brothers came. As they stood outside, they

20. 2, 2; 6, 31 22. Jn 10, 20 * 27. Is 49; 24; 53; 12 28. 1 Tim 1, 13 31. 6, 3; Jn 2, 12

qualified Teacher and he certainly would have found his helpers among the sincere teachers of the Law, priests or Pharisees of good faith. But no, he preferred to educate himself through the worker's life with no other religious preparation than the teachings of the synagogue, with no other book than the book of life. Because of this, when the time came, he found his apostles among the common people, men who were simple but responsible people.

o *He is under the power of Beelzebul.* More than the healings, the exorcisms unsettled the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law. They, the religious authorities, travelled from Jerusalem to see this Jesus for themselves. The Jews of Jesus' time were obsessed with the belief that illness was a form of possession. Jesus does not concern himself with distinguishing between what is illness or what is possession. Actually, the Devil is behind all of human misery. Beelzebul, the name of an ancient idol, was a Jewish term for the Devil.

Breaking into the house of the Strong one. That Strong one is the Devil and his house is the possessed person. "To plunder the house" is to take away the Devil's power over his victim.

Even insults to God shall be forgiven and Matthew adds: "And the one who speaks against the Son of Man will be forgiven." (Matthew 12:32).

Jesus allows himself to be criticized by those who do not understand him. Many Pharisees of good faith did not understand Jesus and were scandalized by him. This was excusable but it is a different thing to call evil that which is clearly good.

To slander (or: to blaspheme) the Holy Spirit is to attribute to a bad spirit a work that is manifestly good. Those who systematically attribute bad intentions to good work done by others, by the Church, by other parties, sin against the Holy Spirit. The one who recognizes the truth but not God is better off than the one who says he believes in God and does not recognize the truth.

About the exorcisms, Jesus concludes: "The kingdom of God has come." The victory over Satan is won, in reality, day by day. Indeed the members of the Church must demonstrate that where they are, the reign of Evil is disappearing and prejudice, evil, injustices, and slavery are diminishing.

■ Jesus lost his relatives but found his true brothers and sisters. When we commit ourselves to God's work, we discover new brothers and sisters and a mother, Mary, of whom the Gospel says, "Happy are you for having believed that God's promises would be fulfilled." Jesus does not say "He is my father," for the Father is one and He is in Heaven.

THE BROTHERS OF JESUS

The Church never doubted that Mary was a virgin and that Jesus was her only son, as he is the only son of the Father (see Luke's commentary 1:26). Why then does the Gospel speak of Jesus' brothers and sisters?

First, in Hebrew, any relative is called brother or sister. (See Jn 19:25 which mentions a certain Mary sister of Mary the mother of Jesus: If they were really sisters they would not bear the same name.) To avoid confusion the Jews used

sent someone to call him.³² The crowd sitting around Jesus told him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you."³³ He replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"

³⁴ And looking around at those who sat there he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers.³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me."

The sower

(Mt 13:1; Lk 8:4)

4 ¹ Again Jesus began to teach by the lake, but such a large crowd gathered about him that he got into a boat and sat in it on the lake while the crowd stood on the shore.² He taught them many things through stories or parables. In his teaching he said,

³ "Listen! The sower went out to

sow.⁴ As he sowed, some of the seed fell along a path and the birds came and ate it up.⁵ Some of the seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil, and sprang up immediately because it had no depth;⁶ but when the sun rose and burned it, it withered because it had no roots.⁷ Other seed fell among thornbushes and the thorns grew and choked it, so it didn't produce any grain.⁸ But some seed fell on good soil, grew up and increased and yielded grain; some produced thirty times as much, others sixty and others one hundred times as much."⁹ And Jesus added, "Listen then, if you have ears."

+ ¹⁰ When the crowd went away, some who followed him came with the Twelve and asked about the parables.

¹¹ He answered them, "The mystery of the kingdom of God has been

33. Lk 11, 28

2. Mt 13, 34

9. 7, 16; Rev 2, 7

11. Dn 2, 18; Rom 16, 25; Eph 1, 9

some clearer forms. If the Gospel really meant brothers, son of Mary, on mentioning them together with her, it should have said, "Your mother and the sons of your mother are here." This was the only acceptable way of expressing it at that time.

On the other hand, in the first Christian Community, when the Gospels were written, there was a very influential group composed of Jesus' relatives and his countrymen of Nazareth. These were called "Brothers of the Lord" and one of them, James, became bishop of the Jerusalem community. Little is said of this group other than that they were late in believing in Jesus even though he lived with them for several years. (Mark 3:21, John 7:3-5). But upon speaking of them, the Gospel gives them the name the Christian community gave them, "brothers of the Lord" or "so and so, brother of Jesus."

◆ See commentary on Mt 13:1 and Lk 8:4.

Who is Jesus? After attracting so many people to himself, what would he do with them? Jesus would be neither a leader of a revolutionary movement nor a founder of a new religion. He would be the *Sower* of the kingdom of God.

The Jews spoke of the kingdom of God as we would speak of a world of justice and peace. Seeing that their nation was in a highly critical period, the Jews of Jesus' time were convinced that the reign of God would begin as a violent revolution or as a spectacular intervention by

God, destroying the oppressors and punishing the profiteers.

It is true that the world of justice and peace would come. In fact, it is in our midst since the coming of Christ twenty centuries ago, yet it is still but a newly planted field. The Kingdom of God is made up of many things that have grown out of the teachings of Christ – for example, the lives of the saints, the catechism the Church has taught us. We remember also, the many Christian institutions of the past, born out of faith and easy to criticize now, but they have contributed to a better world. From the Gospel also comes the sense of unity, justice, and peace which shakes the world. From it also comes our confidence that we are not totally dependent on nature, that we are not persons subject to blind fate but persons called to build our life with God's blessings. Also, workers and farmers are given a sense of their own dignity and the Gospel gives us the security that history has meaning and that we must conquer all obstacles in the way of universal brotherhood.

All this is born of his words but has had to mature in the hearts of good people.

+ There is a *mystery* about the kingdom of God. Many people do not understand how God directs our lives and earthly events. But after giving the parable to all, Jesus will teach his disciples through the work and experiences of common apostolic life and reveal to them how the Kingdom grows through the Cross.



given to you. But for those outside, everything comes in parables, ¹²according to what is written in Scripture: *These people may look, yet not see; hear, yet not understand; surely they will not change nor receive forgiveness.*"

o ¹³Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables?"

¹⁴What the sower is sowing is the Word. ¹⁵Those along the path where the seed fell, are people who hear the word, but as soon as they do, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

¹⁶Other people receive the word like rocky ground. As soon as they hear the word, they accept it with joy, ¹⁷but they have no roots so it lasts only a little while. No sooner does trouble or persecution come because of the word, than they fall.

¹⁸Others receive the seed as among thorns. After they hear the word, ¹⁹they are caught up in the worries of

this life, false hopes of riches and other desires. All these come in and choke the word so that finally it produces nothing.

²⁰And there are others who receive the word as good soil. They hear the word, take it to heart and produce some thirty, some sixty and some one hundred times as much."

Parable of the lamp

(Mt 10:26; Lk 8:16)

+ ²¹Jesus also said to them, "Whom the light comes, is it to be put under a tub or a bed? Surely it is put on a lampstand. ²²Whatever is hidden will be disclosed, and whatever is kept secret will be brought to light. ²³Listen then, if you have ears!"

²⁴And he also said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear. In the measure you give, so shall you receive and still more will be given to you. ²⁵For to him who produces something, more will be given, and from him who doesn't produce anything, even what he has will be taken away from him."

12. Is 6,9; Jn 12, 39; Acts 28, 26
23. Lk 12, 2 24. Lk 6, 38

13. 8, 17; 6, 52; 7, 18

21. Jn 12, 35; 12, 46

For the outsiders (1 Cor 5:12) who do not share the faith and life of the Christian community, the Gospel remains just a collection of beautiful stories.

Everything comes to them in parables. The Outsiders live in a world of half-truths and they do not see that these truths are relative. Because they do not know themselves, they cannot know clearly the ways of God. While they move in this confused world, God can teach them only with hidden truths and confusing actions. When they hear Jesus' parables, they can gather some meaning from them (Is. 29:14). But Jesus does not allow them to clearly see their meaning because it would be of little help to them.

In fact, many Christian communities never grasp the real meaning of the words of Jesus: Some, because they use some Gospel verses, always the same ones, to justify their own ideas. They do not really want to listen. Others, because they look for practical things: that they be more generous, more patient etc., and they don't see that Jesus wants to show them a vision of the world and Church much wider than theirs.

o See Matthew's commentary on 13:18.

The parable of the Sower heads the other parables. Here Jesus tells us the purpose of his mission: he has come to initiate a new age of the human story: the kingdom of God is now among us.

The seed could be the Gospel word but, also the advice we receive and the suggestions from our conscience are also seeds. Sometimes, it appears that the Gospel does not have much power to transform life; but why have we trampled on so many seeds that the wind has brought us? It all depends on us.

Jesus speaks to us of *thirty and one hundred fold*. The word which is heeded transforms our life and strengthens our attempts to save the world. Who can tell what is possible for a free and liberated person?

+ *Pay attention to what you hear.* Jesus calls our attention, "You waste your time if you only listen to me and do not allow what you hear to bear fruit. The measure that you measure out will be used to measure what you receive. That is to say, if you begin to act according to what you



The seed growing by itself

o ²⁶ Jesus also said, "In the kingdom of God it is like this. A man scatters seed upon the soil. ²⁷ Whether he is asleep or awake, be it day or night, the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how. ²⁸ The soil produces of itself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But as soon as the grain is ripe, the man starts cutting it with a sickle, because harvest time has come."

The mustard seed

(Mt 13:31; Lk 13:18)

■ ³⁰ Jesus also said, "What is the kingdom of God like? To what shall we compare it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed which, when sown, is the smallest of all the seeds scattered upon the soil. ³² But having been sown, it grows up and becomes the largest of the plants in the garden and even grows

branches so big that the birds of the sky can take shelter in its shade."

³³ Jesus used many such stories or parables, to proclaim the word to them in a way they would be able to understand. ³⁴ He would not teach them without parables; but privately to his disciples he explained everything.

Jesus calms the storm

(Mt 8:18; Lk 8:22)

+ ³⁵ On that same day when evening had come, Jesus said to them, "Let's go across to the other side." ³⁶ So they left the crowd and took him away in the boat he had been sitting in, and other boats set out with him. ³⁷ Then a storm gathered and the wind began to blow. The waves spilled over into the boat so that it was already filled with water. ³⁸ And Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

27. James 5:7

29. Jn 4:13; Rev 14:15

32. Dn 4:9

have learned, you will receive from God new strength and new knowledge. But if you do nothing, even your religious beliefs will be of no value to you, not even when you present yourself before God. You who read my Gospel, question yourselves before you follow any further.

Whatever is hidden. The word works within the secret of the heart but when we discover the transformation that is at work in our life, we readily proclaim Christ and make known to others the secret that has made us happy. (Eph 2:4; Col 3:3; Phil 2:10).

o In every period of time, people become impatient. When will the kingdom of Justice be realized? Will violence and corruption soon come to an end? Jesus answers: right now invincible forces are working: the world matures and the Kingdom grows on.

SEEDS

How many seeds are cast to the wind? A new style, a new song, a new device, a radio programme – Some seeds have grown and taken root, producing powerful streams that mobilize people. But let us recognize the humble beginnings of the work of God: goodwilled people meeting together to solve a community problem; a gesture of kindness in a closed unfriendly environment; a first attempt to smile at life after a great disappointment. The seed grows and the person who receives the word is more confident on the path in which God leads him.

■ See Matthew's commentary, 13:31.

+ *Do you still have no faith?* Jesus does not reprimand them for their fear of the storm but for not overcoming their fear. For they, together with Jesus, were working for the kingdom.

Jesus' disciples admired him greatly, as we admire a champion, a leader or a saint. This showed that they did not know him well. But on the night that Jesus confronted the storm, they suddenly saw him as the One whom nature obeyed. From then on, Jesus would remain their teacher and friend, but already doubt entered into their minds: "Who is this?" To whom had they entrusted themselves and where would he take them? They became frightened.

The Apostles, like us, were people of faith who honoured God but who kept him at a distance, because they were not ready to allow God into their daily lives, allowing him to witness their pettiness. They had been afraid to be left alone in the storm, but there was a greater fear on discovering God so near to them. Now we know why Jesus silenced the demons: he wanted to reveal himself gradually. What good would it do to know that Jesus is the Son of God when we are not yet used to living in the presence of God? First, Jesus had to teach them to be true to themselves and before God and then they would not be afraid to have him so close.

This crossing of the sea is an example of what we will all experience if we follow Christ. He

They woke him up and said to him, "Master, don't you care if we sink?"³⁹ As Jesus awoke, he rebuked the wind and ordered the sea, "Quiet now! Be still!" The wind dropped and there was a great calm.⁴⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Why are you so frightened? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹But they were terribly afraid and they said to one another, "Who can this be that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The Gerasenes demoniac

(Mt 8:28; Lk 8:26)

5 They arrived on the other side of the lake in the region of the Gerasenes.² No sooner did Jesus leave the boat than he was met by a man with evil spirits who had come from the tombs.³ He lived among the dead and no one could restrain him, even with a chain.⁴ He had often been bound with fetters and chains but he would pull the chains apart and smash the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him.⁵ Night and day he stayed among the tombs on the hill-sides, and was continually screaming and beating himself with stones.

⁶When he saw Jesus from afar, he

ran and fell at his feet⁷ and cried with a loud voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? For God's sake I beg you, do not torment me."⁸ He said this because Jesus had commanded, "Come out of the man, evil spirit."⁹ And when Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" he replied, "Mob is our name, for we are many."¹⁰ And all of them kept begging Jesus not to send them out of that region.

¹¹Now, a great herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside,¹² and the evil spirits begged him, "Send us to the pigs and let us go into them."¹³ So Jesus let them go and the evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs. These herds rushed down the cliff and were drowned in the lake.¹⁴ The herdsmen fled and reported this in the town and in the countryside, so all the people came to see what had happened.

¹⁵They came to Jesus and saw the man freed of the evil spirits sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very same man who had been possessed by the Mob. They were afraid.¹⁶ And when those who had seen it told what had happened to the man and to

39. 1, 25; Ps 89, 10; 93, 3

3. Is 65, 4; Bar 3, 11

7. 1, 24; 1, 34

10. Mt 12, 45; Lk 8, 2

does not offer us a comfortable, calm life since sooner or later we will have to risk and undertake new things and the storm will come precisely when Jesus "sleeps," that is to say when we feel like we are completely alone. This crisis is precisely the necessary condition by which we arrive at the other shore, in other words, at a stronger, clearer faith.

◆ Jesus had the art of directly approaching the one responsible for the evil – the Devil (Mark 1:23). The Devil enters into the consciousness of the leaders of this world, and he enters into the workings of civilization. Jesus' contemporaries believed that the Devil manifested himself in mental illness. Certainly, they too easily held the Devil responsible for every kind of ailment of the nervous system but, in many cases, like the one above, they were not mistaken.

Jesus casts the demons into the pigs. Jesus sees that they still have some place in this world. This action is costly to the pigherders, but Jesus

values one man more than many pigs.

These herds rushed down into the lake. (See Matthew 8:30 and Luke 8:32) The actual text of Mark says, "two thousand pigs rushed." This is an incredible number, for such large herds of pigs were never seen. But, in Hebrew, the word for *herds* is only distinguished from the word for *2,000* by an accent mark. Probably there was a mistake when Mark's Gospel was written in Greek.

Jesus did not include this man in his group of disciples but sent him on another mission – to his own hometown. Not everyone has the same vocation.

Tell them how much the Lord has done for you. Jesus is in a foreign land. He will not return there. Because of this, he does not fear that his miracle be known. The man will proclaim to the pagans that the Lord, this means the One God honoured by the Jews, was the one who cured him.

the pigs, ¹⁷the people begged Jesus to leave their neighbourhood.

¹⁸When Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to stay with him. ¹⁹Jesus would not let him and said, "Go home to your people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰So the man went throughout the country of Decapolis telling everyone how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were astonished.

Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus (Mt 9:18; Lk 8:40)

+ ²¹Jesus then crossed to the other side of the lake and while he was still on the shore, a large crowd gathered around him. ²²Jairus, an official of the synagogue, came up and as soon as he saw Jesus, threw himself at his feet ²³and asked him earnestly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her so that she may get well and live."

²⁴Jesus went with him and many people followed, pushing from every

side. ²⁵Among the crowd was a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶She had suffered a lot at the hands of many doctors and had spent everything she had, but instead of getting better, she was getting worse. ²⁷Because she had heard about Jesus, this woman came up behind him and touched his cloak ²⁸thinking, "If I just touch his clothing, I shall get well." ²⁹Her flow of blood dried up at once, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

³⁰But Jesus was conscious that healing power had gone forth from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹His disciples answered, "You see how the people are crowding around you. Why do you ask who touched you?" ³²But he kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³Then the woman, aware of what had happened, came forward trembling and afraid. She knelt before him and told him the whole truth.

◆³⁴Then Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in

28. 3, 10; 6, 56; Acts 5, 15; 19, 11

30. Lk 6, 19

+ This woman was considered by the Jews as *unclean* because of her illness (Lev 15:19). She would also make "unclean" anyone who touched her. Because of this she was prohibited by the Law from mingling with others but she dared to enter into the crowd, and touch Jesus' cloak.

Faith drove her to break the Law of "purification," and to risk scandal. This woman did not know who Jesus was but she had faith that God would cure her through him.

The religiosity of this woman is akin to those who practice their faith according to what is called today "popular Catholicism." As seen in this woman, popular Catholicism is ill-instructed, yet shows much religious sense and trust in God. It is superficial and naive, expecting great results when touching images and religious things – Christ's garments in this case. As Jesus did, we should respect the religious expressions of popular Catholicism while at the same time, trying, like him, to help people discover deeper dimensions of their faith.

◆ FAITH AND MIRACLES

Who is responsible for a miracle? Does it come from the faith of the one who asks or is it from Christ who works the miracle? If the miracle depends solely on the faith of persons, then what is the difference between the faithful one who asks God for a cure and the one who goes to any faith healer? In this latter case, it would be enough that one convince oneself and the one actually doing the healing would not matter much.

Of course, these people coming to Jesus were very far from recognizing him as the Son of God, but they were convinced that God would give them some blessing through this prophet and holy man. This faith prepared them to receive healing in both body and spirit. How can God heal those who refuse to hope?

However, what stands out on this page is the power of Christ: *Jesus was conscious that healing power had gone out from him.*

Your faith has saved you. Jesus says, "it has saved" you; not, "it has healed" you. For this



peace and be free of this illness."

³⁵While Jesus was still speaking, some people arrived from the official's house to inform him, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Master any further?" ³⁶But Jesus ignored what they said and told the official, "Do not fear, just believe." ³⁷And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James.

o ³⁸When they arrived at the house, they saw a great commotion with people weeping and wailing loudly.

³⁹Jesus entered and said to them, "Why all this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep."

⁴⁰They laughed at him. But Jesus sent them outside and went with the child's father and mother and his companions into the room where the child

lay. ⁴¹Taking her by the hand, he said to her, "Talitha kumi!" which means: "Little girl, get up!"

⁴²The girl got up at once and began to walk around. (She was twelve years old.) And there was astonishment, very great astonishment. ⁴³Jesus strictly ordered them not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

Is he not the carpenter?

(Mt 13:53; Lk 4:16)

■ **6** ¹Leaving there, Jesus returned to his own country, and his disciples followed him. ²When the sabbath came, he began teaching in the synagogue, and most of those who heard him were astonished. They commented, "How did this come to him? What kind of wisdom has been

39. Mt 27, 52; 1 Cor 11, 30; 15, 6; 1 Thes 4, 13

2. Jn 7, 15

woman had risked all and finally had seen how much God loved her.

o Here Jesus comes in contact with the death of a youth who is called to live. Jairus was ruler of the synagogue, that is to say, one of those holding responsibility in the local Jewish community.

Why trouble the Master any further? We also ask God for healing but we do not dare to ask God to resurrect the dead because we consider death the final and insuperable stage of the human condition. But Jesus wants to show us that, for God, life not death is the stronger force.

People shouting and wailing. During Jesus' time, it was customary to hire professional mourners and musicians at a funeral. Today, at funerals, we also have long discourses and ceremonies to mask death because it shakes and discomforts us and shatters our apparent peace. Jesus does not allow himself to be taken in by our illusions.

The child is not dead, but asleep. She sleeps, hoping that Christ will awaken her, like those believers who somehow "sleep" awaiting the resurrection. The truly dead are those who have choked and sterilized all the good that God has sown in them. They have imprisoned themselves in their egoism and pride and have rejected the call to be sons and daughters of God. Because of this, they will remain dead eternally.

Get up! Because God calls you to life. A good part of the world's wealth is spent in prolonging the lives of old people in rich countries. It would be useless to prolong a life worn-out by sin and

deception; instead we should discover the secret of new life founded on faith.

■ THE WISDOM OF JESUS

The brothers and sisters of Jesus are his relatives and acquaintances of Nazareth: see commentary on Mk 3:31.

"How did all this come to him?" Does this mean that Jesus had travelled to other countries? See the answer in the commentary on Mt 2:21.

Because he always lived among them and never demonstrated anything extraordinary, they were astonished that, in such a short time, he became famous throughout Galilee. Indeed, they did not know him. How can one live so close to another and yet be so blind to the gifts of the other?

A prophet is despised only in his own country. After living with him so long, and treating him like any other how could they then show respect and have faith in him?

Is not this the carpenter? The term the Gospel uses is craftsman. There is no further specification. Yet the first Christians of Palestine asserted that Jesus was a carpenter.

What does this wisdom mean? Many people say that because Christ was God he knew all things, but divine knowledge is nothing less than God himself. He knows all at once in an instant that never ends – this is eternity. On the other hand, humans think in ideas, and human thought is unraveled in time. That is why, from birth, Jesus had to learn to experiment and discover. Yet he had a clear awareness that he was the



given to him that he performs also such miracles? ³Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joset and Judas and Simon... His sisters, too, are they not here among us?" So they took offense at him.

⁴And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his relatives and in his own family." ⁵And he could work no miracles there but only healed a few sick people by laying his hands on them. ⁶Jesus himself wondered why they would not believe.

Jesus sends out the Twelve (Mt 10:1; Lk 9:1; 10:1)

+ Jesus then walked around the villages teaching. ⁷He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two, giving them authority over evil spirits. ⁸And he ordered them to take nothing for the journey except a stick; no food, no bag, no money in their belts. ⁹They were to wear sandals and were not to take an extra shirt.

¹⁰And he added, "In whatever house you are welcomed, stay until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place doesn't receive you and the people refuse to listen to you, leave after shaking the dust off your feet. It will be a testimony against them."

¹²So they set out to proclaim that this was the time to change. ¹³They drove out many demons and healed many sick people by anointing them.

John the Baptist beheaded (Mt 14:1; Lk 9:7)

o ¹⁴King Herod also heard about Jesus because his name had become well-known. Some people said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵Others thought, "He is Elijah," and others, "He is a prophet like the prophets of times past." ¹⁶But when Herod heard of Jesus, he exclaimed, "Although I had John beheaded, he has been raised from the dead!"

¹⁷For this is what had happened. Herod had ordered John arrested and

3. Mt 13, 55

4. Jn 4, 44

7. 3, 14

10. 7, 24

Son, although he did not have the words to think or express this.

Jesus received his human learning from Mary, Joseph, and his neighbours in Nazareth. Jesus also acquired his wisdom from the Bible and the culture of his people. Yet the Father gave him his Spirit to judge as God does and to recognize God through all things. For him as well as for us, what was important was not reading or accumulating experiences but to be able to appreciate all that occurred. Jesus, inspired by the Spirit, uncovered a new awareness of the realities of life: this was Wisdom.

+ THE MISSION

See Commentary on Matthew 10:5; Lk 10:1; Mt 28:8. Jesus begins a third stage of his ministry by organizing a mission throughout the province. Before, the apostles accompanied Jesus but now he sends them ahead of him.

Jesus is an educator. He not only teaches his followers, he has them participate in his mission. His apostles must also proclaim their faith and perform healings as the Master does. By doing this, they concretize what they have discovered of the kingdom of God. The disciples

should be the first ones to believe what they themselves proclaim: God makes himself present. Because of this, they must live day by day, trusting in the Father's Providence, not frightened but always conscious of God's mission and power.

Oil was used at the time as a remedy, but Jesus gives it a new meaning: more than just well-being, the healings will also be the sign of spiritual healing, the reconciliation of man with God. Jesus' concern for forming communities of believers is already present. He sends his disciples out two by two so that the message will not be from one person only, but an expression of a group united in the one mission. Jesus tells them to stay under one roof with one family so that this may be a centre radiating the faith.

o ¹⁸Herod respected John, but Herod was a prisoner of his environment and his vices. Many people believe that sexual faults are not important and have little to do with the progress of human salvation. The Bible illustrates that we cannot advance without responsible people who are capable of putting sexual energies at the service of love instead of becoming a slave to the

had him bound and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herod had married her¹⁸ and John told him, "It is not right for you to live with your brother's wife."¹⁹ So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she could not²⁰ because Herod respected John. He knew John to be an upright and holy man and kept him safe. And he liked listening to him, although he became very disturbed whenever he heard him.

²¹Herodias had her chance on Herod's birthday, when he gave a dinner for all the senior government officials, military chiefs and leading men of Galilee. ²²On that occasion the daughter of Herodias came in and danced; and she delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want and I will give it to you."²³ And he went so far as to say with many oaths, "I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom."²⁴ She went out to consult her mother, "What shall I ask for?" The mother replied, "The head of John the Baptist."²⁵ The girl hurried to the king and made her request: "I

want you to give me the head of John the Baptist, here and now, on a plate."

²⁶The king felt very sad, but he would not refuse in front of his guests because of his oaths. ²⁷So he sent one of the bodyguards with orders to bring John's head. The man went and beheaded John in prison; ²⁸then he brought the head on a plate and gave it to the girl. And the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and buried it.

Jesus, shepherd and prophet

+ ³⁰The apostles returned and reported to Jesus all they had done and taught. ³¹Then he said to them, "Go off by yourselves to a remote place that you may have some rest." For there were so many people coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a secluded area by themselves.

³³But people saw them leaving and many could guess where they were going. So, from all the towns they hurried there on foot, arriving ahead of them.

18. Lev 18, 16

23. Est 5, 3; 7, 2

31. 2, 2; 3, 20

passions. Because of this, John the Baptist could not speak of justice without recalling the marriage vows. The messenger of the word of God had to judge Herod like any other citizen.

King Herod. This refers to Herod Antipas, son of the other Herod who reigned when Jesus was born.

People said that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead (6:14). They considered John a martyr, and believed he would rise from the dead to punish Herod. Some associated Jesus with John – Jesus performed the miracles that John had not done. Others, less informed, thought Jesus was an apparition of John.

+ The Apostles are exhausted. At the end of this journey, they need to rest and take account of their experiences. Jesus teaches them and also helps them reflect upon what they saw and did.

So many came and went. After the disciples went around through the villages of Galilee many people gathered who wanted to know

who had sent them, and the crowd approached Jesus.

He had compassion on them. The Old Testament had shown the compassion of God as a Father, but now Jesus reveals this compassion in a different way. Men could not understand fully the mercy of God until the Son had come to share everything with us, making himself poor among the poor, able to feel with them instead of giving them his words and deeds of mercy from above.

This compassion of Jesus helps us understand that Christian commitment to the poor is not complete as long as the church is not deeply rooted in the lower class of society.

They were like sheep without a shepherd. These are people who have not yet found a true community. So Jesus has compassion for them. He is not concerned with those who constantly complain that they have not got enough priests or pastors. After ten years or so of being in the Church and of being committed to the Gospel,

³⁴As Jesus went ashore he saw a large crowd, and he had compassion on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he started a long teaching session with them.

First miracle of the loaves

(Mt 14:13; Lk 9:10; Jn 6:1)

■ ³⁵It was now getting late, so his disciples came to him and said, "This is an unpopulated area and it is now late. ³⁶You should send the people away and let them go to the farms and villages around here so they can buy themselves something to eat."

³⁷Jesus replied, "You yourselves give them something to eat." They answered, "Should we go and buy two hundred silver coins' worth of bread, and give it to them?" ³⁸But Jesus said, "You have some loaves: how many? Go and see." The disciples found out and said, "There are five loaves and two fish."

³⁹Then he told them to have the people sit down together in groups on

the green grass. ⁴⁰This they did in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹And Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish and, raising his eyes to heaven, he pronounced a blessing, broke the loaves and handed them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among the people.

⁴²They all ate and everyone had enough. ⁴³The disciples gathered up what was left and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴Five thousand men had eaten there.

Jesus walks on the water

(Mt 14:22; Jn 6:16)

+ ⁴⁵Immediately, Jesus obliged his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, towards Bethsaida, while he himself sent the crowd away. ⁴⁶And having sent the people off, he went by himself to the hillside to pray.

34. Mt 9, 36
40. Ex 18, 21

37. 2 K 4, 42; Ex 16; Dt 8, 3;
41. Is 25, 6; 55, 1; 65, 13

38. Ps 78, 24; Wis 16, 20; 1 Cor 10, 3
44. 8, 8

these people should be the shepherds, the counselors, the animators and the prophets of the world around them.

He began to teach them for a long time. What did he tell them? – All that makes up the Gospel. Penetrating everyone's conscience with a prophetic gaze. Jesus showed each one where the real problem lay. Speaking like the prophets, Jesus never enclosed and isolated anyone within his personal problem: their personal progress had to be attained together with the renewal of their environment.

Jesus saw that *they were burdened* with difficulties but he would lift them up by giving them "signs of hope." In any situation there is something that we can do immediately to uplift ourselves; and even before any attempt of ours, God already gives us signs that he does not abandon us and that we must trust totally in him.

■ The Bible says that from the mouth of God comes bread and also the Word that we need (Deut 8:3). Jesus in the act of giving bread, demonstrates that his words are God's words. *God gives bread* to his people. (Ex 16; Ps 72:16; Ps 81:17; Ps 132:15; 147:14).

What comes from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3; Sab 16:26; Mt 4:4).

In the light of the Old Testament, this narration helps us to see Jesus as the Shepherd foretold by the prophets.

The sheep without a Shepherd (Numbers 27:17; Is 40:11; Ez 34; Za 11:4-17; 12:8).

They sat in fresh pastures, (Psalm 23), and *they are all satisfied*. (Psalm 78:29). The crowd seated for a meal is the image of the Reign when Jesus will unite all of humanity in the fraternal banquet of God (Lk 14:18).

Raising his eyes to heaven. By this gesture, Jesus expresses his personal relationship with the Father instead of using any prayer that saints or prophets would have said on this occasion.

Jesus is the bread needed by humanity (John 6). God has set on this earth all that humanity needs for food and development, but if we do not know how to listen to the Word, we will not know how to solve the world's most urgent problem, the distribution of the riches of the earth. Faith in God's promises is the only force with which to fight against egoism and unequal privileges, and to eventually obtain food, peace, and freedom for all.

Because of this, Jesus *had compassion for this crowd* whose leaders had little concern for them. Without bothering about food, this crowd



⁴⁷When evening came, the boat was far out on the lake while he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸Jesus saw his disciples straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, and before daybreak he came to them walking on the lake; and he was going to pass them by.

⁴⁹When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified. But at once he called to them, "Courage! It is I; don't be afraid." ⁵¹Then Jesus got into the boat with them and the wind died down, so that they were completely astonished. ⁵²For they had not really grasped the fact of the loaves; their minds were dull.

⁵³Having crossed the lake, they came ashore at Genesaret where they tied up the boat. ⁵⁴As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus ⁵⁵and ran to spread the news throughout the countryside. Wherever he was they brought to him the

sick lying on their mats. ⁵⁶And everywhere he went, to villages, towns or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplace and begged him to let the sick touch just the fringe of his cloak. And all who touched him were made well.

True cleanness

(Mt 15:10; Lk 6:39)



¹One day the Pharisees with some teachers of the Law who had just come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus.

²They noticed that some of his disciples were eating their meal with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. ³Now the Pharisees, as well as the rest of the Jews, never eat without washing their hands for they observe the tradition received from their ancestors. ⁴Nor do they eat anything when they come from the market without first washing themselves. And there are many other traditions they observe, for example, the ritual washing of cups, pots and plates.

48. 1, 35; Jn 6, 15
56. 1, 32; Num 15, 38

49. Job 9, 8; Ps 77, 20; Sir 24, 5
2. Lk 11, 38

51. 4, 41; Lk 5, 9

52. 4, 13; 7, 18

sat listening to him – while he conveyed to them the word of God which liberates people from blindness and emptiness. And in turn, being the shepherd and the True Bread of Life, he gave them food and distributed it.

+ Jesus obliged them to get into the boat. Why? John's Gospel explains this (John 6:15). Because the people, enthused by the miracle, wanted to make him a king and liberator, sent by God. Even the apostles were eager for this to happen.

Their minds were dull. Actually, these men understood the meaning of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves: Jesus was the Shepherd long promised by God. But they interpreted it all in a political sense, expecting that God's promised liberation would be a national liberation.

♦ THE TRADITION AND TRADITIONS

No group, not even the Church, can sustain itself without traditions and customs. Yet even when they are good traditions, they are still made by humans. For example, the way the mass is celebrated, celebrations, novenas etc. All that past popes, bishops, and Christian communities have done can be changed by

another pope, bishop or christian community, and because these can be changed, we understand that they are not essential in religion.

What does not change is God's teaching. Where can it be found? In the Bible and in Jesus' teachings. Yet there is a way of understanding Jesus as the apostles did. This is called the Tradition of the Apostles, and the Church, founded by the apostles, guards this tradition, that is, their spirit. Let us not confuse the traditions of Catholics with the Tradition of the Church.

However, we often make little effort to enter into the spirit and Tradition of the Church, but blindly grasp onto antiquated and bad traditions. Why are so many Christians today scandalized when the Church frees itself from these antiquated rites? Why do they hate so much more open priests and Christians who leave behind some traditional forms? Jesus gives us the reason: they grasp at these rites because they are incapable of believing. Their external religion replaces the authentic faith they do not have. They hang onto their ideas and their traditional political and cultural positions because these are the only things they have, and if they lose them, God would no longer have meaning for them.

⁵So the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law asked him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders, but instead eat with unclean hands?"

⁶Jesus answered, "You go no further than appearances. How well Isaiah prophesied of you when he wrote: *This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless, for what they teach are only man-made rules.* ⁸You even put aside the commandment of God to hold fast to man-made tradition."

⁹And Jesus commented, "You have a fine way of disregarding the commandment of God in order to implant your own tradition. ¹⁰For example, Moses said: *Do your duty to your father and your mother*, and: *Whoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death.* ¹¹But you let anyone tell his father or mother: 'I can't help you for I have kept all I possess for the Temple.' ¹²In this case, you no longer permit him to help his parents. ¹³So you nullify the word of God through the tradition you have handed on. And you do many other things like this."

+ ¹⁴Jesus then called the people to him again and told them, "Listen to

me, all of you, and try to understand. ¹⁵Nothing that enters anyone from outside can make him unclean. That which comes out of him, that makes him unclean. ¹⁶Let everyone who has ears listen."

¹⁷When Jesus reached home and was away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about this saying ¹⁸and he replied, "So even you have not understood? Do you not see that whatever comes from outside cannot make a person unclean? ¹⁹Since it enters, not the heart but the stomach and is finally emptied out."

Thus Jesus said that all foods are clean.

²⁰And he went on, "What comes out of a person is what can make him unclean. ²¹for evil designs come out of the heart: immoral things, theft, murder, adultery, ²²jealousy, greed, maliciousness, deceit, indecency, slander, pride and folly. ²³All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean."

The faith of the Syrophoenician (Mt 15:21)

o ²⁴When Jesus left that place he went to the border of the Tyrian country. There he entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was

6. Is 29, 13
22. Mt 15, 19

10. Ex 20, 12; 21, 17
24. 1 K 17, 8

20. Acts 10, 11; Gal 2, 12; Col 2, 21; Rom 14, 14

+ CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

An important practice of Judaism was to keep oneself clean: one could not participate in worship without being in a state of ritual purity. This word "purity" did not have the same meaning we attribute to it. The clean man was one who was not contaminated even inadvertently by things prohibited by Law. For example, pork and rabbit were considered unclean; they could not be eaten. A menstruating woman or a person with hemorrhoids were considered unclean for a certain number of days: no one could even touch them. A leper was considered unclean until cured. If a bug fell in oil, the oil was considered unclean, and had to be thrown out.

If contaminated even by no fault of his own, the person had to purify himself, usually with water, sometimes paying for sacrifices.

At one time, these laws were useful in encour-

aging a hygienic lifestyle. They also protected the faith of the Jews who lived among pagans (people who did not know God). How could they guard their faith in the one God if they had to live with other nations, befriend them, and even imitate their ways? But with so many religious practices to observe, the Jews had to live apart from those who did not share their faith and lifestyle.

Jesus does away with all these rites: nothing is unclean in all of God's creation; touching the sick, a corpse or a bloodstained object does not offend God. God is not bothered if we eat this or that. Sin is always something *which comes from the heart* and not something we do unintentionally.

It is true that the Bible teaches these concepts of purity and impurity, but these laws were written many centuries ago and not everything

there, but he could not remain hidden.

²⁵A woman whose small daughter had an evil spirit, heard of him and came and fell at his feet. ²⁶Now this woman was a pagan, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷Jesus told her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she replied, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the crumbs from the children's bread." ²⁹Then Jesus said to her, "You may go your way; because of such a reply the demon has gone out of your daughter." ³⁰And when the woman went home, she found her child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Healing of a deaf and dumb man

■ ³¹Jesus returned from the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon and went to Lake Galilee passing through the region of the Decapolis country. ³²There a deaf man who also had a speech impediment was brought to him. They asked Jesus to lay his hands upon him.

³³Jesus took him aside by himself, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. ³⁴Then, looking up to heaven, he groaned and said to him, "Ephpheta," that is, "Be opened."

³⁵And his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak clearly. ³⁶Jesus ordered them

32. 8, 22

the Bible says is valid for all times. Through the teachings of the Bible, God educated his nation but the laws he gave them from the beginning, when they were barbaric and uneducated, are no longer what is necessary for a community with religious foundation.

Several things in the Bible seem contradictory, because they arose in different periods and under different circumstances. Because of this, without the assistance of the Church, we are unable to understand the Bible in its true sense.

o THE PAGANS

This is when the authorities come into conflict with Jesus. He must depart and wander along the border of Galilee where he is less watched and can easily flee. This incident occurs in Tyre, a province occupied by the Syrians and Phoenicians who were pagans.

We are used to calling people who have not received God's message, pagans. In their own way they believe in God, but not because they have been taught by God himself. During Jesus' time, only Jews knew of the word of God, all the rest were pagans.

Although Jesus came to save all, his Father desired that he not go beyond his own country. Nevertheless on certain occasions, he encountered pagans, and more than once, he admired their simplicity and faith. God desires to save all but he does not lead all on the same path. Some believe and know God; others, through no fault of their own, do not have the gift of faith but they all live and work together and together they build a society more worthy of humankind; in the end, together they will be saved.

During the centuries before Christ, God

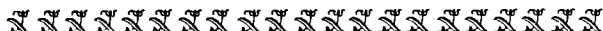
communicated only with the Jews and he let other nations grope for him. This was part of God's wise and merciful plan, but because of this special treatment, the Jews began to think that the pagans were unworthy in the eyes of God: the Jews were the sons or children and the pagans were looked down upon as no more than dogs.

Jesus answers the afflicted woman repeating this well-known scornful saying of the Jews. He said this to test this woman's faith: in effect, would she insist when it appeared that even God would reject her?

■ *They asked him to lay hands on him.* This was a way of invoking divine power but Jesus did not have to ask. His gesture was a way of teaching that he had within himself, within his human person, all the health and welfare that we need and he communicated this to the sick one.

Jesus gave a groan (see 8:12). Why? Because the man before him is an impressive symbol of those who have eyes and ears but neither see nor hear. The people bring him the deaf and mute, and ask him to heal him, but they themselves remain deaf.

Jesus asked them not to tell anyone about this (v. 31). How far Jesus is from the organizers of a "Miracle Crusade!" An unexpected miracle may help us discover the loving presence of God, but as soon as we begin to wait for them, we turn away from the Gospel. The Devil knows this and so he tempted Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:6): If you want the people to believe, do miracles. I can help you and, besides, I know some political groups very interested in spreading: such a religion, who are used to paying for advertising and for preachers!



not to tell anyone, but the more he insisted on this, the more they proclaimed it. ³⁷The people were completely astonished and said, "He has done all things well; he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

Second miracle of the loaves

(Mt 15:32)

8 ¹Soon afterwards Jesus was in the midst of another large crowd who obviously had nothing to eat. So he called his disciples and said to them. ²"I feel compassion for these people because they have been with me for three days and now have nothing to eat. ³If I send them to their homes hungry, they will faint on the way because some of them have come a long way."

⁴His disciples replied, "Where in a deserted place like this could we get enough bread to feed these people?"

⁵He asked them, "How many loaves

do you have?" And they answered, "Seven."

⁶Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Taking the seven loaves and giving thanks, he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute. And they distributed them among the people. ⁷They also had some small fish, so Jesus said a blessing and asked that these be shared as well.

⁸The people ate and were satisfied. The broken pieces were collected, seven wicker baskets full of leftovers. ⁹Now there had been about four thousand people. Jesus sent them away ¹⁰and immediately got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

Why do they demand a sign?

(Mt 16:1; Lk 12:54)

+ ¹¹The Pharisees came and started to argue with Jesus. Hoping to

37. Is 35, 5	1. 6, 30-44	12. Mt 12, 38; Jn 6, 30; 1 Cor 1, 22; Is 7, 10; Dt 18, 20; Num 14, 11
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o Some feel that the second account of the multiplication of loaves is only a repetition of the first account. Actually, it is different and has a different meaning. The first time, between Tiberias and Capernaum (that is, right at the centre of Jesus' work in Galilee) the people, more numerous and more urgent, approach Jesus to make him their liberator (John 6).

Jesus refuses but, later that afternoon, he multiplies the loaves – a clear sign that he is the Messiah foretold by the Prophets. The next day, Jesus in his turn, demands that they take him for what he is, and this is what produces the breakup (John 6:60).

Later, Jesus journeys to the boundaries of Galilee where much of the population are pagan. They also want to hear Jesus. So then, on the other side of the shore, the eastern part, Jesus offers them bread as a farewell meal, after they had followed him for two days through the desert land.

The two accounts of the multiplication of loaves differ not only in the number of loaves or the number of participants. Various details indicate that the first miracle took place among Jews and the second among Greeks, that is, aliens to the Jewish faith. For example, the baskets mentioned in Mk 6:42 refer to the stiff, osier basket of the Jews, and the *wicker basket* (8:8) to the Greek's folding bag.

Twice, then Jesus multiplies the loaves: this is

one of his most impressive miracles. Not every extraordinary act is a miracle, (as people used to say) but only those that require God's intervention. These listeners of Jesus were given bread when there was absolutely no food at hand.

Note that throughout the history of the Church and up to the present time there have been several accounts of multiplication of loaves for those who gave all that they had.

+ See commentary on Mt 16:1

Jesus tells his apostles to beware of the Pharisee's spirit (of becoming like the Pharisees) but they don't listen, they are more concerned about the food.

THE PHARISEES

There are people who see nothing apart from their books and their own ideas. The Pharisees are like that, only concerned with the Law of God.

They do not see the fruits of Jesus' preaching. They do not see the people who are comforted and begin a better way of life. They do not see those who discover hope and faith. They do not see how God is saving the poor.

No sign will be given to this people. Jesus respects our freedom and does not want to force us if we do not care to acknowledge the truth.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus confronts the Pharisees. They were a respected and powerful association, the most conspicuous within the



embarrass him, they asked for some heavenly sign. ¹²Jesus gave a deep sigh and said, "Why do the people of this present time ask for a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this people." ¹³Then he left them, got into the boat again and went to the other side of the lake.

¹⁴The disciples had forgotten to bring more bread and had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵Then Jesus warned them, "Keep your eyes open and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." ¹⁶And they said to one another, "He saw that we have no bread."

¹⁷Aware of this, Jesus asked them, "Why are you talking about the loaves you are short of? Do you not see or understand? Are your minds closed? ¹⁸Have you eyes that don't see and ears that don't hear? And do you not remember ¹⁹when I broke the five loaves among five thousand? How many baskets full of leftovers did you collect?" They answered, "Twelve."

²⁰"And having seven loaves for those four thousand, how many wicker baskets of leftovers did you collect?" They answered, "Seven." ²¹Then Jesus said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

Cure of the blind man at Bethsaida

²²When they came to Bethsaida Jesus was asked to touch a blind man who was brought to him. ²³He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had put spittle on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked, "Can you see anything?" ²⁴The man, who was beginning to see, replied, "I see people; they look like trees, but they move around." ²⁵Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and the man could see perfectly. His sight was restored so that he could see everything clearly.

²⁶Jesus sent him home saying, "Do not return to the village."

15. 1 Cor 5, 6

17. Jer 5, 21; Ekk 12, 2

19. 6, 42

23. Jn 9, 6

Jewish society. Nevertheless they oppose Jesus steadfastly – If Jesus came in our present time, would he not likewise offend some of the most powerful religious associations?

Jesus says: do not trust the leaven of the Pharisees, meaning their *teaching* (Mt 16:12). Jesus feared that his disciples, because of being common people, would let themselves be impressed by the knowledge and fame of the Pharisees and he warned them that these people built the religion on a mistaken basis.

The Pharisees were religious in a way that has always existed and still exists. Imagine a serious person who becomes aware that God's service is the most important thing. This person enjoys a good social status or a fine education; so he decides to work for God, especially by leading others, sinners, less capable or less instructed.

The Pharisee willingly serves God, but God, in turn, must acknowledge his services and reward him. The Pharisee wants to be without debt to God and carefully keeps himself from falling into sin because he dislikes being in need of God's pardon.

This is where things begin to go wrong. For no one can meet God, not even the rich and well-instructed, unless they discover their own misery and weakness. That is where we experi-

ence God's mercy and begin loving him wholeheartedly, meekly, feeling at one with the poorest and with sinners.

The Pharisees know everything about God except the true face of God and the happiness resulting from forgiveness. What is worse, they cannot see what they need. They always have reasons for not recognizing God's work in the midst of the poor, or, if they recognize it, they look down on it with pity.

The Pharisee avoids intimacy for fear that friends will discover his true sentiments. He is aware of having the same weaknesses as other people, in spite of being very observant, but he has no means of being freed because he is not humble enough to ask for God's help. Thus there is no other way for him apart from hiding his faults behind a flawless, exterior conduct and so he becomes a hypocrite.

Beware of the yeast, both of the Pharisees and of Herod, says Jesus.

o When a man, blind from birth, regains his sight, it takes time for him to gradually focus on objects and to understand what his new eyes see. That is why Jesus again laid his hands on the blind man's eyes.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Jesus does not let us see everything at once, but



Peter's profession of faith

(Mt 16:13; Lk 9:18; Jn 6:69)

■²⁷ Jesus set out with his disciples for the villages around Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"²⁸ And they told him, "Some say you are John the Baptist; others say you are Elijah or one of the prophets."

Then Jesus asked them, ²⁹"But you, who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."³⁰ And he ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Jesus then began to teach them that the Son of Man had to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. He would be killed and after three days rise again.³² Jesus said all this quite openly, so that Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.³³ But Jesus turning around, saw his disciples very close. So he rebuked

Peter saying, "Get behind me Satan! Your thoughts are not from God, but from man."

Take up your cross

(Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23)

+³⁴ Then Jesus called the people and his disciples and said, "If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.³⁵ For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it; and if you lose your life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, you will save it.

³⁶ What do you win by gaining the whole world but destroying yourself?³⁷ There is nothing you can give to recover your life.³⁸ I tell you: If anyone is ashamed of me and of my words among this adulterous and sinful people, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the Glory of his Father with the holy angels."

30. 4, 22; 9, 9	34. Mt 10, 38; Lk 14, 27	38. Ps 49, 8; Mt 10, 33; 2 Tim 2, 12
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conversion is realized bit by bit.

Don't even go into the village. If so, all the people would go looking for Jesus to see him and touch him and clamour for a miracle. Jesus instead, came for an authentic encounter with responsible people.

■ CHRIST - THE SON OF MAN

Here the Gospel already foretells the tragic end. For the first time, the apostles take account of who their Master is.

You are the Christ. Christ is a Greek word which means the Messiah in Hebrew. They both mean: *the anointed or consecrated one.* This term designated the long-awaited Saviour. The apostles discover that Jesus is the Christ, the Liberator, but he teaches them that *the Son of Man has to suffer many things.*

Why does Jesus call himself the Son of Man? For two reasons: First, because one page in the Bible speaks of the Son of Man who gloriously comes from God to judge all people and to rule all the nations (Daniel 7:13). And second, because Jesus is the perfect Man who bears the destiny of humanity.

Jesus had to suffer, because this is the fate of sinners. He had to suffer and be rejected by the authorities because this is the destiny of those who proclaim the truth to us. He had to freely go to his death because self-sacrifice is the only means for the salvation of the world.

+ It is necessary to lose oneself:

- To lose oneself like Abraham who, in his old age, went to strange lands.
- To lose oneself like Moses who agreed to be the leader of an irresponsible people.
- To lose oneself like Mary who entered a path wherein nobody could understand or help her.
- To rid oneself of this provisional existence so as to be reborn from God, like Ignatius the martyr. Condemned to be eaten by lions, he said, "I am the wheat of God: may I be ground by the teeth of wild animals to be converted into the pure bread of Christ. My passions are crucified in me; there is no carnal fire that can burn me; a fountain has sprouted in me that murmurs and speaks from within: come to the Father."

Take up your cross. Jesus tells us that to follow him is to follow the same path that took him to the cross. To reach maturity it is necessary to renounce our life; in other words, we must risk ourselves for something noble instead looking for a future; we must find a life style that will help us to excel in the way of love; and we must accept that our life may be a failure according to others' way of thinking (Lk 17:33; Jn 13:23-25).

Taking up our cross, by accepting freely the sacrifices that the Father sends each day, we re-

The transfiguration of Jesus

(Mt 17:1; Lk 9:28)

9 ¹And he went on to say, "Truly I tell you, there are some here who will not die before they see the kingdom of God coming with power."

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up on a high mountain. There his appearance was changed before their eyes. ³Even his clothes shone, becoming as white as no bleach of this world could make them. ⁴Elijah and Moses appeared to them; the two were talking with Jesus.

⁵Then Peter spoke and said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for

Elijah." ⁶For he did not know what to say; they were overcome with awe. ⁷But a cloud formed, covering them in a shadow, and from the cloud came this word, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." ⁸And suddenly, as they looked around, they no longer saw anyone except Jesus with them.

⁹As they came down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man be risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept the word to themselves, though they discussed with one another what 'to rise from the dead' could mean.

The question about Elijah

¹¹Finally they asked him, "Aren't the teachers of the Law right in saying that Elijah must come first?" ¹²Jesus

1. 13, 30; Rom 1, 4 Dt 18, 15; Acts 3, 22	2. Mt 4, 8; 28, 16 9. Mk 1, 34; 8, 30	3. 2 Cor 3, 18; Mt 28, 3; Rev 3, 4 11. Mal 3, 23; Sir 48, 10; Mt 11, 14; Jn 1, 21	7. Ex 40, 35;
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ceive from now on something more marvellous than what we have sacrificed: inner freedom and more profound happiness (Mk 10:30).

Think of what Jesus says: *from me, for me*, and not: *from God, for God*. For God has come in the person of Jesus to knock on our door and to propose to us very specific commitments.

If anyone is ashamed of me and of my words. The believer who follows the words of Christ without fear of what they may ask of him, is attacked without mercy by many who call themselves Christians. For we live in the midst of an *adulterous people*, in other words, people who without verbally denying God, in fact, serve other gods (Mt 16:24; Jn 8:42).

♦ The Transfiguration of Jesus is the centre of Mark's Gospel.

It is not by chance that Jesus brings them apart and invites them to go up the mountain with him, just like Moses who went up Mount Sinai to encounter the Glory of God. Certain conditions of solitude dispose man to receive God's communications (Mt 4:8; 28:16).

Who is Jesus? Peter has already answered this question, but now it is the Father who gives the answer. Jesus is *the Beloved Son*; the Eternal Love of the Father can only be satisfied by the Son who shares his own Divinity. Jesus is the Chosen One, in other words, the Saviour announced by the prophets (Is 42:1; Lk 3:21).

Moses and Elijah, the two most important persons in the Bible, come to Jesus. God had many times, and in many ways, spoken through the prophets (Heb 1:1), but now he gives all that he

can give us by sending his own Son: *Listen to him* (see Deut 18:19), as the Prophet who gathers in himself all the prophets.

A cloud covered them with its shadow. The cloud mentioned here is that which in several episodes of the Bible both indicates and hides: the mysterious presence of God (Ex 19 & 1 Ks 8:10).

When Jesus worked miracles for the sick, and even over the forces of nature, he showed that the present order of the world is not definitive. Now the curtains are partially opened: would that the apostles understood that the Son of Man, as Jesus calls himself, is closer to his Resurrection. In a little while now his fellow men will hang him on a cross. In a little while too the Father will give him the Glory that awaits him. The shining cloud, the dazzling white clothes are external signs that let us know something of the mystery of Jesus: the day he rises from among the dead, all of his humanity will be transformed and extended by divine Energies, so that he may fill everything in everyone.

This is the Father's answer to the apostles who expected a kingdom of God, a golden age, a world of justice brought down from heaven to earth. He does not prepare a paradise on earth for us, but he offers us the chance of suffering with his Son so as to be transformed by him from the present life in a very mysterious way.

In the transfiguration the apostles got a glimpse of Jesus' inner life and glory. Somehow, contemplation of the risen Christ became a new experience of God. This was so intense that they

answered them, "Of course, Elijah will come first so that everything may be as it should be... But, why do the Scriptures say that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be despised? ¹¹I tell you that Elijah has already come and they have treated him as they pleased, as the Scriptures say about him."

The boy with an evil spirit

o ¹⁴When they came to the place where they had left the disciples, they saw many people around and some teachers of the Law arguing with them. ¹⁵When the people saw Jesus, they were surprised and ran to greet him.

¹⁶He asked, "What are you arguing with them about?" A man answered him from the crowd, ¹⁷"Master, I brought my son to you for he has a dumb spirit. ¹⁸Whenever the spirit seizes him, it throws him down and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth

and becomes stiff all over. I asked your disciples to drive the spirit out, but they could not."

¹⁹Jesus replied, "You faithless people. How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him to me." ²⁰And they brought the boy to him.

As soon as the spirit saw Jesus, it shook and convulsed the boy who fell on the ground and began rolling about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹Then Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" He replied, "From childhood. ²²And it has often thrown him into the fire and into the water to destroy him. If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

²³Jesus said to him, "Why do you say: 'If you can?' All things are possible for one who believes." ²⁴Immediately the father of the boy cried out, "I do believe, but help the little faith I have."

12. Is 52, 14

24. Lk 17, 5

wished to stay there, just with Jesus, forgetting all the rest; they had discovered that the Lord was able to fill their lives.

+ On going down the mountain, the apostles feel uneasy. "Why did Moses and Elijah speak of the imminent death of Jesus?" They cling to their illusions finding support in the Bible which said that Elijah had to return to earth before the coming of the Messiah, so that he should not encounter any opposition (Mal 3:1 & 4:22).

But Jesus asserts again what he had said many times: he has to be rejected. Not all that is written in the Bible is to be understood literally. Elijah is not to return personally from heaven, but instead, John the Baptist has already come as a new Elijah (Lk 1:16).

o *Everything is possible for one who believes.* Everything is possible for God, but usually miracles are answers from the Father to those who trust in him.

Why couldn't we drive out the spirit? The apostles wonder: Did Jesus not give them power over the demons? But they are not aware of their lack of faith and easily forget how far they are from their Master. To them are directed the sharp words of Jesus: *You faithless people!* How many people think they are great believers when in fact their faith has still not moved anything!

Only prayer can drive this kind out. Possibly various people mentioned in the Gospels as being possessed were just mentally sick and could be cured by a magnetic force, by the laying on of hands (Mk 6:5). But not this lad. Sometimes we find ourselves like Jesus close to the power of evil, and prayer is needed to overcome it.

In the Gospel of Mark we find only four references to prayer and these in very few words. It is because prayer was not a novelty for the Jews. It was enough for them to open the Bible and find the Psalms, those marvellous prayers.

But what is prayer? It is to direct our spirit to God. There are thousands of ways of praying, of maintaining our spirit oriented toward God, striving towards him and listening to him: praying the Psalms and other prayers of the church, meditating on the rosary, singing, Bible reading ... But the end of all these prayers is that the Lord may give us the spirit of prayer, that we may be able to communicate with God in the depth of our spirit, even while working and giving our mind to our task.

Jesus shows us in these pages the way to expel the demon, because the evil spirit will multiply his obstacles to discourage us, as soon as he knows that we have decided to follow Christ (Mt 12:43; 13:19).



²⁵ Jesus saw that the crowd was increasing rapidly, so he ordered the evil spirit, "Dumb and deaf spirit, I command you: Leave the boy and never enter him again." ²⁶ The evil spirit shook and convulsed the boy and with a terrible shriek came out. The boy lay like a corpse and people said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him and he stood up.

²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive out the spirit?" ²⁹ And he answered, "Only prayer can drive out this kind, nothing else."

Jesus again speaks of his passion (Mt 17:22; Lk 9:43)

+ ³⁰ After leaving that place, they made their way through Galilee; but Jesus did not want people to know where he was ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. And he told them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill

him, but three days after he has been killed, he will rise." ³² The disciples, however, did not understand these words and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

Who is the greatest?

(Mt 18:1; Lk 9:46; 18:17; 22:24)

■ ³³ They came to Capernaum and once inside the house, Jesus asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴ But they did not answer because they had been arguing about who was the greatest.

o ³⁵ Then he sat down, called the Twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and make himself the servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child, set him in the midst of them, and putting his arms around him said to them ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes a child such as this in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me but the One who sent me."

29. 1, 26	35. Lk 22, 24	36. Mt 20, 26	37. Mt 10, 40; Lk 10, 16; Jn 13, 20
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+ Time is running out for Jesus. He now dedicates himself chiefly to preparing the group of apostles who will have the tremendous responsibility of continuing his work. They did not understand about his death and resurrection: these things cannot be understood until they have happened. They prefer not to question or know; thus they leave Jesus very isolated.

■ SERVANTS

The apostles return to Capharnaum, the centre of their missionary expeditions, and they are most probably in the house of Simon Peter.

They have preached the kingdom of God, have performed miraculous cures, and have also expelled the demons. But they still lack the most important thing of all: to be humble.

We also follow Christ, we make sacrifices for him, we look like good Christians, and God performs through us some miracles great or small ... Can we compare ourselves with our neighbour? Do we have the right to impose ourselves when others prefer the services of another person? Should we consider ourselves superior to those who do not reach our level?

The last sentence of Jesus is as important as

the first: *He who receives a child like this in my name ...* This for us is the basis of the dignity of the human person dignified by Christ.

o THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

God does not wait for us to be baptized before he recognizes his Son in us. He created us "in Christ." This means that he created each of us so that we bear the likeness of his Son: see what Paul says in Ephesians.

But, of course, it is something much greater when God calls us to believe and chooses us to share in the mission and life of his Church.

The Church has always taught the eminent dignity of the human person and, in the end, convinced the world. More than anyone else, the martyrs taught us the superior value of the human person over any kind of interest or collective bonds. But it is impossible to separate this dignity of the human person from her relationship with the Father. Those who do not share in this belief cannot easily explain their commitment to human rights.

The greatest gift to man is not that he can think and love, but that he can say to God: "You are my Father," and that God looks at us thinking, "You are my son/daughter."



+ ³⁸ John said to him, "Master, we saw a man who drove out demons by calling upon your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us." ³⁹ Jesus answered, "Do not forbid him, for no one who performs a miracle in my name can soon after speak evil of me." ⁴⁰ For whoever is not against us if for us.

"If anyone gives you a drink of water because you belong to Christ and bear his name, truly, I say to you, he will not go without reward.

If your eye causes you to sin

(Mt 18:6; 5:13; Lk 17:1)

■ ⁴² If anyone should cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble and sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a great millstone around his neck.

⁴³ If your hand makes you fall into sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than with two hands to go to hell, to the fire that never goes out. ⁴⁵ And if your foot makes you fall into sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than with both feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye makes you fall into sin, tear it out! It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than, keeping both eyes, to be thrown into hell ⁴⁸ where the *worms that eat them never die, and the fire never goes out.* ⁴⁹ The very fire will preserve them.

⁵⁰ Salt is a good thing; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."

39. Acts 3, 16; 1 Cor 12, 3 40. Mt 12, 30; Lk 11, 23 43. 1 Cor 3, 23 48. Is 66, 24 50. Col 4, 6; Rom 12, 18

+ SEPARATE CHURCHES

While Jesus prepares his apostles, whom he wants to leave in charge of his Church, others preach the Gospel and expel demons. In the same way, nowadays, outside the Catholic Church, Church of the apostles, others of diverse Christian denominations do apostolic work.

This evangelization outside the Church, sometimes against the Church, has the positive aspect of posing a challenge to the Church. If others evangelize, this may be because many people are not reached by the evangelization of the Church, and God himself helps them to do the work we do not do. If they form separate churches and the people come to them, then it may be due to the fact that the Catholic church needs to reform its ways: because numerous Catholics do not take the Gospel seriously, because parishioners have not been accustomed to take initiatives, leaving the priests and nuns to tell it all, because ... If through the efforts of other Churches the poor abandon their vices and discover what Christian community can be, this is something positive.

In saying this we do not forget the many riches of Christian tradition which have often been lost by those who left the Church, especially the certitude that everything human has to be redeemed and saved, and the joyful and humble way of believing and doing the will of the Father of which Mary is the symbol.

Several things seem to us out of place in these churches: the miracle used as an instrument of

propaganda, the pressures on the sick, the threatening with the punishments of God ... Each one chooses the biblical texts that suit his own purpose, and finally many enclose themselves in their cults, far from the "world," making ecumenism impossible, that is the dialogue and common research with other Christians.

We must believe that God works somehow through the rival churches. We can regret that each one sets up the church that he likes. So he disobeys the will of Christ who built his Church to be only one, and disobeys the will of the Father who, in laying the foundation stones, that are the apostles of Jesus, founded in him, willed to be and to remain the only owner of his Church.

But there is no room for envy or hatred: who could harm us if we do the work of God?

■ See commentary on Mt 18:6.

To be thrown into Gehenna, says Jesus (v. 45). This word was used to designate hell.

To enter life ... to enter the kingdom; this is one and the same thing. The kingdom of God is not a place where God would put us; it is a life that invades us; it is a person's meeting with herself, the total realization of a person's potential; the perfect union with God through which the sons and daughters are transformed into the likeness of the Father.

Have salt in yourselves (50). This concludes the speech after the discussion of the apostles (9:34). Of course we should make ourselves servants of others (9:35). But that does not mean that we should be oppressed persons. The salt signifies the creativity and the talents of each

Divorce

(Mt 19:1; 5: 31; Lk 16:18)

◆10 ¹Jesus then left that place and went to the province of Judea, beyond the Jordan River. Once more crowds gathered around him and once more he taught them, as he always did. ²Some Pharisees also came and, in order to test him, asked, "Is it right for a husband to divorce his wife?" ³He replied, "What law did Moses give you?" ⁴They answered, "Moses allowed us to write a certificate of dismissal in order to divorce."

⁵Then Jesus said to them, "Moses wrote this law for you, because you are stubborn. ⁶But in the beginning of creation *God made them male and female,* ⁷and because of this, *man has to leave father and mother and be joined to his wife,* ⁸*and the two shall become one body.* So they are no longer two but one body. ⁹Therefore let no one separate what God has joined."

¹⁰When they were indoors at home, the disciples again asked him about this ¹¹and he told them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against his wife, ¹²and the woman who divorces her husband and marries another also commits adultery."

Let the children come to me

(Mt 19:13; Lk 18)

+ ¹³People were bringing their little children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples scolded them for this.

¹⁴When Jesus noticed it, he was very angry and said, "Let the children come to me and don't stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." ¹⁶Then he took the children in his arms and laying his hands on them, blessed them.

4. Mt 24, 1 6. Gen 1, 27; 2, 23 11. Mt 5, 32; Lk 16, 18; 1 Cor 7, 10

one. Let us be persons fully alive, even if that includes quarrelling, but always concerned about maintaining fraternal dealing and mutual respect.

◆ MATRIMONY (see notes on Mt 18:6).

The Bible clearly states God's plan regarding the division of the sexes in humankind. *He made them man and woman*, in other words, they are incomplete beings who need to unite with one another to constitute one human unit. God made them equal and wanted to unite them, through ties stronger than those existing between parents and children (Gen 1:26 & 2:24).

But, in fact, human beings have not respected the plan of God and this is because of two reasons. First, the immense majority of men, being stronger than women, have acted as owners of their wives. For women, adultery has been a crime, but the men felt proud to have many women. On the other hand, people do not know how to love according to the way of God, because they love without God, because they love without giving themselves totally, and they love only for a time. For God though, love and fidelity always go together. God is faithful to those whom he loves. He proved this when man, his creature, got lost. His faithfulness led him to become the Redeemer of all.

Love and fidelity are the law of matrimony

for husband and wife. There is no other way. The words of Jesus are straightforward and the difficulties presented to him by his disciples, in order to justify divorce, do not make him change his stand. What if one of the spouses is unfaithful to the other? In that case, neither of them can consider himself relieved of all commitment. This is how the Church sees it, though it must show understanding and compassion for the victim of infidelity.

They are no longer two. The text of Genesis says: *they shall be one body* (2:24), and this could be understood as an ideal that spouses try to fulfill. But Jesus says: *they are no longer two, but one body*; thus their conjugal union binds them with an indestructible link.

Let no one separate. Here Jesus does not directly condemn the divorced (for he knows there are many excuses). But he denies authority to those who try to calm the conscience of the divorcees, as if God did not demand anything.

+ Jesus, despite having no children of his own, opens to everyone the richness of his heart. He marvels at the mystery of a life that begins full of hope, and he discovers the likeness of the Father in every unknown child. How could Jesus, who asks us to have hope, forget that the children are also our hope?

Whoever does not receive the kingdom of

Jesus and the rich man

(Mt 19:16; Lk 18:18)

o ¹⁷ Just as Jesus was setting out on his journey again, a man ran up, knelt before him and asked, "Good Master, what must I do to receive eternal life?"

¹⁸ Jesus answered, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not cheat, honor your father and mother." ²⁰ The man replied, "I have obeyed all these commandments since my childhood."

²¹ Then Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him and he said, "For you, one thing is lacking. Go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come and follow me."

²² On hearing these words, his face fell and he went away sorrowful for he was a man of great wealth.

How hard for the rich to discover the kingdom!

■ ²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus insisted, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ They were more astonished than ever and wondered, "Who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked steadily at them and said, "For man it is impossible, but not for God; all things are possible with God."

19. Ex 20, 12

21. Mt 6, 20; Lk 12, 33

23. Mk 4, 19

God as a *child*. We must be like children in order to enter the kingdom of God. We must forget our wisdom and self-sufficiency, and the bitterness of past experience in order to receive God's gifts and words in wonder and simplicity.

o Jesus' influence was due not so much to the novelty of his teachings as to the mysterious attraction that his person radiated. Many just and religious people discovered suddenly what it meant to be perfect.

He who comes to Jesus is a young man, according to Matthew (19:9). Luke calls him an important man (18:18).

Jesus with deliberation asks him: *Why do you call me good?* Do you not see that you are thirsty for God and that you will find him if you live with me?

This man asks Jesus the way that leads to *eternal life*; but Jesus does not have any new commandment to teach. In the Old Testament everything had been said that a person has to do and how we can win eternal life by observing the commandments of Justice and compassion. Now Jesus proposes to him a new way and a new experience of liberty, through becoming his follower and imitator.

Sell all you have. Happiness does not consist in leaving all one has, but in being free of it all in order to submit oneself to Christ.

■ Jesus does not say that the rich person will not be saved, but that he will not *enter the kingdom of God*, which consists in sharing

from now on the uncertainties, happiness and liberty of Christ.

In the Old Testament, wealth was never condemned provided that it was shared. Moreover, it was considered as a sign that a person knew how to direct his life well and that God had blessed him. While a person is not liberated from urgent material conditions, it is difficult for him to avoid living in a state of passivity. But Jesus proposes giving up all and following him as a condition for entering the Kingdom, that is to experience the presence of God as Father in our present life.

Who are the *rich ones*? Those who have money or those who do not take the risk of sharing what they have? Of course we can speak at length about who is really rich, and who is a little less than rich, and about the "rich in spirit" ... (For everyone the rich are only those who possess more than he himself does.) But here Jesus is not condemning some evil ones; he does not distinguish between good and bad rich. Jesus speaks of the *rich* in the common sense of this word (*those who have riches*) and asserts that their situation prevents them from experiencing the kingdom of God from inside. In speaking thus, Jesus discredits those who would want to bless the rich provided they are "spiritually poor."

Riches and the mentality they bring make people spiritually blind. They lead to confusing true and false values, beginning with the knowledge of God. For only by giving up everything



The reward for those who follow Jesus (Mt 19:27; Lk 18:26)

◆²⁸ Peter spoke up and said, "We have given up everything to follow you." ²⁹ Jesus answered, "Truly, whoever has left house or brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or children, or lands for my sake and for the Gospel, ³⁰ will not lose his reward. I say to you: he will receive a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and lands in the present time – and persecutions as well! And in the world to come he will receive eternal life. ³¹ Do pay attention: Many who now are first will be last, and the last, first."

³² They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead. The Twelve were worried and anxious and those who followed were afraid. Once more Jesus took the Twelve aside to tell them what was to

happen to him, ³³ "You see we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be given over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the foreigners ³⁴ who will make fun of him, spit on him, scourge him and finally kill him; but three days later he will rise."

James and John ask for the first places (Mt 20:20; Lk 22:24)

+ ³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him: "Master, we want you to grant us what we are going to ask of you." ³⁶ And he said, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ They answered, "Grant us to sit one at your right and one at your left when you come into your Glory."

³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized in the way I am baptized?"

31. Mt 20, 16; Lk 13, 30
39. Acts 12, 2; Lk 12, 50

32. Jn 11, 7; 11, 16

36. 10, 51

38. 14, 36; Ps 75, 9; Lk 51, 17

can we fulfill our vocation as sons of God (as Jesus did). Moreover rich people usually do not see the needs of others and, still less, their own social duties.

All things are possible to God. The question, "Who can be saved?" gives Jesus the opportunity to affirm once more that no one is saved by his own merits. God saves all, including the rich, by taking away all the benefits and false security provided by their wealth. It is better still if they themselves take the initiative to get rid of their wealth.

◆ *Whoever has left house ...* Jesus speaks not only of the reward in the next life. In the present world, too, one who sacrifices for the Kingdom will find friendship, happiness and human fulfillment: many things he never expected.

+ Jesus feels full of courage and confidence, as he himself walks ahead of them to Jerusalem, where his punishment awaits him. Prompted by James' and John's request, he tries to convince his followers that success in his Kingdom does not consist in prestige and power, but in following the ways of Jesus, their leader.

THE LEADERS – TO SERVE

What makes a leader? How should a leader be? How do leaders act, the head of a team, of

a family? The heads of State smile at crowds and embrace a child who renders them homage, but who serves and who is to be served? Jesus has come to serve and his service to humanity will be his voluntary death: "He made himself obedient; took the condition of a slave and died on the cross" (Phil 2,9).

To "*drink the cup*" and "*to be baptized*" are figurative ways of describing the sufferings and death of Jesus.

In connection with this topic, we cite a short poem of Lao-Tseu, a wise old Chinese:

"What have the river and sea done to be kings of the hundred valleys? They put themselves below them and that is why they reign in the hundred valleys.

If the saint wants to be at the top of his people

first he has to learn how to talk with humility.

If he wants to lead his people, he should be last.

That is how the saint is at the top of his people

and he doesn't make them suffer. Willingly they place him at the top

and do not get tired of him.

Since he doesn't compete with anybody nobody can compete with him."



³⁹They answered, "We can." And Jesus told them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and you will be baptized in the way I am baptized." ⁴⁰But to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to grant. It has been prepared for others."

⁴¹On hearing this, the other ten were angry with James and John; ⁴²Jesus then called them to him and said, "As you know, the so-called rulers of the nations lord it over them and their great men make their importance felt."

⁴³But it shall not be so among you: whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you shall make himself slave of all. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many."

The blind man of Jericho

(Mt 20:29; Lk 18:35)

o ⁴⁶They came to Jericho and, as Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar, Bartimeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by, he began to call out, "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸Many people scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he shouted all the louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man saying, "Take heart. Get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰He immediately threw aside his cloak, jumped up and went to Jesus.

⁵¹Then Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said, "Master, let me see again!" ⁵²And Jesus said to him, "Go your way, your faith has made you well." And immediately he could see, and he followed Jesus along the road.

The triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21:4; Lk 19:28; Jn 12:12)

11 ¹When they drew near to Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples with these instructions, ²"Go to the village on the other side and, as you enter it, you will find a colt tied up that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone says to you: 'What are you doing?' give this answer: 'The Lord needs it, but he will send it back immediately.'"

⁴They went off and found the colt out in the street tied at the door. ⁵As they were untying it, some of the bystanders asked, "Why are you untying that colt?" ⁶They answered as Jesus had told them, and the people allowed them to continue.

⁷They brought the colt to Jesus,

1. 45. Is 53, 11; 1 Tim 2, 5 1. 14, 26; Zac 14, 4 2. Zac 9, 9 7. Is 62, 11

o God is the one who moves us to ask something of him. The blind man understands that if he lets this opportunity go by, there will not be another chance, and that is why he shouts all the more while the rest are trying to silence him.

Son of David! This was a way of designating the Messiah.

■ See notes on Mt 21:1.

THE SAVIOUR

From Jericho to Jerusalem, Jesus "goes up" with the people who will celebrate the Feast.

Many are from Galilee, the province of Jesus and, on seeing him among the pilgrims, they think he is about to proclaim himself as the Messiah.

Until then Jesus had refused to be proclaimed because the people expected from their Messiah a liberation very different from that which Jesus brought them. But at this moment when he is finishing his mission, the time has come for Jesus to define himself publicly. He is the Anointed of God and there will be no other after him.

Jesus was sent by God to all people, but above all he came as Saviour of the Jewish people. He

threw their cloaks on its back, and Jesus sat upon it. "Many people also spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread leafy branches from the fields. "Then the people who walked ahead and those who followed behind Jesus began to shout, "Hosannah! *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!* "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David which comes! Hosannah in the highest!"

"So Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. And after he had looked all around, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Jesus curses the barren fig tree

(Mt 21:18; Lk 13:6)

o ¹²The next day, when they were leaving Bethany, he felt hungry. ¹³In the distance he noticed a fig tree covered with leaves, so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When

he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴Then Jesus said to the fig tree "May no one ever eat your fruit!" And his disciples heard these words.

Jesus clears the Temple

(Mt 21:10; Lk 19; Jn 2:14)

◆ ¹⁵When they reached Jerusalem Jesus went to the Temple and began to drive away all the people he saw buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the stools of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶And he would not let anyone carry anything through the Temple area.

¹⁷Jesus then taught the people "Does not God say in the Scriptures: *My house will be called a House of Prayer for all the nations?* But you have turned it into a *den of thieves*."

¹⁸The chief priests and the teachers of the Law heard of this, so the

10. Ps 118, 25 13. Jer 8, 13; Hos 9, 16; Mi 7, 1 16. Zac 14, 21 17. Is 56, 7; Jer 7, 11

came precisely when this people needed to be saved, because things were not working out well for them. The prophets had announced a conciliatory king who would visit his people on a donkey as peaceful people did, not on a horse, like the generals of that time. That was why Jesus wanted to enter Jerusalem this way. Jerusalem was a big city. Though the enthusiasm of the Galileans shook the city, it did not conquer it.

The Jews did not think that their Saviour would be so meek. Throughout their history, God had saved them from oppression, hunger, and the irresponsibility of their famous leaders. This time he came in person, to show them the real path to salvation through pardon and non-violence but they did not recognize him. The people of Galilee who spontaneously mounted a triumphant entrance for Jesus hoping for a political announcement from him would later deny him.

o See notes on Mt 21:13.

◆ THE TEMPLE

The Temple of Jerusalem was for the Jews the only Temple of the only God. In each town they assembled in the synagogue to read the Bible and sing psalms, but only in the Temple did the priests sacrifice animals and celebrate the true worship. A regular-size building was at the

centre of it. Only the priests in charge of offering incense entered this building, while the multitude crowded together in the courtyards. In these courtyards stood vendors and exchange brokers who supplied animals and birds for the offerings.

The presence of God rested on the Temple and from there protected and sanctified the Holy City and all the Jewish people. But people did not know how to live in the presence of God. While they defend their religion fanatically they do not strive to approach God in a sincere way or cleanse their churches of all that hinders true praying. There were vendors in the Temple, and also people little concerned about their ceremonies and prayers. The priests were used to this, and the High Priest, Caiaphas, made money by allowing vendors to stand in the very courtyard dedicated to prayer.

Jesus was not a priest or a Temple guard, but this Temple was the house of his Father. That was why he made a whip from ropes and cast them all out.

It will be called a House of Prayer for all the nations. The courtyards where the vendors stood were precisely those intended for the foreigners. "To clean the Temple" requires of us that we have an open church where everyone is welcome.

See also Jn 2:14.

sought a way to destroy him. They were afraid of him because all the people were tremendously interested in his teaching.

¹⁹When evening came, Jesus left the city.

The power of faith

(Mt 21:20)

o ²⁰Early next morning, as they walked along the road, the disciples saw the fig tree withered to its roots. ²¹Peter then said to him, "Master, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered."

²²And Jesus replied, "Have faith in God. ²³Truly, I say to you, if you say to this mountain: 'Get up and throw yourself into the sea,' and have no doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you. ²⁴Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be done for you. ²⁵And when you

stand to pray, forgive whatever you may hold against anyone, so that your divine Father may also forgive your sins."

By what authority do you act?

(Mt 21:23; Lk 20:1)

+ ²⁷They were once again in Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the elders came to him ²⁸and asked, "What right do you have to act like this? Who gave you authority to do the things you do?"

²⁹Jesus said to them, "I will ask you a question, only one, and if you give me an answer, then I will tell you what right I have to do the things I do. ³⁰Was John's ministry and baptism from God, or was it merely something human? Answer me."

³¹And they kept arguing among themselves, "If we answer that the baptism of John was from God, he will say: 'Why then did you not be-

18. 3, 6; 14, 1

Col 3, 13; 1 Pet 3, 7

23. Is 40, 4; 1 Cor 13, 2

31, Mt 14, 5

24. Jn 11, 22

25. Mt 5, 23; 6, 15; Eph 4, 32;

o THE POWER OF FAITH

If you have no doubt in your heart, but believe. See the same in James 3:1.2. Jesus refers in a more precise way to "the faith that performs miracles" (See 1 Cor 13.2). Jesus does not say that this faith will be given to everybody and at every moment. It is a charism or gift of God that he gives to whomever he wishes (1 Cor 12:9). It is an interior certainty that God wants to perform a miracle, so that one dares act and command in his name.

But at the same time, this promise of Jesus applies to all our prayer. Of course we should not think that God will always work the miracles we ask of him. When a sick person tries to convince himself that he will be cured, it is possible that consequently he will get better more quickly, but this mental exercise or hope does not necessarily mean faith. And if I convince myself that God will make me the winner of a lottery, he is under no obligation to think that my becoming richer will make me a better person.

Actually, he who humbly loves God understands in the midst of his trials that God wants to lift him up. That is why he asks with faith because he knows that God wants to listen to him. He who is really anxious for the kingdom of God

asks the Lord that his Almighty hand take away all the obstacles to the extension of that Kingdom. It is hard for us to ask big things, because if God refuses to give them to us, how will we still believe in him? But all those who risk everything for the Gospel, like the saints, dare to ask God for impossible things, obeying the very subtle suggestions of the Spirit of God.

Whatever you ask in prayer. Jesus invites us to ask with faith and perseverance until God assures us that our prayer has been heard, or else helps us understand that what we asked for was not good for us nor was it the will of God.

+ THE OPPORTUNIST PRIESTS

Jesus did not ask any authorization to teach in the Temple, or to drive out the vendors. He acted freely as a prophet. Since the priests were the ones in charge of maintaining the true faith, it was normal for them to check whether Jesus was a real prophet or not. But were they really concerned about truth? Were they ready to recognize that Jesus had come from God? Apparently they only thought of defending what was acceptable to them and, before even listening to Jesus, they held him to be subversive.

That is why Jesus asked them about John the



lieve him?" ³²But neither could they answer before the people that the baptism of John was merely something human, for everyone regarded John as a prophet. ³³So they answered Jesus, "We don't know," and Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you what right I have to act as I do."

Parable of the tenants (Mt 21:33; Lk 20:9)

12 ¹Using parables, Jesus went on to say, "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a hole for the wine press and built a watchtower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenants and went abroad.

²In due time he sent a servant to receive from the tenants his share of the fruit. ³But they seized the servant, struck him and sent him back empty-handed. ⁴Again the man sent another servant. They also struck him over the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵He sent another and they killed him. In the same way they treated many others; some they struck and others they killed. ⁶One was still left, his beloved son. And so, last of all, he sent him to

the tenants, for he said: "They will respect my son."

⁷But those tenants said to one another: "Here comes the owner's son who is to inherit the vineyard. Let's kill him and the property will be ours." ⁸So they seized him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard! ⁹Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

¹⁰And Jesus added, "Have you not read this text of the Scriptures: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone.* ¹¹*This was the Lord's doing; and we marvel at it.*

¹²The Jewish leaders wanted to arrest him for they realized that Jesus meant this parable for them, but they were afraid of the crowd. So they left him and went away.

Paying taxes to Caesar (Mt 22:15; Lk 2:20)

◆¹³They sent to Jesus some Pharisees with members of Herod's party, with the purpose of trapping him in

1. Is 5, 1

6. Mt 3, 17

10. Ps 118, 22; Acts 4, 11; 1 Pet 2, 7

Baptist. Because John the Baptist's preaching was the most important happening in the previous two years, the priests should have taken a stand with regard to him. But they had not done so nor were they ready for that. How could they make demands of Jesus if they spoke out only when it suited them?

Jesus' attitude obliges religious leaders of all times to see if they deserve that others respect their declarations and condemnations.

■ THE CHOSEN ONES OF GOD

In this comparison, *the vine* represents the kingdom of God. The Jews were God's people and they came to consider that their own interests were those of God. He had to help them against others. They had confidence that they would be saved and were not concerned about the fate of others who did not recognize God.

God entrusted his Kingdom to them; in other words, he guided them throughout the long span of their history so they would be an example to others. They were to communicate their experience to others so that all would develop justice,

a spirit of responsibility, a sense of brotherhood among them: these were *the fruits* God wanted to harvest.

God sent prophets to remind them of their debt: they were hardly heard. Finally, the only Son of God made man comes and the same thing will happen. He will be *cast out of the vineyard*, in other words, rejected by his own people. That is why the kingdom of God will be *given to others*, to those gathered in the Church of Christ.

Here ends the parable. But it could be applied to our days if the Church becomes a religion of one social class, or similar to the other religions, if we do not find in the Church more obedience to God, more commitment to values that will save the world. What would happen to Christian groups and their leaders if they began to feel they were the owners of the Kingdom and God's promises?

◆ POLITICS AND RELIGION - CAESAR

The trap is as follows: They ask about the tax that the Jews are obliged to pay to Caesar, Emperor of Rome, for the Jews have been colo-



his own words. ¹⁴They said to Jesus, "Master, we know that you are true; you are not influenced by, nor are you afraid of anyone, but you truly teach God's way. Tell us, is it against the Law to pay taxes to Caesar? Should we pay them or not?"

¹⁵But Jesus saw through their trick and answered, "Why are you testing me? Bring me a silver coin and let me see it." ¹⁶They brought him one and Jesus asked, "Whose head is this, and whose name?" They answered, "Caesar's." ¹⁷Then Jesus said, "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

And they were very astonished.

17. Rom 13, 7; Acts 23, 8

19. Dt 25, 5

nized by the Romans and are under their rule.

The Pharisees and partisans of Herod, who are political enemies, join together. The Pharisees oppose Roman domination; the partisans of Herod, on the other hand, accept it. If Jesus says they are to pay, the Pharisees will discredit him before the people. If he says no, the partisans of Herod will have him arrested by the Romans.

But Jesus does not condemn Roman imperialism, nor does he justify it. Is it because the problems of justice and peace are not "spiritual things" and do not concern him?

Actually, Jesus does not see political problems the way we see them. These problems are important, of course, but they are not the only field where human liberation is at stake. Sacred History teaches us that God wants freedom for each of us, and for each nation the possibility to develop its culture and national life. This amply justifies the political commitments of Christians.

But Jesus lived in a period of time when his compatriots were obsessed by politics, and divided into irreconcilable factions. By taking a determined political stand, Jesus would have achieved nothing. On the other hand, it was important to put politics in its right place and not to confuse faith with religious fanaticism.

For the Pharisees, to pay taxes to Caesar, a foreign ruler and pagan, was like denying God, the true Lord of Israel. They identified the Jewish National Party with the cause of God. This carried grave consequences since they thought that to serve God they must crush those of the opposition party. Since faith asks of us total obedience, people who confuse faith with political militancy, begin to justify, little by little, everything their party does, even lies and crimes.

The Caesar of Rome was not God, although

The resurrection

(Mt 22:23; Lk 20:27)

■ ¹⁸The Sadducees also came to Jesus. Since they claim that there is no resurrection, they questioned him in this way. ¹⁹"Master, in the Scriptures Moses gave us this law: 'If anyone dies and leaves a wife but no children, his brother must take the wife and give her a child who will be considered the dead man's child.' ²⁰Now, there were seven brothers. The first married a wife, but he died without leaving any children. ²¹The second took the wife and he, too, died leaving no children. The same thing happened to the third. ²²Finally the seven

he pretended to be. He had imposed his authority and the use of Roman coins, but could not demand the obedience of conscience that was due only to God. Neither was he "the enemy of God," as the Pharisees thought he was, and to serve the kingdom of God, it was not necessary to refuse him taxes and civil obedience.

With his answer "to Caesar what belongs to him, to God ..." Jesus separates religion and politics, in cultures - Jewish and Roman alike - where politics always looked for religious justification. From now on, religion should not be manipulated for political purposes, nor should religion confuse her political opponents with the enemies of the Kingdom.

■ THE RESURRECTION

What is "resurrection"? When Jesus called the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:21) or Lazarus (Jn 11:1) back to life, they only recovered the life they had before. The daughter went back to school. Lazarus went to work in the field and after this both had to die again. This was not true resurrection.

Many people think that there is "something" after death and that something in us, called "soul" survives. This belief is partly true but it is not the most important. The Resurrection points not to a survival of "something of us" but to a transformation and raising up of our whole person. This will be through grace and the work of God: we will be reborn from God himself.

Many persons are mistaken about resurrection, thinking that when people are raised they recover their actual body and, logically, they say this is ridiculous. It would be better for us to think of the transformation already achieved in us as Christians, followers of Christ. Something is developing in us: a new way to understand the things of God, a new vision of existence and re-

died leaving no children. Last of all the woman died. ²³Now, in the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife? For the seven had her as wife."

²⁴Jesus replied, "You might be wrong in this regard because you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ²⁵When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry but are like the angels in heaven.

²⁶Now, about the resurrection of the dead, have you never reflected on the chapter of the burning bush in the book of Moses? God said to him: *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.* ²⁷Now, he is the God, not of the dead but of the living. You are totally wrong."

The greatest commandment

(Mt 23:34; Lk 20:39; 10:25)

²⁸A teacher of the Law had been listening to this discussion and admired how Jesus answered them. So he came up and asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"

²⁹Jesus answered, "The first is: *Hear, Israel! The Lord, our God, is One Lord;* ³⁰*and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* ³¹And after this comes another one: *You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* There is no commandment greater than these two."

³²The teacher of the Law said to him, "Well spoken, Master; you are

26. Ex 3, 6

29. Dt 6, 4

31. Lev 19, 18

32. Dt 4, 35; Is 45, 21

newed conscience. While our "external self" is wasting away as St. Paul says, the "inner self" is growing in us. This is my true self which is being built up day by day by the Spirit of God and it is this inner self which will be raised by the Spirit.

There is no need to wonder if we will recover stomach and viscera, because in the new life there is no place for any biological functions proper to mortal beings, like eating, sleeping and sex: we will be in heaven *like angels*. Jesus did not say: "they will be angels" for we are and will be members of the one human family and, in the resurrection, we will form the saved humanity, the innumerable brothers of Christ. We will all enjoy God, we will know each and everyone and we will remain united through the bonds of Charity.

With this, we understand the double reproach of Jesus to the Sadducees:

They don't understand the power of God. They only imagine a caricature of the resurrection.

You don't understand the scriptures. Very few books of the Hebrew Bible speak of the resurrection but all of them refer to a living God who makes us his friends.

I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. If God committed himself to them, could he be indifferent about their death and let them disappear forever while he enjoys Himself in his glory?

o TO LOVE GOD

You shall love the Lord, your God. This first commandment is not among the Ten Commandments of Moses, which only speak of "serving God." But we read it in Deut 6:4.

To love God is not a commandment like the others because the commandments show specific actions that we should undertake or avoid i.e., you shall rest on the day of the Lord, or you shall not commit adultery. On the other hand when it comes to loving God there is no limit.

The Commandments of the Bible, (especially the Ten Commandments of Moses), merely express in a clear manner the demands of our conscience. It should not be necessary to tell us not to steal, or to slander others. Nevertheless it is necessary to teach this to the children and to the unscrupulous person. Paul says, "The Law was not set for the good, but for those who do evil." (1 Tim 1:9)

Some people think they are perfect simply because they obey the Ten Commandments of Moses. It would be better to say that they only fulfill the minimum requirements of morality that Moses demanded from his primitive and irresponsible people more than thirty centuries ago. Instead of concentrating on these commandments which make them feel better about themselves, they should meditate on the First Commandment. All the rest are meaningless if the First Commandment is not understood.

You shall love God with all your heart. You shall love Him more than you love your loved ones. You shall long for him, you shall forget yourself so that, in everything, you search for what he wants most from you.

You shall love him with all your soul, with all your intelligence. You shall devote the best of your intelligence to know him. Looking into your own life, you shall understand how much he has guided you. You shall try to understand how

right when you say that he is one and there is no other.³³ To love him with all our heart, with all our understanding and with all our strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves is more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice."

³⁴Jesus approved this answer and said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Whose son is the Christ?

(Mt 22:41; Lk 20:41; Mt 23:6)

³⁵As Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he said, "The teachers of the Law say that the Messiah is the son of David. How can that be?" ³⁶For David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit declared: *The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right until I put your enemies under your feet.* ³⁷If David himself calls him *Lord*, in what way can he be his son?"

Many people came to Jesus and listened to him gladly.

+ ³⁸As he was teaching, he also said to them, "Beware of these teachers of the Law who enjoy walking around in long robes and being greeted in the

marketplace,³⁹ and who like to occupy reserved seats in the synagogues and the first places at feasts.⁴⁰ They even devour the widow's and the orphan's goods while making a show of long prayers. How severe a sentence they will receive!"

The widow's offering

(Lk 21:1)

■ ⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the Temple treasury and watched the people dropping money into the treasury box; and many rich people put in large offerings.⁴² But a poor widow also came and dropped in two small coins.

⁴³Then Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all those who gave offerings.⁴⁴ For all of them gave from their plenty, but she gave from her poverty and put in everything she had, her very living."

Jesus speaks of the end

(Mt 24:1; Lk 21:5; 19:41; 17:23)

13 ¹As Jesus left the Temple, one of his disciples said, "Look, Master, at the enormous stones and wonderful buildings

33. 1 S 15, 22; Hos 6, 6; Am 5, 21

38. Mt 23, 6; Lk 20, 45; 11, 43

35. Mt 9, 27

41. 2 K 12, 9; Jn 8, 20

36. Ps 110, 1

37. Lk 19, 48; 21, 38

the kingdom of God is coming through world and daily events. Praying and reading the Bible regularly, you shall ask God to give you his own Spirit so that you may understand him better.

You shall love him with all your strength. And since you are very weak in this, you shall ask for his help and strive to unite with the true servants of God, using the means that the Church makes available to you.

The Commandment to love your neighbour as you love yourself comes second, because it cannot be understood or fulfilled without love of God. For God asks for more than solidarity with one's neighbour, or concern for those who are suffering. We should make an effort to look at our brothers and sisters in the same way that the Father does. We should give them what the Father wants for them. Among so many good things we could do for our neighbour, we should select those which the Holy Spirit inspires us to

do. All this requires that we first know and love God.

+ The teachers of the Law were not bad persons. They became teachers of religion because they were interested in religion, but as soon as the teacher stops trying to be a saint, he is only a weak man. The very respect that people show him leads him to overlook in himself many wrongs that in anybody else would be severely censured.

■ On the other hand, the poor widow was the only one from among so many worshippers who made retribution to God as he deserves. She was the personification of those uncountable poor who have practically nothing but, somehow, find a way to give part of the little they have. The humble person is capable of sacrificing part of his paid time to study or participate in common activities in order to help his companions. The small salary he loses is worth much more than



here!" ²And Jesus answered, "You see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another, but all will be torn down."

³After a while, when Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, facing the Temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew approached him privately and asked, ⁴"Tell us when this will be. What signs will be given us before all this happens?"

⁵Then Jesus began to tell them, "Don't let anyone mislead you. ⁶Many will come, taking my place, and say: 'I am the one you are waiting for,' and they will deceive many people.

⁷When you hear about war and threats of war, don't be troubled; this must occur but the end is not yet.

⁸Nations will fight one another and kingdom will oppose kingdom. There will be earthquakes everywhere and

famines, too. And these will be like the first pains of childbirth. ⁹Be on your guard, for you will be arrested and taken to Jewish courts. You will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake to bear witness before them. ¹⁰For all the nations must hear the preaching of the Gospel: this is the very beginning.

¹¹So when you are arrested and brought to trial, don't worry about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour. For it is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit.

¹²Brother will betray brother, even to death, and the father his child. Children will turn against their parents and have them put to death. ¹³And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But whoever holds out to the end will be saved.

4. 1, 29	5. Rev 2, 20; 12, 9; 1 Jn 1, 8	8. Is 13, 8; Hos 13, 13	9. Acts 26, 11
10. Mt 26, 13; Rom 11, 25	11. Acts 4, 8; 5, 32; 7, 55	12. Mt 7, 6	13. Jn 15, 18;
1 Pet 4, 14	14. Dn 11, 31; 12, 11; 2 Mac 1, 54	22. Dt 13, 2; 2 Thes 2, 9; Rev 13, 13	

the big salary that wealthy people are not willing to lose. God calls on the poor man before anybody else because only the poor man gives all that he has to live on.

◆ THE END OF THE WORLD

The prophets of the Bible had spoken in a rather obscure way of the end of the world that would initiate God's universal kingdom. According to them, all nations of the world would join forces to destroy the Holy City of Jerusalem but right at the moment of greatest despair, God would intervene in a triumphant way to establish his own Kingdom. (Is 66:18; Ez 38; Jl 4; Za 14)

That is why, when Jesus speaks of the destruction of the Temple, the apostles think of the end of the world. The answer of Jesus is clear: the tragedy that will end with the destruction of Jerusalem is near but that shall not be the end of the world.

This discourse contains Jesus' warnings about the destruction of the Jewish nation that would occur 30 years after, but what he said clarifies the meaning of the conflicts that occur at present in the whole world.

When you hear about wars (7). This does not mean that God leaves the world in the hands of evil. It is more a delivery than a failure because humanity is maturing and the nations encounter more complex problems in their life and development. The crisis suffered by the Jewish na-

tion, in the time of Jesus, was similar to that experienced by other civilizations: something dies and something is born.

People, confused, are easily fooled by propaganda and ideologies. Fear turns them blind and they persecute those who do not share their fanaticism. That is why they hate the true believers. At the same time, Jesus asks his followers to bear witness to him (v. 9) as the only Saviour and to proclaim the demands of the Gospel for the individual as well as for society.

Thirty years after Jesus, the Jews rebelled against the Roman oppressors. The Roman Army reorganized after its first defeats and, its flags adorned with the image of their idols, approached the Holy City. Then many Messiahs (v. 22) appeared, that is, those who claimed to be the saviours of the Jewish Nation and led many followers.

The more fanatic Jews locked themselves in the City of Jerusalem waiting for God's intervention but they were so divided that they fought among themselves. Those who fled from the city, because of hunger were arrested by the Romans and crucified in front of the walls. In the end, when the Romans entered, burning the Temple and the palaces, all those that were not killed – men, women and children – were brought to Rome as slaves.

• Regarding the days after. After announcing the end of the Jewish world, Jesus speaks of



Last days of Jerusalem

¹⁴So, when you see the *idol of the oppressor* set in the place where it should not be (may the reader understand!), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵If you are on the housetop, don't come down to take anything with you. ¹⁶If you are in the field, don't turn back to fetch your cloak. ¹⁷How hard it will be then for pregnant women and mothers nursing their babies! ¹⁸Pray that it may not happen in winter. ¹⁹For the distress of those days will be greater than any that has been from the beginning, since God created the world until now or will ever be again. ²⁰So that if the Lord had not shortened that time, no one would survive; but he decided to shorten it for the sake of his chosen ones.

²¹And if anyone says to you at that time: 'Look, here is the Messiah! Look, he is there!' – do not believe it. ²²For false Messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders in order to deceive even God's chosen people, if that were possible. ²³You must be on your

guard. I have told you everything ahead of time.

The coming of the Son of Man

(Mt 24:29; Lk 21:25)

o ²⁴Now regarding the days after that disastrous time, *the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall out of the skies and the whole universe will be shaken.* ²⁶Then people will see the *Son of Man coming in the clouds* with great power and glory. ²⁷And he will send the angels to gather his chosen people from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the bounds of the sky.

²⁸Learn a lesson from the fig tree. As soon as its branches become tender and it begins to sprout leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the time is near, even at the door. ³⁰Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all this has happened. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away.

■ ³²But, regarding that Day and that Hour, no one knows when it will

24. Is 13, 10; Ezk 32, 7; Rev 6, 12 26. Dn 7, 13

an even more important event: the end of the world, or, better still, its transformation.

The sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light (v. 24). These are images taken from Is 13:10 and 34:4, that express the confusion, the surprise and the disintegration of man and the Universe before the majesty of the Supreme Judge.

He will send the angels. This is also a common image of the Jewish books that spoke of God's judgement. Likewise, the *trumpet* referred to in Mt 24:31 and 1 Thes 4:16 should not be understood literally.

Learn a lesson. Jesus comes back to the destruction of Jerusalem.

■ In this paragraph, we return to the end of the world. The Day mentioned is the day of the Judgement, called the "Day of Yahweh" in the Prophets (Amos: Zeph 1:15).

No one knows when... Jesus states it clearly. Nevertheless, there have always been people who believe they know what the angels do not. And people in each century have foretold

31. Mt 5, 18 32. 1 Thes 5, 1; Mk 10, 18; Acts 1, 7

the end of the world. (2 Thes 2).

Not even the Son, only the Father. Some are confused by this. Does this not mean that Jesus is not God as the Father is? But they must remember that when Jesus speaks of the Father and the Son, he speaks of himself, with his human consciousness in relation to the Father. God's infinite knowledge cannot be encompassed by the human mind of Jesus. (see notes on Lk 3:21 and Mk 6:1)

God the Father can communicate to Jesus certain prophecies but he cannot tell him, for example: "the end of the world will take place on the 12th of July of the year 1977" because the date is not fixed; it depends on how we make the kingdom of God mature through our efforts and prayers (2 Pt 3:12).

Modern science shows that time does not pass at the same speed for two persons if one is moving and the other is still; much less equal is the pace of time between God and us. God knows the time in eternity but this does not mean that it corresponds with a certain date in our calendar.

come, not even the angels or the Son, but only the Father.

◆ ³³Be alert and watch, for you don't know when the time will come. ³⁴When a man goes abroad and leaves his home, he puts his servants in charge, giving to each one some responsibility; and he orders the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵So stay awake, for you don't know when the Lord of the house will come – in the evening or at midnight, when the cock crows or before dawn. ³⁶Do not let

him come suddenly and catch you asleep.

³⁷And what I say to you, I say to all: watch."

Conspiracy against Jesus (Mt 26:2; Lk 22:1; Jn 11:47)

+ 14 ¹It was now two days before the feast of the Passover and Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the teachers of the Law were looking for a crafty way to arrest Jesus and put him to death; ²for they

1. Dt 16, 1; Ex 12, 1

3. Lk 7, 46

◆ This is like a summary of the parable of the talents (Mt 25:1) and that of the ten young women (Mt 25:14). It warns us that we should wait for the Lord who is at work. The doorman symbolizes those who have positions of responsibility in the Church, those who are not the owners of the Church but who only hold the keys of the Church.

HOW CHRIST COMES; CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

In several parts of the Gospel, Jesus invites us to be vigilant while waiting for his arrival. How will he come? How can he come to us if we are meant to die before his coming in glory?

It is true that we will meet the Lord when we die. Nevertheless, Jesus comes to us in several ways while we await him, doing our work and living our lives.

Our work (34). One aspect of our commitment to Christ is our commitment to the Christian community, our Church. It is our participation in common prayer, in the Eucharist, in the Catechesis and other similar things, and as we participate in these commitments there is not only one but several "comings" of Christ. We see his coming in those of our brothers and sisters who are converted; he comes to us giving us strength and wisdom; he comes to us through prayer, giving us the inner certainty of his presence.

He also comes in our day-to-day living. The prophets have said time and again that the events that bring renewal and growth in values also bring the Lord. At times, he comes in his resurrection, through happy events that bring life and joy, and more justice and hope for the poor. At other times, he comes through his passion and death.

Precisely because Jesus comes in our daily history, we have a commitment to him to serve our contemporary world. As lay people, the major part of our commitment to Christ is expressed through the affairs of the world in our jobs, family, social and political endeavours –

and there, each one in his own way, is to be "alert."

Alert in order not to become discouraged and to be able to resist the environment of corruption and the suggestions of the evil spirit. Alert to be able to keep waiting for Christ. For many begin with generosity, making commitments for the good of others but, because they do not have their eyes permanently on the Lord, they lose sight of the goal and turn out to be mere administrators and activists.

They are committed to works and movements but not to the Lord himself. That is why their life is full of contradictions. For a time they perform marvels and suddenly they fail. They do useful things, but are not aware of the moment they should stop them and follow another path. They do their own work, but do not let the Lord take over their brain, their heart, their whole life.

This does not happen to those who are alert: through them Christ comes to men.

+ EASTER, THE PASSOVER

The Jews were going to celebrate the 1480th anniversary of their departure from Egypt. Easter, that is the Passover of the Lord, was the feast of national independence and was the most important holiday of the religious calendar.

But for the past 40 years they had lost their independence. That is why the Passover would revive in them their desire for freedom and cause disturbances. From all parts of Palestine the Jews went up to Jerusalem in pilgrimage, because the Passover lamb would be sacrificed in the Temple and eaten in Jerusalem.

Each family was to eat the roasted lamb with lettuce and unleavened bread, alternating the singing of Psalms with the blessing of several cups according to an old and very precise ritual. The head of the family would recall the departure from Egypt and, on recalling the past everyone would ask the Lord to free his humiliated people.

But the vast majority, both of common people and of the authorities, were incapable of



the house he enters and say to the owner, "The Master says: Where is the room where I may eat the Passover meal with my disciples?"¹⁵ Then he will show you a large upstairs room, already arranged and furnished. There you will prepare for us."¹⁶ The disciples went off. When they reached the city, they found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷ When it was evening, Jesus arrived with the Twelve.¹⁸ While they were at table eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me, *one who shares my meal.*"

¹⁹ They were deeply distressed at hearing this and asked him, one after the other, "You don't mean me, do you?"

²⁰ And Jesus answered, "It is one of you Twelve, one who dips his bread in the dish with me."²¹ The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures say he will. But alas for that man by whom the

Son of Man is betrayed; better for him: if he had never been born."

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. "Take this," he said, "This is my body."²³ Then he took a cup and after he had given thanks, passed it to them and they all drank from it.²⁴ And he said, "This is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is to be poured out for many."²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not taste the fruit of the vine again until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God."

Peter's denial foretold

(Mt 26:30; Lk 22:34; Jn 13:37)

²⁶ After singing psalms of praise, they went out to the Hill of Olives.²⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Because of me you will all be confused this night and fall away; for the Scripture says: *I will strike the shepherd and the*

20. Ps 41, 10 24. Ex 24, 8; Heb 9, 20 25. Is 25, 6; Lk 14, 15; Is 53, 12 26. Ps 115; Ps 118 27. Zac 13, 7

would be "his" salvation? It was to bring human history to its fulfillment: peoples and races needed to mature, to confront one another and finally to be united in one body. The world would pass through a thousand crises and deaths in order to come to the Resurrection. Within such a history God could spread and distribute the riches of his Spirit and bring to holiness his elect. Jesus had presented a message that should guide humanity, but a people of God was also needed, a minority, a yeast who would feel committed to God's work, and to whom God would commit himself.

Twelve centuries before Jesus' birth, God had made a Covenant with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai: they and their children would be among all races, the chosen people of God. But as time passed and the infidelities of God's people appeared more clearly, the prophets understood that something more was needed: a covenant whose first effect would be the forgiveness of sins (Jer 31:31). The family of God could no longer be identified with a certain race, but would be a family of believers pardoned of their sins: that is the Church.

On the eve of his death, Jesus remembered the first Covenant on Sinai, when the blood of sacrificial animals was spilled (Ex 24:8). He would soon spill his blood for many, that is, for a multitude (Is 53:11). These many are, in a

special way, the Church. So Jesus purified: through his death those who will be his own people in the world.

Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist (or Mass), we renew this Covenant. Jesus is among us while we remember his sacrifice. He becomes our spiritual bread and consecrates us to his Father so we may participate more and more in his work of salvation.

Jesus' last supper was the first Christian liturgy. Unlike the solemn Temple ceremonies the liturgical service of primary importance in the life of the Church would be a communal meal in which Jesus offers himself as the bread of life.

I will not taste the fruit of the vine again. The Eucharist not only reenacts Jesus' death but also announces the day when Christ, with all humanity reunited in him, will celebrate at the Banquet in the Kingdom.

To understand the meaning of the Lord's supper, it is necessary to read Jesus' farewell speeches to his apostles, which John situates on this very night of Holy Thursday (Jn 14-17). Jesus came, not only to preach, but to spread his Spirit among his believers. In the future he would be present and empower them in a special way: whenever they would gather to celebrate the Holy Supper. John explains this in Jn 6 and Paul in 1 Cor 11:17.

See also notes on Mt 26:26.



sheep will be scattered. ²⁸But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you."

²⁹Then Peter said to him, "Even though all the others fall away, I will not." ³⁰And Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, today, this very night before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." ³¹But Peter repeated more strongly, "Though I have to die with you, I will never deny you." And all of them said the same.

Gethsemane

(Lk 22:40; Jn 18:1)

■ ³²They came to a place which was called Gethsemane and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

³³But he took Peter, James and John along with him and, as he began to be filled with fear and distress, ³⁴he said to them, "My soul is filled with sorrow, even to death. Remain here and stay awake."

³⁵Then he went a little further on

and fell to the ground, praying that if possible this hour might pass without striking him. Jesus said, ³⁶"Abba (Daddy), all things are possible for you; take this cup away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want."

³⁷Then he came and found them asleep and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn't you stay awake for even one hour?" ³⁸Keep watch and pray, all of you, so that you may not slip into temptation. The spirit indeed is eager but nature is weak. ³⁹And going away he prayed saying the same words. ⁴⁰When he came back to the disciples, he found them asleep again; they could not keep their eyes open, and they did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹When he came back the third time, he said, "You can sleep on now and take your rest! It is all over, the time has come; the Son of Man is now given into the hands of sinful men. ⁴²Get up, let us go. Look: the one betraying me is right here."

28. 1 14; 16, 17

33. 5, 27; 9, 2; 13, 3

34. Jn 12, 27

36. Gal 4, 6

38. Mt 6, 10; Jn 5, 30; 6, 38

■ THE SILENCE OF GOD

Jesus is alone as he confronts death to overcome it, carrying on his shoulders the destiny of all humanity. He sees the wickedness of people who will ill-treat him or let him be ill-treated. And he sees behind it all the power of Darkness.

At this moment Jesus is the man of sorrows, aware of all afflictions, made one with sin. He is burdened by all the wickedness on earth. For this his death will be the price, the atonement. Face to face in prayer with his beloved and just Father, Jesus experiences anguish as great as death.

Jesus keeps on repeating one phrase which expresses the perfect prayer: *Father, your will be done*. There are moments and places in which the persecuted church is in agony and cannot do anything other than pray for the will of God to be done. During these times her prayer is more effective than ever.

How mysterious is the *agony* of the Son of God (agony means struggle); He who will give countless martyrs the inner strength to face their tortures fearlessly, allows himself to experience the very extreme of human weakness. This is for us. Even filled with fear or a sense of weakness, we shall not doubt: he will make us firm.

Let us look at Jesus our Saviour, who had no

faults or need to be purified. Yet he had to know humiliations, sufferings and even the silence of God to reach the maturity he still lacked in order to become "Man," the head of humanity.

+ JUDAS

Judas was one of the Twelve. After a night of prayer, how could Jesus have chosen the one who would betray him? When Judas followed Jesus, he waited, like the rest of the Apostles, for a liberator in the ordinary sense. The others, as they came to know Jesus better, accepted to change their ambitions, but Judas did not. Judas betrayed Jesus to take revenge against the Master who had disappointed him. Though Judas was among Jesus' closest group, he could not return the Master's affection for him and finally had to return hatred for love, falling into an abyss of evil.

Perhaps the other apostles contributed something to Judas' failure. Judas, like Levi-Matthew, joined the fishermen from Galilee who comprised the majority in the team. Had they tried enough to integrate him into their group?

o THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Jesus appeared before two courts. First be-

The arrest

(Mt 26:47; Lk 22:47; Jn 18:2)

+ ⁴³While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. With him was a mob armed with swords and clubs, who had been sent by the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the elders. ⁴⁴The traitor had arranged a signal for them, "The one I kiss, he is the man. Arrest him and take him away under guard."

⁴⁵So, when he came, he went directly to Jesus calling, "Master! Master!" and gave him a kiss. ⁴⁶Then they seized Jesus and took him. ⁴⁷One of the bystanders drew his sword and struck out at the High Priest's servant cutting off his ear.

⁴⁸Jesus turned to them saying, "So you set out against a robber! did you need swords and clubs to arrest me?"

⁴⁹Day after day I was among you teaching in the Temple and you could have arrested me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰Then they all deserted him and ran away.

⁵¹A young man covered by nothing but a linen cloth followed Jesus. As they put their hands on him, ⁵²he left the cloth in their hands and fled away naked.

o ⁵³They led Jesus to the High

Priest and all the chief priests assembled with the elders and the teachers of the Law. ⁵⁴Peter had followed him at a distance and went right into the courtyard of the High Priest, where he sat with the guards, warming himself at the fire.

⁵⁵Now the chief priests and the whole Council tried to find some evidence against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they were unable to find any. ⁵⁶Even though many came up to speak falsely against him, their evidence did not agree. ⁵⁷At last some men stood up and told this lie, ⁵⁸"We heard him say: 'I will destroy this Temple made by hands and in three days I will build another not made by human hands.'" ⁵⁹But even so their evidence did not agree.

◆ ⁶⁰The High Priest then stood up in the midst of them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer at all? What about this evidence against you?" ⁶¹But Jesus was silent and made no reply.

The High Priest put a second question to him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" ⁶²Then Jesus answered, "I am, and you will see *the Son of Man seated at the right*

49. Lk 19, 47 50. Zac 13, 7; Jn 16, 32
62. 13, 26; Ps 110, 1; Dn 7, 13; 1 Thes 4, 17

fore the Sanhedrin, or the Supreme Council of the Jews, where he was accused of blasphemy. Later he was brought before the Roman governor Pilate and accused of being a political agitator.

The reason for this double process was that the Jews, under Roman rule, had lost the power to issue death sentences. So, after judging Jesus according to their law, that is the laws of the Bible, they asked Pontius Pilate to implement the death penalty. To impress and convince Pilate, they submitted new charges.

It is very difficult to say whether Jesus' trial was dealt with in a legal way or not. It was similar to many other trials we know of, in which the authorities in power are able to twist the law and condemn their opponents without resorting to obvious fraud.

58. 13, 2; Jn 2, 19; Acts 6, 14 61. Is 50, 6

◆ THE SENTENCE OF JESUS

The priests could not sentence Jesus to death for minor violations of the Law. That is why they had to find something more important that occupies the central place in the Gospel: Are you the Son of God?

Jesus answered by combining two Biblical texts which reflect the divine personality of the Saviour. *Son of Man* who comes from God himself (Dan 7:13): *who is seated at the right hand of God, as an equal* (Psalm 110). With this assertion, Jesus clearly affirmed that he is not only a son of God like a saint or an envoy of God, but the Only One who shares the divinity of the Father.

The priests were not mistaken about what Jesus claimed to be as Son of God. It was not a matter of words, but they condemned him be-

hand of the Most Powerful and coming with the clouds of heaven around him." ⁶³The High Priest tore his clothes to show his horror and said, "What more evidence do we need? ⁶⁴You have just heard his blasphemous words. What is your decision?" And they all condemned Jesus, "He must die."

⁶⁵Some of them began to spit on Jesus and, blindfolding him, they struck him saying, "Play the prophet!

Peter disowns Jesus

(Mt 26:69; Jn 18:15)

+ ⁶⁶While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the High Priest's servant-girls came by. ⁶⁷Noticing Peter beside the fire, she looked straight at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the Nazarene." ⁶⁸But he denied it, "I don't know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the gateway.

⁶⁹The servant-girl saw him there and told the bystanders, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰But Peter denied it again. After a little while those standing by said to Peter, "Of course you are one of them: you are a Galilean,

aren't you?" ⁷¹And Peter began to justify himself with curses and oaths, "I don't know this man you are talking about."

⁷²Just then a cock crowed a second time and Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Jesus before Pilate

(Mt 27:11; Lk 23:2; Jn 18:28)

15 ¹Early in the morning, the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the Law (that is, the whole Council or Sanhedrin), had their plan ready. They put Jesus in chains, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

²Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "You say so." ³As the chief priests accused Jesus of many things, ⁴Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer at all? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵But Jesus gave no more answers, so that Pilate wondered.

o ⁶At every Passover festival, Pi-

5. 14, 61

cause in all his way of acting, Jesus put himself in the place fitting to God. They could soothe their conscience, for they were upholding the honour due to the Only One.

So they forgot that, in fact, they hated him because he had denounced their hypocrisy, their lack of faith and love for money. Jesus had felt free about the religious rules they defended and had made them fall from their pedestals. God had come in the person of Jesus to demand from them *the fruits of the vineyard* (Mk 12:2) calling them to account, and they had opposed him.

Jesus was condemned in the name of God. He did not rebel against the unjust sentence imposed by the religious leaders of his people who were the legal though unworthy, representatives of God. This was his perfect obedience to the Father.

+ The apostles did not lack character or courage; if so, Jesus would not have chosen them. Peter was sincere when he said: although all

abandon you, I will not. They were ready to die for Jesus, as people do in the enthusiasm of a battle, but what happened was very different. When Jesus was arrested, the apostles became confused because he did not use his divine power and showed no resistance to his enemies. That is why it would be wrong to say that the apostles were cowards until they received the Holy Spirit.

It was an understandable reaction for them to flee from the scene of Jesus' arrest. Their fleeing, however, shook to the foundations all the faith they had after living day by day with Jesus for the past two years. It was more than fear which caused Peter to deny Jesus; in fact, he did not yet know who Jesus really was.

The denial of Peter was a real and serious fall, although God forgives the sin the instant Peter's gaze meets Jesus and Peter repents (Lk 22:16). This failure however, will compel him, until the end of his life, not to rely on himself. Peter, Rock and responsible for the Universal Church, will



late used to free any prisoner the people asked for. ⁷ Now there was a man called Barabbas, jailed with the rioters who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ When the crowd went up and began to ask Pilate the usual favour, ⁹ he said to them, "Do you want me to set free the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he realized that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him out of envy. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask instead for the release of Barabbas. ¹² Pilate replied, "And what shall I do with the man you call King of the Jews?" ¹³ The crowd shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁴ Pilate asked, "What evil has he done?" But they shouted the louder, "Crucify him!"

Jesus crowned with thorns

(Mt 27:27; Jn 19:1)

¹⁵ As Pilate wanted to please the people, he freed Barabbas for them; then he had Jesus scourged, and after that delivered him up to be crucified.

¹⁶ The soldiers took him inside the

courtyard known as the *pretorium*, and called the rest of their companions. ¹⁷ They dressed him up in a purple cloak and twisting a crown of thorns, they forced it onto his head. ¹⁸ Then they began saluting him, "Long life to the King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ With a stick they gave him blows on the head and spat on him; then they knelt down pretending to worship him.

²⁰ When they had finished mocking him, they pulled the purple cloak off and dressed him in his own clothes again.

The crucifixion

The soldiers led him out of the city to crucify him. ²¹ On the way they met Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), who was coming in from the country, and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus.

²² When they had led him to the place called Golgotha, which means *the Skull*, ²³ they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he would not

13. Acts 3, 14; 13, 28

23. Pro 31, 6; Ps 22, 19

remain ever conscious of his personal weakness and will never find peace until he follows Jesus by giving up his life for him (Jn 21:19).

o THE PEOPLE

The Jewish people asked for Jesus' death – the same people who had brought their sick to him and followed him for three days through remote areas, forgetting their hunger. Not necessarily the same individuals, but the same people.

The leaders delivered Jesus to death out of envy, and also because the Gospel is subversive of every system that defends itself instead of serving the people. The people abandoned Jesus and chose Barabbas. Why? Because Jesus proposed a path to liberation that requires time, responsibility and sacrifice, while the political agitator Barabbas used irresponsible violence which attracts the mediocre and satisfies their own hidden violence.

The Jewish people asked for Jesus' death. Of course, not all did so, but collectively they were all responsible. In any group, the evil that some do concerns all, because the others have not been sufficiently courageous or intelligent or persistent to stop it.

The evangelists blame the Jewish people and rightly so, because they also were Jews. The true believer first accuses oneself and one's own group. The Jews happened to be the murderers of God because he had decided to live among them; any other people to whom the Lord would have come would most likely have done the same in the name of God and their sacred laws.

Over the centuries, many so-called Christians persecuted the Jews calling them murderers of Christ. In this they were hypocrites: they themselves were murdering Christ in the person of numberless victims they killed for the sake of their political or religious fanaticism.

Jesus was subjected to torture and mockery and everything that befalls the condemned anywhere in the world when police and military no longer consider them as free persons and brothers and sisters. To comply with Roman law, Jesus was scourged, but this was not done out of cruelty; the loss of blood and exhaustion caused by such a scourging would hasten the death of the crucified man, thus shortening his agony.

A convicted man with his arms nailed to the cross would suffocate. To make breathing possible, he would shift his weight from his feet to



take it. ²⁴Then they nailed him onto the cross and divided his clothes among themselves, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The statement of his offense was displayed above his head and it read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷They also crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

²⁸People passing by laughed at him, shook their head and jeered, "Aha! So you are able to tear down the Temple and build it up again in three days. ²⁹Now save yourself and come down from the cross!"

³⁰In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law made fun of him saying to one another, "The man who saved others cannot save himself. ³¹Let's see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from his cross and then we will believe in him." Even the men who were crucified with Jesus insulted him.

The death of Jesus

(Mt 27:45; Lk 23:44; Jn 19:20)

◆³²When noon came, darkness fell over the whole land and lasted until three o'clock; ³³and at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachani?*" which means "My God, my God, why do you forsake me?" ³⁴As soon as they heard these words, some of the bystanders said, "Listen! He is calling for Elijah." ³⁵And one of them went quickly to fill a sponge in bitter wine and, putting it on a reed, gave him to drink; and he said, "Now let's see whether Elijah comes to take him down."

³⁶But Jesus uttered a loud cry and gave up his spirit. ³⁷And immediately the curtain which enclosed the Temple sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.

³⁸The captain who was standing in front of him saw how Jesus died and heard the cry he gave; and he said, "Truly, this man was the Son of God."

28. Is 53, 12

29. Ps 22, 8; Job 16, 4

33. Am 8, 9

34. Ps 22, 2; Lk 23, 46

38. Heb 6, 19; 9, 3

his arms, thus increasing the unbearable pain caused by the nails in the feet and the wrists. As soon as he no longer had enough strength to do this, he would suffocate and die. The bitter wine offered was a drink commonly used by Roman soldiers. Although myrrh lessens pain, Jesus rejected what could have soothed his pain.

◆ RECONCILIATION

Eloi, Eloi lama sabachani? These are the opening words of psalm 22 that begins with a cry of anguish and ends with certainty of victory. This psalm makes constant reference to the passion of Jesus.

Jesus' shout at the moment of death presents a mystery: for a crucified man ordinarily would die from exhaustion and suffocation and be unable to cry out in this manner. But no one could take life away from Jesus: it was in his own power, and he surrendered his life when he chose to do so. Those near him were taken aback: was it a shout of defeat or of victory?

The death of a person is sometimes cause for division in a family. But at other times a death leads to reconciliation. The cross Jesus died on was made of two wooden beams, a vertical one pointed towards the skies, and the other, horizontal: stretched out between heaven and earth,

Jesus reconciles all people with God and with each other.

Those who in Jesus' death see God's greatest manifestation of love for humanity, become reconciled with God. They are no longer controlled by their fear of God and come to understand that we are not subject to blind fate, but are always in God's loving care.

The curtain that enclosed the Sanctuary of the Temple was torn down. This means that God no longer remains in that place where no mortal could enter. God left the awe-inspiring temple shrine and is now present to all of us through his wounded Son – wounded, not only by sin, but also by the compassion he feels for us.

Reconciliation among persons and nations. Before Jesus entered our world, God had not begun to lift the barriers that divided people but had limited himself to relating with just one people, the Jewish people. But from the time of Jesus' birth, all were called to enter the Kingdom (Eph 2:11-16). Previously each people had their own religious rites and beliefs. But now, the knowledge of Jesus, of Jesus crucified would be the basis of faith and unity. Knowing and believing him, persons and nations would be reconciled despite the differences dividing them.

⁴⁰There were also some women watching from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joset and Salome. ⁴¹They had followed Jesus when he was in Galilee and helped him. There were also many others who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

The burial

+ ⁴²It was now evening and as it was Preparation Day, that is the day before the sabbath, ⁴³someone boldly went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. This was Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God.

⁴⁴Pilate was surprised that Jesus should have died so soon; so he summoned the captain and inquired if

Jesus was already dead. ⁴⁵After hearing the captain, he let Joseph have the body.

⁴⁶Joseph took him down and wrapped him in the linen sheet he had bought. He laid him in a tomb which had been cut out of the rock and rolled a stone across the entrance to the tomb. ⁴⁷Now Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joset took note of where he had been laid.

He has been raised, he is not here
(Mt 28; Lk 24; Jn 20)

16 ¹When the sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early in the morning on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb.

40. Mk 6, 3 42. Dt 21, 22 1. Jn 19, 40; 14, 8 2. Jn 11, 38

Truly this man was the Son of God. Assuredly, the Roman captain proclaimed that Jesus was a just man (Lk 23:47), that is an outstanding man. Mark intentionally places on the lips of the captain the words "Son of God," because this pagan officer represents the pagan nations who will recognize the Son of God in this crucified man.

On several occasions Jesus insisted that he not be proclaimed son of God (Mk 1:44). He did this because no one can know who God is or what being the Son of God means (Mt 11:27) until he has known how Jesus died and come to believe in his resurrection. See Rom 3:24.

+ Joseph of Arimathea hastened to claim and bury the body of Jesus because the Jewish law demanded burial before nightfall for the bodies of convicted men (Deut 21:22), and even more so on a day which preceded an important feast. The tomb selected had been cut from rock on a hillside. The entrance was very low and was sealed with a big round stone, similar to that used in a mill. See commentary on Jn 19:41.

Like the seed that is buried in the soil, the body of Jesus was buried so that new life could flourish (Rom 6:35). Also see comments on Mt 27:52.

o JESUS HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Jesus' history comes to an end with the discovery of the empty tomb. In the last pages of the Gospel we find a brief account of the most important apparitions of Jesus after his death.

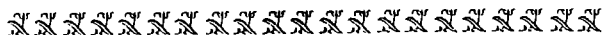
He is no longer the earthly Jesus but the resurrected one, born again from the Father and never to die again, as psalm 2 says: *You are my son and on this very day I have given you life.*

Jesus has risen. The Gospel narrates events that took place after his death and mentions the names of those who saw the resurrected Jesus. Can we believe them? We would want to know more details to support our faith, but if even thousands of interviews with eyewitnesses were published, with pictures in full color to support the statements, there would always be room for doubt. For we do not see him, we cannot find him. Where is he?

Actually, it is not important whether there are few or many witnesses. This is a matter of faith and faith is something personal.

We doubt, not because there is not enough evidence, but because the event overcomes us. How can we believe that a world of scandals and human suffering leads to a resurrection? The evidence, nevertheless is there and has withstood recurring criticisms and even modern studies. Finally, who will believe? Those whose own experience has prepared them to accept the most fundamental truth: the living God loves and restores people to life.

Some persons are predisposed to believe because they have experienced that God himself walks with them in their trials and gives them hope when everything seems lost. Because of this, they recognize in Christ the ideal human



³They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴But as they looked up, they noticed that the stone had already been rolled away. It was a very big stone.

⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right, dressed in a white robe, and they were amazed. ⁶But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified; he has been raised and is not here. This is, however, the place where they laid him. ⁷Now go and tell his disciples and Peter: Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you." ⁸The women went out of the tomb and fled, beside themselves with fear. And they said nothing to anyone because of their fear.

Short conclusion of Mark's Gospel

◆ ⁹After Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary of Magdala from whom he had driven out seven demons. ¹⁰She went and reported the news to his followers, who were now mourning and weeping. ¹¹But when they heard that he lived and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

¹²After this he showed himself in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. ¹³These men too went back and told the others, but they did not believe them.

¹⁴Later Jesus showed himself to the Eleven while they were at table. He scolded them for their unbelief and stubbornness in refusing to be-

5. Acts 1, 10; Rev 7, 9

6. Acts 2, 23; 3, 15; 4, 10

9. Jn 20, 18

12. Lk 24, 13

14. Lk 24, 36; Jn 20, 19; 1 Cor 15, 5

being and understand that he had to suffer before reaching his glory. They have learned to understand the ways of God and that is why they believe the witnesses of the resurrected Christ.

It is not more difficult to believe in Christ's resurrection than to believe in his words, for both go together. *He who believes has overcome the world.* John the apostle says (1 Jn 5:4). This means overcoming the false meaning that most people give to their existence due to their ignorance of God. Whoever believes has overcome the fears each of us has when we have to pass through uncharted paths, when we have to set reason aside and entrust ourselves in God's hands.

◆ In verse 8, there is an abrupt ending of Mark's Gospel. We were looking forward to the meeting between Jesus and the apostles in Galilee, but it does not take place. Why? We do not know. We find only a series of brief references to Jesus' appearances after his resurrection.

Proclaim the Good News to all creation. The Good News is the seed that will be planted in the world and will flourish, in proper time, in all the fields of human activity. Salvation is not a matter of saving isolated souls or individual beings. The Gospel is to be proclaimed to all creation in all activities and acts of those who have been renewed by Baptism. They are to be the yeast that transforms human history.

■ THE NAME OF JESUS

On the day of his resurrection, Jesus' human nature begins to participate fully in divine Glory. Jesus is now the "Son of God with power" (Rom 1:1). Jesus now asks us to believe in his *Name*, that is in the divine power he has just received and that works through him.

The Name is a word that has little or no meaning for us. But for the Jews it meant the active presence of God. This term allowed them to speak of God's mysterious presence in the world without disregarding his greatness. The Bible does not say that God walked with the Hebrews toward the promised land (for God does not walk); instead it says that his Name or his Face (Ex 33:14) was among them. God's presence could not be confined within his temple, but the Bible says that his Name dwelt in this temple, from whence he blessed all the activities of his people (1 Kg 8:27).

The Name, thus, means divine presence or power. And Paul says that the resurrected Jesus has received this Name that outshines any other (Phil 2:9). God the Father has given it to him and Jesus, who has received it, is not less than him since whatever belongs to his Father is now his as well. Jesus does not receive glory as one receives a title or an honour (as already proclaimed in Is 9:5), for divine glory can be granted only to God. If he receives a divine title, that is because he actually received divinity from the



lieve those who had seen him after he had been raised.

■ ¹⁵ Then he told them, "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation. ¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who refuses to believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ Signs like these will accompany those who have believed: in my Name they will cast out demons and speak new languages; ¹⁸ they will

pick up snakes and, if they drink anything poisonous, they will not be hurt. They will lay hands on the sick and the sick will be healed."

¹⁹ So then, after speaking to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right of God. ²⁰ The Eleven went forth and preached everywhere while the Lord continually worked with them and confirmed the message by the miracles which accompanied them.

16. Acts 2, 38; 16, 31

17. Acts 8, 7; 14, 3; 28, 3

20. Acts 2, 4; 19, 6; 1 Cor 14, 2

Father in the beginning – divinity is his own being.

Thus, Jesus is as much God as the Father, but he is so in a different way, by receiving everything from God who possess all. That is why it is written that *his Name is the Son* (Heb 1:4). And when we speak to the Father *in the Name of Jesus*, this means much more than bolstering ourselves with his merits (Heb 5:9) or making use of his valuable intercession (Heb 7:25). We present ourselves as children, knowing that God embraces us with the same paternal love he has for his own Beloved one (Eph 1:6).

From then on, our Lord Jesus Christ, with divine power begins little by little to direct human

history and the personal path of each one of us to himself. The apostles were sent into the world to heal and sanctify it. The miracles and healings are not ends in themselves; they are only signs and mean: The goal of evangelization is that all creation may be gathered around the person of the Son of God made man, through the power of his Spirit. "Do not fear," the Lord says, "my Church is not a shelter against the world, its temptations and problems; rather each of you is baptized to be an apostle."

Signs like these will accompany those who believe. The Acts of the Apostles reports these signs and miracles. Even today they can be seen wherever Christians fulfill their mission of evangelizing the world.



Luke, a Syrian doctor, converted to Christianity when the first missionaries left the Jerusalem and Caesarea communities to take the Gospel beyond the borders of the Jewish country. Then, he left his homeland to accompany the Apostle, Paul.

He arrived at Rome, the capital of the known world then. He stayed there for at least two years and he met Peter and Mark who were preaching among the Christians in Rome.

When he wrote his Gospel, around the year 70, various texts containing deeds and miracles of Jesus, were available to him, the same texts which Mark and Matthew had used. But in his travels, he had also picked up other stories coming from Jesus' first disciples. These stories were kept in the oldest churches of Jerusalem and Caesarea.

Such is the origin of those first two chapters of Luke's Gospel telling us about Jesus' infancy, based on information which his mother, Mary, must have supplied.

Luke's cultural background was Greek and he was writing for Greek people. He omitted several Marcan details, things dealing with Jewish laws and customs which would have been hard to understand for his readers.

Luke saw in the Gospel the power reconciling people with God and people among themselves. Therefore, he was concerned about giving us the parables of mercy and the words condemning money – a divisive factor between people. Likewise, Luke showed the very natural way Jesus treated woman who were completely marginalized by the world.

+ 1 Many people have already related the events that have taken place among us.² writing down what we were told by the first witnesses who became ministers of the word.³ Yet after I myself had gone

carefully over the whole story from the beginning, it seemed good to me to write an orderly account for you, Theophilus,⁴ so that your Excellency may know the truth of all you have been taught.

2. Acts 4, 31; 8, 25

3. Acts 1, 1

+ Luke dedicates his work to Theophilus, who may have been a well-to-do Christian. According to the custom of the times (printing did not exist), Luke gave him his manuscript with the expectation that several copies would be made at his expense for the use of Christian communities. Luke will also dedicate the Acts of the Apostles to Theophilus

curacy and reliability of the stories he used in his Gospel since history is not written on the basis of rumors and legends. But there is something more important: Luke realizes that Jesus' passage among men is going to change world history. Many times we view Christian faith only as the means to save our soul, or to go to heaven or to encourage us in the difficulties of life. We forget that Christ came to save the world not just to save souls.

Luke says that he, personally, verified the ac-

The birth of John the Baptist foretold

o ⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there lived a priest named Zechariah, belonging to the priestly clan of Abiah. Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, also belonged to a priestly family. ⁶Both of them were upright in the eyes of God and lived blamelessly in accordance with all the laws and commands of the Lord, ⁷but they had no child. Elizabeth could not have any and now they were both very old.

⁸Yet, while Zechariah and the other priests were fulfilling their office, ⁹it fell to him by lot, according to the custom of the priests, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰While all the people who had gathered for the incense service were praying outside, ¹¹an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on

the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²On seeing the angel, Zechariah was deeply troubled and a holy fear took hold of him.

¹³But the angel said to him, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah, be assured that your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall name him John. ¹⁴He will bring joy and gladness to you and many will rejoice at his birth.

¹⁵This son of yours will be great in the eyes of the Lord. Listen: he shall never drink wine or strong drink, but he will be filled with holy spirit even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶Through him many of the people of Israel will turn to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He himself will open the way to the Lord with the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah; he will reconcile fathers and children, and lead the disobedient to

5. 1 Chron 4.10

12. Jdg 6, 22; Dn 8, 17

Num 6, 3; Jdg 16, 17; 1, 41

7. Gen 11, 30; 25, 21; 29, 31;

13. Gen 15, 1; Dn 10, 12;

16. Jer 1, 5

Jdg 13, 2; 1 S 1, 5

12; Gen 17, 19; Jdg 13, 3

17. Mal 2, 6; Mal 3, 1;

11. Mt 1, 20

15. 1 K 17, 1;

17. Mal 1, 14; Mal 3, 24; Is 40, 3

o *In the days of Herod.* Herod was the last king of the Jews. When he died, Judea lost its autonomy. Since God had promised not to abandon the Jewish nation, either God's plan had failed, or something new was going to appear. However, beginnings are always humble and they never make the front page of newspapers.

Zechariah was a 'priest.' For the Jewish people, one was not a priest because of a personal decision, but through family rights. There were a number of priestly families, called Aaron's descendants. All the men from these families were priests from generation to generation. From time to time they had the privilege and duty to fulfill priestly functions in the Jerusalem temple, but the rest of the time, they worked as ordinary citizens.

Elizabeth could not have children. As with Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, famous ancestors of the Jewish people, and Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel, this occurred so that God's goodness and power shown to the humble and despised could be made more obvious (1 Sam 1).

Your prayer has been heard. Zechariah had wanted to have a son, but he no longer hoped for one. However, in the temple, he had just prayed for the salvation God would grant his people and he is promised both.

He will not drink wine. In Israel many men consecrated themselves to God in this way: they

neither cut their hair nor drank alcoholic drinks and they withdrew from the world for a while (Nm. 6). They were called *Nazirites*.

But Zechariah's son must be a Nazirite *from his mother's womb* until his death, as Samsor had been (Jg 13:13). The one who will be known as John the Baptist receives the mission to preach repentance, and his very life will be a model of austerity (Mk 1:6). In that he will be the opposite of Jesus who, but for exceptional times: such as his fasting in the desert, will live like everybody else and will not request special fasts of his disciples (Lk 7:33-34).

Then, the angel indicates what John-Zechariah's son - will be: *He will go in the spirit and power of Elijah.* In Scripture, we see that after Elijah disappeared, having been taken to heaven in a flaming chariot (2 Kg 2:11), the community of believers kept wondering about the meaning of such an unusual event. They even thought that just as Elijah had worked during a time of religious crisis to bring his people back to faith, so he would also return from heaven before the coming of the Messiah to restore his people's faithfulness.

The text here refers to this Israelite expectation: one should not think that Elijah would return from heaven in person as Mal 4:23 seemed to say. Rather John the Baptist would operate *with the spirit of Elijah* to obtain recon-

wisdom and righteousness, in order to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I believe such a thing? I am an old man and my wife is elderly too." ¹⁹The angel replied, "I am Gabriel, who stand before God, and I am the one sent to speak to you and bring you this good news! My words will come true in their time, although you would not believe. ²⁰But now you will be silent and unable to speak until this has happened."

²¹Meanwhile the people waited for Zechariah, and they were surprised that he delayed so long in the sanctuary. ²²When he finally appeared, he could not speak to them and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He remained dumb and made signs to them.

²³When his time of service was completed, Zechariah returned to his home ²⁴and some time later Elizabeth was pregnant. For five months she kept to herself, remaining at home, and thinking, ²⁵"What is the Lord doing for me! This is his time for mercy and for taking away my public disgrace."

The annunciation

(Mt 1:18)

+ ²⁶In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth. He was sent ²⁷to a young virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the family of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸The angel came to her and said, "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you." ²⁹Mary listened and was

19. Dn 8, 16; 9, 21 25. Gen 21, 6; 1 S 1, 10; Is 4, 1 27. Mt 1, 18 28. Rut 2, 4; Ex 3, 12

ciliation for all through justice and faithfulness to God's law.

And so, in this remote corner of the world, the Good News begins with an elderly couple without children, because nothing is impossible with God but first, we must believe in his promises.

THE VIRGIN MARY

+ How considerate God is toward men! He does not save them without their consent. The Saviour is expected and welcomed by a mother: a young girl freely and knowingly accepts to be the servant of the Lord and becomes the mother of God.

The virgin's name was Mary. Lukes uses the word *virgin*. Why did he not say a *young girl* or a *woman*? Simply because he is referring to the words of the prophets stating that God would be received by the *virgin of Israel*. For centuries God had endured thousands of infidelities of his people and he had forgiven their sins. But at his coming, the Saviour was to be received by a virgin people, namely a people who would let go of their own ambition and place their future in God's hands. God must be welcomed with a pure heart, that is, a new heart not worn out in the experience of other loves. In Jesus' time many people concluded that the Messiah would be born of a Virgin mother when they read the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14.

Now then, Luke says: Mary is *The Virgin*.

How can I be a mother? The angel states that the baby will be born of Mary without Joseph's intervention. The one to be born of Mary in time

is the same one who exists in God, born of God, Son of the Father (see Jn 1:1).

The power of the Most High will shadow over you. The sacred books spoke of a *cloud* or *shadow* filling the temple (1 Kg 8:10) as a sign of the divine presence over the holy city protecting it (Sir 24:4).

By using this image the Gospel conveys that Mary becomes God's dwelling place, through whom he works out his mysteries. The Holy Spirit comes, not first over the Son, but over Mary so that she may conceive through the power of the Spirit as we usually say, since a man's intervention is excluded. Jesus is conceived in Mary through her total surrender to the unique and eternal Word of the Father.

Jesus was conceived by a virgin mother. Before the angel came, had Mary thought about consecrating her virginity to God? The Gospel gives no indication to this effect other than Mary's word: *I do not know man*. Let us recall that Mary was about to be married and was engaged to Joseph, which, according to Jewish law, gave them the rights of marriage (Mt 1:20). Under these conditions, her words would make no sense or be difficult to explain if Mary had not been determined to remain a virgin.

Many people are surprised by such a decision on Mary's part. How could she think about remaining a virgin in marriage, especially among a people who did not value virginity? Many people in non-Catholic churches, when they read in the Gospel, *the brothers of Jesus*,



troubled at these words, wondering what this greeting could mean.

³⁰ But the angel said, "Do not fear, Mary, for God has looked kindly on you. ³¹ You shall conceive and bear a son and you shall call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and shall rightly be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the kingdom of David, his ancestor; he will rule

over the people of Jacob forever³³ and his reign shall have no end."

³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be if I do not have intercourse with a man?" ³⁵ And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the holy child to be born shall be called Son of God. ³⁶ Even

30. 1, 13

31. Is 7, 14; Mt 1, 21

32. 2 S 7, 16; Is 9, 6; Dn 7, 14

35. Mt 1, 20; Is 11, 1;

Num 9, 18; Acts 3, 14; 4, 34

simply conclude that Mary had other children after Jesus. We have already explained this point in Mk 3:31. The sad part is that such people are so eager to deny Mary's virginity.

The one who, from the beginning, was chosen by God to welcome his only Son through an act of perfect faith, had to be a virgin. She, who was to give Jesus his blood, his hereditary traits, his character, his first education, must have grown under the shadow of the Almighty like a secret flower belonging to no one else, who had renounced everything except the living God. From then on, she would be the model for everyone, since all believers, in varying degrees depending on one's mission, renounce many things in order to venture on a way in which the only reward is God.

For a believer – man or woman – it is not that exceptional to renounce sex altogether. There are many examples of young people who have sensed, from an early age, that this evangelical way is a more direct way to come closer to Jesus. Could Mary have been less intelligent than they were, less able to sense the things of God? And after being visited in a unique way by the Holy Spirit, who is the breath of God's love, would she still have needed the loving embraces of Joseph? If the history of the church gives us so many examples of God's jealous love for those who were his friends and his saints, would he ask less of the one who was called *full of grace*?

What irresponsible reasoning on the part of those who have not preserved the Apostles' tradition which proclaims that Mary was and always remained a virgin! Shall we reduce the marvels of God to what we ourselves are capable of understanding and practicing?

THE ANNUNCIATION

Only Mary could make known the mystery of Jesus' conception to the primitive church. How could she express such an inner experience and how would it be reported? God does not usually communicate with his great saints and prophets through visions, or when there are visions, they are not what is most important. Everything occurs in an intimate encounter from person to person. God engraves his words in the depths of the mind, and his grace so enables the spirit of

his servants that they give the total response which God expects.

Therefore, in writing, Luke had to use biblical words and forms which would allow a better understanding of Mary's encounter with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: an encounter which could not be expressed in human words.

The angel Gabriel. The Jews of that time believed that only seven angels of the highest rank were allowed into God's presence and they called one of them, Gabriel, the one who appears in the book of Daniel to announce the hour of salvation (Dan 8:16 and 9:24). And so, in speaking of Gabriel, the Gospel implies that, for Mary, everything began with the assurance that this was the moment when the destiny of the world was being decided.

Rejoice. This was the joyful way in which prophets addressed the *daughter of Zion*, that is to say, the community of the humble, who looked forward to the coming of the Saviour (Zep 3:14; Zec 9:9).

Full of grace. The word used in the Gospel means specifically: beloved and favoured. Other people had been loved, chosen, favoured; but in this instance it becomes the very name of Mary.

She was troubled by these words. But the text does not speak of fear as it did in the case of Zechariah (1:12). From the first moment that Mary's spirit was awakened, she was aware of the presence of God inspiring her every decision, and so the divine revelation does not cause fear in her. But the divine words, revealing her unique vocation, trouble her.

You are going to conceive. We have already mentioned that the phrase refers to Isaiah's prophecy (7:14). Isaiah was announcing the one who would be *Emmanuel* meaning God-with-us. Mary will name him Jesus which means saviour.

He will rule over the people of Jacob forever (or the Israelites). This is a way of saying that Jesus is the Saviour, the son of David, announced by the prophets: 2 Sam 7:16; Is 9:16.

He will be great, but not in the way that John the Baptist would be great before God, for John was only a man (1:15). Jesus was to be *son of the Most High and son of David*: these two attributes pointed to the expected Messiah or



your relative Elizabeth is expecting a son in her old age, although she was unable to have a child, and she is now in her sixth month. ³⁷So with God nothing is impossible."

³⁸Then Mary said, "I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

Mary visits Elizabeth

■ ³⁹Mary then set out for a town in the Hills of Judah. ⁴⁰She entered the

house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby suddenly moved within her. Elizabeth was filled with holy spirit and, ⁴²giving a loud cry, said, "You are most blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³How is it that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" ⁴⁴The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby within me suddenly moved for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed are you who believed that the Lord's word would come true!"

37. Gen 18, 14	41. 1, 15	42. Jdg 5, 24; Jud 13, 18	45. 1, 20; Jn 20, 29
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Saviour (2 Sam 7: 14; Ps 2: 7). This is why it was made clear that Joseph was from the family of David: see commentary on Mt 1:20.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

I am the servant of the Lord. In saying this Mary does not lower herself with false humility, instead, she expresses her faith and her surrender.

From her will be born the one who is going to be both the *servant* announced by the prophets (Is 42: 1; 50: 1; 52: 13) and the *only Son* (Heb 1).

Many persons are so mistaken about the word servant that they view almighty God as using his servants to his own ends without taking the time to look at them and to love them. For them God would lose his greatness if he were to give Mary authentic responsibility in the incarnation of her Son and if he were to make her worthy of her Son. According to them it is characteristic of God to decide, act and create without us, as we are only God's instruments and God only needed Mary to provide a human body for his Son.

This, however, is contrary to the spirit of the Bible which highlights God's attempts to be close to men (Deut 4: 7; Prov 8: 31). God had no need of a woman to make a human body, but he wanted to have a mother for his Son; and for Mary to really be that mother, it was necessary that God had looked upon her with greater love than any other creature. Thus, Mary is called *full of grace*.

Grace is what we call the power God has to heal our spirit, to instill in us the disposition to believe, and to make us resonate with the truth so that the expression of real love comes from us in a spontaneous and unexpected way. We call *grace* what came from the living God to blossom on earth: Is 45: 8; Ps 85: 11.

Mary is really full of grace because Jesus was born of her as he is born of the Father. He is not her son only through the flesh, a stranger to his mother as some Christians believe, but he is son of her soul and of her faith, because she is the servant of the Lord, *the one who believed* (Lk

1: 45) and in whom God has done great things (Lk 1: 49).

This is why the church believes that Mary has a unique role in the work of our salvation. She is the marvel that God achieved at the outset of transforming humankind into his image. Along with the Son of God made man, she is the person whom God lifted up to unique intimacy with himself so that, through her, he could come into the world. Along with Christ, the new Adam (Rom 6: 14 and 1 Cor 15: 45), she is the true "mother of the living," the Woman of the new creation, in contrast with Eve, the sinner.

THE HUMBLE PEOPLE

■ Mary, in response to the angel's discreet invitation, went to share her joy with her elderly cousin, Elizabeth. And so was fulfilled the promise made to Zechariah, *Your son will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.*

What is most important in the story is not what is spectacular. The Gospel prefers to draw our attention to life-filled events.

A few years later, Jewish crowds will go to John the Baptist in search of salvation, and they will realize that God gave him the fire of his Spirit and of his Word, but no one will wonder how he received the Spirit of God and no one will know that a humble girl, Mary, put God's plan in motion on that Visitation day.

Blessed are you who believed! With great joy Mary discovers that her virginity has been fruitful. She, who gave up the possibility of having children and giving life as all women desire, communicates the life of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. Mary became the Temple of God.

About Mary's canticle. Mary, so unobtrusive in the Gospel, having no part in Jesus' ministry, is the one who proclaims the historical revolution begun with the coming of the Saviour.

She proclaims:

– the mercy of God who always keeps his promises,

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

⁴⁷ my spirit exults in God my saviour,

⁴⁸ He has looked upon his servant in her lowliness,
and people forever will call me blessed.

⁴⁹ The Mighty One has done great things for me,
Holy is his Name!

⁵⁰ From age to age his mercy extends
to those who live in his presence.

⁵¹ He has acted with power and done wonders,
and scattered the proud with their plans.

⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones
and lifted up those who are downtrodden.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He held out his hand to Israel, his servant,
for he remembered his mercy,

⁵⁵ even as he promised our fathers,
Abraham and his descendants for ever."

⁵⁶ Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.

Birth of John the Baptist

o ⁵⁷ When the time came for Elizabeth, she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbours and relatives heard that the merciful Lord had done such a won-

derful thing for her and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ When on the eighth day they came to attend the circumcision of the child, they wanted to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ They said to her, "No-

46. 1 S 2, 1	48. 1, 25; 1 S 1, 11	49. Ps 111, 9; Is 57, 15	50. Ps 103, 17	51. Job 12, 19
54. Ezk 21, 23; Ps 113, 7; Ps 146	55. Mi 7, 20; Ps 18, 51	59. Gen 17, 12; Lev 12, 3	60. 1, 13	

- the change which is to take place in the human condition.

This is what, Martin Luther King, the emancipator of the Blacks, recalled: "Despite the fact that all too often people see in the church a power opposed to any change, in fact, the church preserves a powerful ideal which urges men toward the summits and opens their eyes as to their own destiny. From the hot spots of Africa to the black areas of Alabama, I have seen men rising and shaking off their chains. They had just discovered they were God's children, and that, as God's children, it was impossible to enslave them."

With the twentieth century comes the historical moment when it dawns on the world that the poor and lowly may topple oppressive powers, no matter how great, provided they do it without using the weapons of the rich and the violent.

The song of Mary also expresses the deepest feeling of the Christian soul. There is a time for us to seek truth, to discover what our major duties are and to become truly and essentially human. There is a time for asking from and serving God. But in the long run we come to understand that divine love seeks out what is poorer and weaker to fill it and make it great. Then our only prayer becomes thanksgiving to God for his understanding and merciful designs.

- o What was circumcision? (see Gen 17).

The child lived in the desert, that is the desert of Judea by the Dead Sea, where some large communities of people who looked forward to the coming of the Saviour in the near future, had settled. These communities, called the Essenes, devoted themselves to prayer and meditation on Scripture. They also took part in the education of children.

one in your family has that name;"
⁶²and they asked the father by means of signs for the name he wanted to give. ⁶³Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote on it, "His name is John," and they were very surprised. ⁶⁴At that very time Zechariah could speak again and his first words were in praise of God.

⁶⁵A holy fear came on all in the neighbourhood, and throughout the Hills of Judah the people talked about these events. ⁶⁶As they heard this, they pondered it in their minds and wondered, "What will this child be?" For they understood that the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷Zechariah, filled with holy spirit sang this canticle,

⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has come and redeemed his people.

⁶⁹He has raised up for us a victorious Saviour

in the house of David his servant,

⁷⁰as he promised through his prophets of old,

⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of our foes.

⁷²He has shown mercy to our fathers and remembered his holy covenant,

⁷³the oath he swore to Abraham,

⁷⁴to deliver us from the enemy,

⁷⁵that we may serve him fearlessly as a holy and righteous people all the days of our life.

⁷⁶And you, my child, shall be called prophet of the Most High

for you shall go before the Lord to prepare the way for him

⁷⁷and enable his people to know of their salvation when he comes to forgive the sins.

⁷⁸This is the work of the mercy of our God

who comes as a rising sun

⁷⁹shining on those who live in darkness

and in the shadow of death, and guiding our feet into the way of peace.

⁸⁰As the child grew up, he was seen to be strong in the Spirit; he lived in the desert till the day when he appeared openly in Israel.

The birth of Jesus

2 ¹At that time the emperor issued a decree that a census of the whole empire should be taken. ²This first census was taken while Quirinus was governor of Syria. ³Everyone has to be registered in his own town.

67. 2 K 3, 15; Eek 1, 3	69. 1 S 2, 10; Ps 18, 3; 132, 17	71. Ps 106, 10	72. Ex 2, 24; Lev 26, 42
73. Gen 26, 3	74. Mi 4, 10	78. Jer 23, 5; Num 24, 17; Mal 3, 20	80. Is 9, 1; Mi 5, 4; Lk 3, 2;
7. 24	4. 1 S 16, 13; Jn 7, 42	5. Mt 1, 20	

+ *The emperor issued a decree.* The Jews formed a small nation under the rule of the Roman empire, which included many diverse peoples. The census took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria. This provides us with a fairly accurate date: the year 5 or 6 "before Christ." That is because there is a slight error in our way of counting the years "after Christ": in fact Christ was born before year 1 of the Christian era.

Because of the census, Joseph and Mary had to leave their Nazareth home at the time the child was to be born. Joseph, a descendant of David, must have had relatives in Bethlehem, the city of David and of his family. Jesus may have been born in the house of one of those relatives.

There are many caves in the Palestinian hills and many people would take over one of these caves as their first residence. Then, with time, they would add one or several rooms made of stone and wood. The people from the country used to keep the animals in the simplest room of their house. Since there was not enough room or privacy in the common room, Joseph and Mary settled in the area where the animals were kept.

Thus, it had been foreseen by the Father. Jesus would be educated in a real home where neither work nor bread would be lacking. But in his birth, as in his death, Jesus would resemble the most abandoned. In this voluntary poverty we see the love of God which does not fear



So the people travelled ⁴and Joseph set out from Nazareth of Galilee. As he belonged to the family of David and was even a descendant of his, he went to Judea to David's town of Bethlehem ⁵to be registered with Mary, his wife, who was with child.

⁶They were in Bethlehem when the time came for her to have her child, ⁷and she gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in clothes and laid him in the manger, because there was no place for them in the living room.

The shepherds and the angels

o ⁸There were shepherds camping in the countryside, keeping watch over their flocks by night. ⁹Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them, with the Glory of the Lord shining around them.

As they were terrified, ¹⁰the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid; I am here to give you good news, great joy

for all the people. ¹¹Today a Saviour has been born to you in David's town; he is the Messiah and the Lord. ¹²Let this be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger."

¹³Just then the angel was surrounded by many more angels, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth for God is blessing humankind."

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go as far as Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶So they came hurriedly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby lying in the manger. ¹⁷On seeing this they related what they had been told about the child, ¹⁸and all were astonished on hearing the shepherds.

◆ ¹⁹As for Mary, she treasured all these messages and continually pondered over them.

12. 3, 21; Eph 5, 23; Phil 3, 20; 2 Tim 1, 10

19. 2, 51; Dn 7, 28; Mt 13, 52

14. Eek 3, 12; Is 9, 5; 52, 7; Eph 2, 14; Ek 19, 38; 24, 36

humiliation and we understand that all the comforts and conveniences are nothing compared with the incomparable riches: Christ in our midst.

She gave birth to her firstborn son. This term was also used then to designate an only son, underlining that this first son was consecrated to God (Ex 13:1). See also Rom 8:29; Col 1:15.

Necessary stages in the religious formation of humankind being over, God sent his Son on earth to introduce us to true religion. And now the angel proclaims peace and graciousness to humankind. See how much God loves us! Let yourselves be caught up in his love! Why continue to fear? Have you not understood that God became a child and that from now on he will be among us as a silent and defenseless child? Fear of God, or rather joy and simplicity?

"Happy mother of God! Today you gave birth to the Saviour of all times and giving birth, you remained a virgin." In fact God was not too great for Mary: "From on high he sees the proud, but he becomes weak with the humble."

There have been many departures from faith during the past twenty centuries: one of the most common has been to misunderstand how God became man. We say that Mary is the mother of God and not only the mother of the man Jesus,

because the Son of God become man cannot be divided.

o *The glory of the Lord shone over them.* Upon seeing themselves shrouded in the divine mystery, the shepherds are afraid. But then, we hear about joy because joy and peace are the first fruits of the Gospel when we welcome it.

Let this be a sign to you. They will recognize God who became poor for us in order to communicate his treasures to us.

They returned giving glory to God. While the world was in darkness, some shepherds saw God. Why were they called to the manger? Perhaps so that Mary and Joseph could have the comfort of seeing the poor reach their refuge, and also most probably, because God delights in revealing himself.

With the birth of Jesus a new age begins (the final age as the apostles will say) in which, on one hand, people hope for the salvation of the world, and on the other hand, they already enjoy this salvation. The shepherds are the models of those dedicated to contemplation. Following them, the church will never be totally involved in works of mercy or human promotion, but instead with its truest spirit, it will continue to look upon Christ, present in its midst, giving thanks and rejoicing in God.



Flashed by the sun, I am beautiful in his sight (Songs 1:5).





²⁰ The shepherds then returned giving glory and praise to God for all they had heard and seen, just as the angels had told them.

²¹ On the eighth day the circumcision of the baby had to be performed; he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his mother was pregnant.

Jesus is presented in the Temple

o ²² The day came when the purification had to be performed according to the law of Moses. So they brought the baby up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³ as it is written in the law of the Lord: *Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to God.* ²⁴ And they offered a sacrifice as ordered in the law of the Lord: *a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.*

²⁵ There lived in Jerusalem at this time a very upright and devout man named Simeon; the Holy Spirit was in him. As he looked forward to the time when the Lord would comfort Israel, ²⁶ he had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he

had seen the Messiah of the Lord. ²⁷ So he was led into the Temple by the Holy Spirit at the time the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the Law.

²⁸ Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed God, saying,

²⁹ "Now, O Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace, for you have fulfilled your word

³⁰ and my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ which you display in the sight of all the peoples.

³² Here is the light you will reveal to the nations and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The father and mother wondered at what was said about the child.

³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "See him; the multitudes of Israel are to encounter him, for their rise or their fall. He shall stand as a controversial sign, ³⁵ while a sword will pierce your own soul. Then the secret thoughts of everyone will be brought to light."

21. Gen 17, 12	23. Ex 13, 2; Num 18, 15	24. Lev 12, 8	26. Is 40, 1; 61 2	30. Is 40, 5
32. Is 42, 6; 49, 6; Jn 8, 12	34. 20, 17; Is 8, 14;	28, 16; Acts 28, 26	35. Jn 19, 25	Jn 3, 19; 9, 39

♦ *Mary kept all these things.* because every event of her life was for her the way God revealed his plans to her, and all the more so now that she was living with Jesus. She wondered, marveled but was not confused, because her faith was beyond any wavering. However, she too had to discover the ways of salvation slowly and painfully. *She pondered on these things* until the time of the Resurrection and Pentecost when all the words and deeds of Jesus became clear.

o Mary and Joseph went to the temple to fulfill a ritual of the Jewish religion (Lev 12:8). Besides, Jesus being a firstborn male, he must be consecrated to God. In the temple the Holy Family met two elderly people who were also looking forward to salvation as did everyone. But they were the only ones who deserved to recognize the Saviour before he could express himself.

Simeon and Anna alike expected a Saviour in the purest sense: not a temporal or political saviour as was commonly expected in Jesus' time, but a universal saviour from evil and sin.

the initiator of God's true Kingdom. These two holy persons – and Mary and Joseph as well – belong to the "small remnant of Israel," a minority of Jews who were faithful to the best teaching of the prophets.

Simeon takes the child Jesus in his arms and raises him in an offering gesture. In fact, this old man offers his life which is about to end.

What is the meaning of the sword which will pierce Mary's soul? This probably indicates Mary's grief upon seeing her son die on the cross. But it also means that Mary will suffer because she will not always understand what this son does. Though she knows Jesus' intentions better than anyone else, at times she will not grasp the why of his actions and because she loves him so much, she will suffer all the more.

Christ is God's light, which enlightens people but which also blinds and confuses them at times. He is a sign that is opposed, but this is a mystery – those who oppose him are not always the worst ones. There are some people who believe in Christ, but do not follow him. Unable to see his light they do not know that it condemns

³⁶ There was also a prophetess named Anna, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. After leaving her father's home, she had been seven years with her husband and, since then, she had been continually about the Temple, serving God night and day in fasting and prayer. ³⁷ She was now a widow of eighty-four. ³⁸ Coming up at that time, she gave praise to God and spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When the parents had fulfilled all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to their town, Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ There the child grew in stature and strength and was filled with wisdom: the grace of God was upon him.

I must be in my Father's house

◆ ⁴¹ Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, as was customary. ⁴² And when Jesus was twelve years old, he went up with them according to the custom for this feast. ⁴³ After the festival was over, they returned, but the

boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem and neither Joseph nor his mother knew it.

⁴⁴ The first day of the journey they thought he was in the company and looked for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ As they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem searching for him ⁴⁶ and, after three days they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. ⁴⁷ And all the people were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸ His parents were very surprised when they saw him and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Don't you realize that your father and I have been full of sorrow while searching for you?" ⁴⁹ Then he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Do you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand this answer.

⁵¹ Jesus went down with them, returning to Nazareth, and he continued to be under their authority. As for his mother, she kept all these things in her heart.

37. 1 Tim 5, 5; Jud 8, 4; Ps 23, 6; 84, 5
47. 4, 22;

40. 1, 80; 2, 52; 11, 31; 21, 15

them. And there are good people who do not believe because God wills that they seek the light their whole life long.

◆ NAZARETH – ACHIEVING FREEDOM

During his Nazareth years Jesus discovers life as any child or youth of his age. He does not receive special education. He does not manifest extraordinary talents other than perfect judgment to assess and evaluate everything according to God's criteria.

At twelve an adolescent was to observe religious prescriptions, among them the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feasts. Seated in the shade of the Temple galleries, the teachers of the law used to teach groups of pilgrims and to dialogue with them.

On that occasion, Jesus manifested his independence for the first time. *Why have you done this to us?* The child could have asked for permission or have let his parents know where he was. How could he remain for two days without thinking how worried they would be? Actually, he achieved radical freedom before returning

with them and he did not feel guilty about causing them such pain.

From then on, he would be obedient to them but he had shown them that he knew who he was, and that he was capable of any sacrifice or breaking of ties to serve his father in whatever way seemed good to him.

When reading this text, we should reflect on the respect that parents must have for the vocation of their children and the effort they must make to be able to understand them when they begin to be independent. Instead of speaking of the lost child, it would be more precise to say that the young Jesus had found himself.

It is surprising that Jesus' first conflict (at least to all appearances) was with Mary. It was a conflict of misunderstanding, in which neither Jesus nor Mary were to blame: they both acted right, from their own standpoints. Perhaps this symbolizes many of the conflicts happening within the Church. There are conflicts stemming from different and legitimate standpoints, ministries and charismas, which are not resolved by looking for whom to

o ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and age and grace with God and men.

John the Baptist prepares the way

(Mk 1:1; Mt 3:1; Jn 1:19)

3 ¹ It was the fifteenth year of the rule of the Emperor Tiberius; Pontius Pilatus was governor of Judea; Herod had authority over Galilee, his brother Philip ruled over the country of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias over Abilene. ² Annas and Caiaphas were the High Priests when the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah in the desert.

■ ³ John promoted a baptism for repentant people to obtain forgiveness of sins and he went through the whole country bordering the Jordan River. ⁴ It was just as is written in the

book of the prophet Isaiah: *I hear a voice crying out in the desert: prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.* ⁵ *The valleys will be filled and the mountains and hills made low. Everything crooked will be made straight and the rough paths will be made smooth;* ⁶ *and every mortal will see the salvation of God.*

⁷ John said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, "You, brood of snakes! How will you escape when divine punishment comes? ⁸ Produce now the fruits of a true change of heart, and don't deceive yourselves by saying: 'We are sons of Abraham.' For I tell you, God can make sons of Abraham from these stones. ⁹ The axe is already laid to the root of the tree and every tree that fails

52. 2, 19; 1 Sam 2, 26	1. 23, 12; Mk 6, 17	2. Jer 1, 2; Hos 1, 1; Act 4, 6
4. Is 40, 3	5. 14, 11; 18, 14; Is 2, 2; Ps 68, 16	7. Is 30, 27; 1 Thes 1, 10
		8. Jn 8, 33

blame, but rather through dialogue and mutual understanding.

o Luke does not mention anything more about the life of Jesus in Nazareth until he reaches the age of thirty, when he begins to preach. He was Joseph's apprentice and after Joseph's death, he became the carpenter of Nazareth. Joseph must have died before Jesus revealed himself, because, otherwise, when Jesus left home, Mary would have remained with Joseph. Mary's son was a man among men and later the Christian community of Nazareth would keep things made by the carpenter Son of God for a long time.

+ Luke provides us with facts which enable us to situate Jesus in history. It is the year 27 after Christ and actually Jesus is about thirty or thirty-five years old. The Jews have lost their autonomy and their country is divided into four small provinces. *Herod and Philip*, sons of the Herod mentioned at the birth of Jesus (see Mt 2:1) rule over two of these provinces.

Those interested in the chronological commentaries can also read John 2:20.

In those years the Jews were suffering from Roman imperialism, the corruption of their own leaders, the materialism and lack of faith seen in priests, and political radicalization among the people who were divided into irreconcilable factions and parties. This very deterioration of the situation convinces them that God's promise about his coming is about to occur: the Reign of God will be now or never. That is why John's preaching awakens great interest.

■ THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

John shows the way we must follow in order to be saved: we must acknowledge that we are sinners and that all of us are responsible for the dramatic situation in which we find ourselves.

People must admit they are sinners and ask God's forgiveness. This first step will not change the world, but it will open the way to authentic salvation. People who have asked for God's forgiveness will find means of renewing society different from those used by people who think they are the good and just ones in contending with those who exploit and are evil.

The Jewish people versed in Scripture, had a very strong consciousness of sin and so, they were open to hearing John when he spoke of seeking God's forgiveness.

Actually, not everyone was ready to change: we all have our good reasons for thinking that in our case, a sin is somehow justified: I am doing something wrong, but ... Besides, we convince ourselves that God will be understanding with us who belong to his church, who are on the side of the good guys, who defend the interests of religion: *We are children of Abraham. We are real believers, and good Catholics ... and a brood of snakes.*

People, anxious to obtain God's forgiveness, came to John from every group: even prostitutes, tax-collectors (Mk 2:13) and soldiers of the oppressor. John rejected no one but he did demand a personal commitment to justice from everyone. The Kingdom of God would not begin with a call to good will, a call which does not go



to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown to the fire."

¹⁰ The people asked him, "What are we to do?" ¹¹ And John answered, "If you have two shirts, give one to the man who has none; and if you have food, do the same."

¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized and asked him, "Master, what must we do?" ¹³ John said to them, "Don't collect more than your fixed rate." ¹⁴ People serving as soldiers asked John, "What about us? What are we to do?" And he answered, "Don't take anything by force or threaten the people by denouncing them falsely. Be content with your pay."

◆ ¹⁵ The people were wondering

about John's identity, "Could he be the Messiah?" ¹⁶ Then John answered them, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is coming will do much more: he will baptize you with Holy Spirit and fire. As for me, I am not worthy to untie his sandal. ¹⁷ He comes with a winnowing fan to clear his threshing floor and gather the grain into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸ In this way John encouraged the people and raised their hope ¹⁹ until Herod had him put in jail. For John reproached Herod for living with Herodias, his brother's wife, and for his evil deeds. ²⁰ Then Herod added another crime to all the rest by putting John in prison.

10. Acts, 2, 37 Acts 1, 5	12. Ezk 18; Is 58, 7; Acts 4, 32 17. Mal 4, 19; Jer 15, 7; Is 5, 24; 66, 24	15. Jn 1, 20 19. Mk 6, 17	16. Lk 11, 22; Jn 13, 5
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below words and good intentions: those who were baptized had given up their sins and from among them would come Jesus' disciples.

John invites us to share, that is, to prepare a society which cares and is concerned about giving to everyone what is necessary, and does not blindly accept the differences which emerge from money or power: Do not take advantage of people.

Our conversion will be deep and lasting if we can be critical of our false way of judging the world and people. To convert a rich man means to help him ask himself the why of his wealth in the face of so many poor. The husband who betrays his wife readily will have to realize both his male chauvinism and his inability to relate to his wife in a mature way.

John's call for a personal conversion brings about the renewal of society. It is not enough for a few prostitutes or drunks to be converted. We must ask ourselves about the network of complicity which allows widespread prostitution; about the economic circuit coming from alcoholism; about social mechanisms which marginalize the workers, peasants and blacks.

◆ Baptism means to be immersed in water and to rise. The Essenes in the desert were baptized on the occasion of certain feasts to show their desire to reach a purer life when the Saviour would come. John, in turn, baptizes those who want to straighten out their life, marking their commitment by a visible ritual.

Here the Gospel compares John with Jesus and John's baptism with Christian baptism.

All of us have heard words like: since Jesus

was not baptized until he was thirty years old, one should be baptized as an adult. But this is a useless argument since we are not dealing with the same baptism and the demands are different.

Baptism in water ... baptism in fire: this refers to very common experiences. We wash stains off clothes in water, but what has been washed does not then resemble what is new. Besides there are stains which stay. On the other hand, fire purifies rusted metal so that shining metal comes out of the crucible as good as new. Moreover, fire is able to destroy the stain together with the thing that is stained.

John baptizes with water those who want to straighten out their life. For them, baptism is a way of expressing publicly their decisions and promises. Such resolutions are fallible as any human commitment is and insufficient for eradicating the root of evil from our heart.

Jesus, on the other hand, requests that his apostles baptize those who enter the church. At that moment, if baptism is accepted with faith, God gives his Spirit which transforms people interiorly.

John did not baptize children (or women). On the other hand, as Christian baptism draws its power, not so much from the commitment of the recipient, as from the gift of God making us his children, we can baptize children. They may receive the gift of God, provided that their family, and the Christian community take the responsibility for their growth in faith.

+ Jesus, neither needs to be converted, nor to receive John's baptism. But, being the Saviour,



Jesus is baptized by John

(Mt 3:13; Mk 1:9; Jn 1:29)

+ ²¹ Now, with all the people who came to be baptized, Jesus too was baptized. Then, as he was praying, the heaven opened: ²² the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the bodily form of a dove and a voice from heaven was heard, "You are my Son, the Beloved One, you are my Chosen One."

o ²³ When Jesus made his appearance, he had reached the age of thirty years. He was known as the son of Joseph, whose father and forefathers were:

Heli, ²⁴ Matthat, Levi, Melki, Jan-nai, Joseph, ²⁵ Matthatias, Amos, Nahum, Esli, Naggai, ²⁶ Maath, Mat-tathias, Semein, Josech, Joda, ²⁷ Joanan, Rhesa, Zerubbabel, Sheal-

tiel, Neri, ²⁸ Melki, Addi, Cosam, Elmadam, Er, ²⁹ Joshua, Eliezer, Jorim, Matthat, Levi, ³⁰ Simeon, Ju-dah, Joseph, Jonam, Eliakim, ³¹ Me-lea, Menna, Matthata, Nathan, David, ³² Jesse, Obed, Boaz, Salmon, Nahson, ³³ Amminadab, Ram, Hezron, Perez, Judah, ³⁴ Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Terah, Nahor, ³⁵ Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, Shelah, ³⁶ Cainan, Arphaxad, Shem, Noah, Lamech, ³⁷ Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Ma-haleel, Cainan, ³⁸ Enos, Seth, and Adam – who was from God.

Jesus tempted in the wilderness

(Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12)

4 ¹ Jesus was now full of Holy Spirit. As he returned from the Jordan, he followed the Spirit who led him into the desert ² where he was

22. Ps 2, 7; Is 42, 1

27. 1 Chron 3, 17

31. 1 Chron 1, 34

35. Gen 11, 10

36. Gen 5, 1-32

37. Gen 4, 14

he wants to be with his sinful brothers seeking the way to forgiveness. Upon receiving John's baptism, Jesus states that this is the right way: to seek justice and to reform one's life.

There had been no prophets for centuries. God seemed silent and the Jews were saying that "the heavens were closed." But now, God speaks again and Jesus takes over from the prophets. *The heavens opened*, means that Jesus received a divine revelation (see Ez 1:1 and Rev. 4:1).

You are my beloved. Who saw and who heard that voice is not clear from the Gospel (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Jn 1:32). Studying the texts brings us to the following conclusion: Jesus was favored with a revelation from God which John the Baptist may have shared. But, why such a manifestation? Did Jesus need to know that he was the Son of God?

Let us not forget that the phrase *son of God* can be understood in various ways. In the period before Jesus, the king of Israel was called *son of God*. *Son of God* was also used to designate the expected Messiah, chosen by God to save Israel.

Jesus was Son of God in the sense of Only Son of God, begotten of God, from the time of his conception. From that moment on, he was conscious of being the Son of God.

On the other hand, it was only at the time of his baptism by John that Jesus received the call from God inviting him to begin his ministry of salvation, and that God made him his Son (in the old biblical sense), that is, prophet and king of his

people. So, v. 20 recalls a phrase from Isaiah 42:1 referring to the Saviour.

Since the word of God (if it is really from God) is always effective and accomplishes what it says, Jesus receives at the same time the fullness of the Spirit who consecrates prophets and works miracles. From the moment of his conception Jesus enjoyed the fullness of the Spirit bonding him in a unique relationship with his Father. Now, he receives the Spirit enabling him to be the prophet and the servant of the Father.

Thus, Jesus is *anointed* to proclaim the Reign of God and to call the poor first (4:18). Different from so many liberators who, according to Scripture, received the Spirit with a view to a specific mission, Jesus is fully saviour. Different from us, always so concerned to reserve a way out of our commitments, Jesus will not rest until his word and witness to the truth lead him to his death.

In older texts from Luke 3:22 we read: *You are my Son, today I have given you life* (as in Ps 2:7). This is another way of proclaiming the Messiah Saviour.

John's Gospel shows that despite such an obvious revelation, Jesus took his time before going public. The following day, John the Baptist forced his hand when he sent some of his own disciples to Jesus (Jn 1:35), and a week later, it was Mary's intervention in the wedding at Cana which pushed him into action (Jn 2:1).

o Luke then presents a list of Jesus' ancestors, which is quite different from Matthew's (Mt 1:1). Luke not only goes back to Abraham, but

tempted by the Devil for forty days. He did not eat anything during all this and, in the end, he was hungry. ³The Devil then said to him, "If you are son of God tell this stone to turn into bread." ⁴But Jesus answered, "The Scripture says: *People cannot live on bread alone.*"

⁵Then the Devil took him up to a high place and showed him in a flash all the nations of the world. ⁶And he said to Jesus, "I can give you power over all the nations and their wealth will be yours, for power and wealth have been delivered to me and I give them to anyone I choose. ⁷All this will be yours provided you worship me."

⁸But Jesus replied, "The Scripture says: *You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.*"

⁹Then the Devil took him up to Jerusalem and set him on the highest wall of the Temple; and he said, "If you are son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written: *God will order his angels to take care of you*" and again: *They will hold you up on their hands, in case you hurt your foot on the stones.*" ¹²But Jesus replied, "It is written: *You shall not challenge the Lord your God.*"

¹³When the Devil had exhausted every way of tempting Jesus, he left him until an opportune time.

3. 3, 22	4. Dt 8, 3 10. Ps 91, 11	5. 10, 18; Jn 14, 30; Rev 13, 2 12. Dt 6, 16	8. Mt 4, 10; Dt 6, 13 13. 22, 53; Jn 14, 30
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he also supplies the legendary list of Abraham's ancestors all the way back to the first man, as if to emphasize that Jesus has come to save all of humanity plunged into sin since Adam's disobedience. Moreover, from Joseph to Abraham, the list of ancestors varied depending on whether one counted natural parents or adoptive parents, since adoption was a frequent occurrence among the Jews.

he has made us fall, he then accuses us and tries to convince us that our fall will not be forgiven by God.

If you are God's Son. Jesus knew who he was, but he had not yet tested his power. Could he not, for a moment, release divine energy when his body was weak from hunger? Could he not, some day, get down from the cross to save himself?

Jesus refuses to be self-serving. He has higher goals: and so the Devil takes him higher. Knowing people as they are, Jesus is tempted to impose himself on the people and manipulate them. He is tempted to compromise and use weapons of the devil who respects neither the truth, nor freedom of conscience. It would then be easy to reign over the nations "in the name of God," since the devil gives them to whom he wishes.

But Jesus has chosen to serve only God. The devil asks, "Why, then, do you not begin your preaching with something spectacular, like dropping from a high place into the midst of the crowd coming to pray in the temple? – Don't you believe that God will perform a miracle for you?" – This time the Devil uses the very words of Scripture: in reading them, one could think, that with much faith, one would always be healthy and successful. Jesus warns against the error of a "faith" which pretends to remove the cross. Jesus will not demand miracles from his Father to avoid the suffering of humiliation and rejection which are the lot of God's messengers: this would be to challenge God under the pretense of trusting him.

The devil left him to return at an opportune time. In the Passion of Jesus, the devil will turn the people's wickedness against the Liberator whom he could not lead astray. See Jn 14:30.

THE TEMPTATION

■ In secular history, people only participate and cope with other people. But sacred history views things from another perspective: God's plan unfolds hindered by the disturbing devices of the evil spirit, and people are called to take part in this struggle which exceeds their own plans. This is why Jesus had to face the evil one.

We speak of temptation when we feel the pressure of bad instincts or when we feel dragged into doing evil by circumstances. Jesus did not have our bad instincts but the Holy Spirit led him to be tested in the desert – remember that to tempt and to test have the same meaning – and there he felt the strongest persuasion from the evil one trying to dissuade him from his mission (see also Mt 4:1).

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, began his ministry by undergoing a very hard test: forty days of total solitude and fasting. In this situation, Jesus experienced his frailty as he faced a leap into the unknown: he was about to let go of life in Nazareth in surrender to the Father's will and begin a mission which would lead him to death within a few years.

The devil, or the accuser spoke to him; thus he is named in Scripture because he always criticizes. He leads us to accuse God, and when

Jesus proclaims his mission at Nazareth (Mt 13:53)

o ¹⁴ Jesus acted with the power of the Spirit and, on his return to Galilee, the news about him spread throughout all that territory. ¹⁵ He began teaching in the synagogues of the Jews and everyone praised him.

+ ¹⁶ When Jesus came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, he entered the synagogue on the sabbath as he usually did. ¹⁷ He stood up to read and they handed him the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus then unrolled the scroll and

found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to give new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and announce the Lord's year of mercy.*"

²⁰ Jesus then rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant and sat down, while the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he said to them, "Today these prophetic words come true even as you listen."

²² All agreed with him and were lost in wonder while he kept on speak-

15. 4, 44	16. Acts 13, 15	18. 3, 22; Is 61, 1; Is 58, 6; Lev 25, 10
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o Jesus returns home in the company of some of John's followers who become his own disciples (Jn 1:35) and he performs his first sign in Cana (Jn 2:1). This miracle launches his ministry. From Capernaum where Jesus lives in the house of Simon and Andrew, near the lake, Jesus begins to preach in the synagogues of Galilee (Mk 1:35) and his words impress people because he works with the power of the Spirit, namely he speaks with authority and his miracles confirm his words.

He was teaching in the synagogues of the Jews. Jesus does not begin by preaching to the crowds who know nothing of him, instead, for months he makes himself known in the synagogues.

+ In Israel, there was only one Temple, that of Jerusalem, where priests used to offer sacrifices. But, in every place where at least ten men could meet, there was a synagogue where every Sabbath a liturgical service led by community members, was celebrated. It was easy to take part in the readings and their commentaries, and so, Jesus made himself known by participating in the Sabbath services of the synagogues of his area, Galilee.

After some time Jesus, already famous, passes through Nazareth where he is not welcome. In this account Luke shows why Jesus attracted the people and why, particularly in Nazareth, he was rejected.

He found the place where it is written: this paragraph is from Is. 61:1-2. The prophet is referring to his own mission: God had sent him to the Jews in exile to announce that soon God would visit them. Yet, his words prove even more appropriate in the case of Jesus who was sent in order to bring real freedom to a people waiting for it.

The phrase *to set free the oppressed people* is not found in Isaiah's text, but Luke takes it from another text of the same prophet (Is 58:61) and

inserts it here because this expression 'to set free' summarizes better than any other word the very work of Jesus in his mission.

Today these prophetic words have become true. Jesus has come to inaugurate a new age in which God becomes present and reconciles men. Every fifty years Israel celebrated a jubilee year during which debts were forgiven and slaves recovered their freedom (Lev 25:10). In the same way a year of mercy from the Lord is beginning. Thus the time of promises and prophecies is over. God begins to show himself to humankind as he is: Jesus reveals the Father and the Father reveals his Son through the signs and the miracles which he performs.

He sent me to set free the oppressed people. Jesus brings real liberation to everyone since his deeds urge each one of us to live in truth: "the Son makes you free ... the truth will make you free ..." (Jn 8:30). The Jews, obviously, were looking first and foremost for political freedom, which is part of the total liberation of man. Why didn't Jesus undertake it? Was he only interested in "souls?"

Actually, the Old Testament had never promised 'the salvation of souls' which is emphasized these days in various groups and churches: such believers think they are saving their souls and yet they remain silent, frightened, paid or blind accomplices of the daily sins permeating all economic and social life.

The Old Testament announced Jesus as the Saviour of his people and of his race. His words and deeds were stirring people who had become helpless and opening the way for human liberation at all levels, but they were like seeds and could not produce immediate fruits. Jesus had no desire to join the fanatics and violent among his people in order to obtain a national sovereignty as oppressive as Roman domination. He was witnessing to the truth and building the foundations for all future liberation movements.



ing of the grace of God. Nevertheless they asked, "Who is this but Joseph's son?" ²³So he said, "Doubtless you will quote me the saying: Doctor, heal yourself! Do here in your town what they say you did in Capernaum."

²⁴Jesus added, "No prophet is honoured in his own country. ²⁵Truly, I say to you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens withheld rain for three years and six months and a great famine came over the whole land. ²⁶Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow of Zarephath, in the country of Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, the prophet, and no one was healed except Naaman, the Syrian."

²⁸On hearing these words, the whole assembly became indignant. ²⁹They rose up and brought him out of the town, ³⁰to the edge of the hill on which Nazareth is built, intending to throw him down the cliff. But he passed through their midst and went his way.

With the power of the Spirit

(Mk 1:23; Mt 4:24; 8:14)

■ ³¹Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town of Galilee, and began teaching the people in the sabbath meetings.

³²They were astonished at the way he taught them, for his word was spoken with authority.

³³In the synagogue there was a man possessed by an evil spirit and he screamed out in a loud voice, ³⁴"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I recognize you: you are the Holy One of God." ³⁵Then Jesus said to him sharply, "Be silent and leave this man!" The evil spirit then threw the man down in front of them and came out of him without doing him harm.

³⁶Amazement seized all these people and they said to one another, "What does this mean? He commands the evil spirits with authority and power. He orders, and you see how they come out!" ³⁷And news about Jesus spread throughout the surrounding area.

³⁸Leaving the synagogue, Jesus went to the house of Simon, whose mother-in-law was suffering from high fever. They asked him to do something for her. ³⁹Bending over her, he rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and waited on them.

⁴⁰At sunset, people suffering from all sorts of sickness were brought to Jesus. Laying his hands on each one,

22. Acts 14, 3; 20, 32; Mt 13, 55 23. Mk 15, 31 24. Jn 4, 4 25. 1 K 17, 1
26. 1 K 17, 9 27. 2 K 5, 14 29. 13, 33; Jn 8, 59 34. 1, 35; Jn 6, 69
40. Acts 10, 38; 19, 12

In the same way today, we can speak of evangelization if liberating deeds are seen. Evangelization takes on its full meaning when the hearers, or the local community or the whole world are going through exceptional times in which they either welcome God's grace or perish.

He sent me to bring Good News to the poor.
See commentary on Lk 6:20.

Then, Luke explains why the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus:

- First, because of their pride: common and mediocre people let themselves be dazzled by a stranger, but they fiercely deny that one of their own could stand out or be their teacher: *is not this the son of Joseph* (see comm. on Mk 6:1).
- Because of their selfishness: they do not

agree that God's benefits should be shared with others. So, Jesus reminds them that the prophets of old did not limit their favours to their compatriots alone (see 1 Kg 17:7 and 2 Kg 5).

■ See commentary on Mark 1:21.

Why did Jesus order the unclean spirit to be quiet? We see the same thing in 4:41.

Jesus does not want people to refer to him as the Christ, or the Messiah, or the Holy One of God (all these words have the same meaning of saviour anointed by God), because he does not identify with the saviour expected by the people. And if the demons acclaim him, is it not to spread confusion and to ruin him by such fame? How could Jesus not be disgusted with such praise coming from the unclean spirit?



he cured them.⁴¹ He also drove out demons, who cried out as they went from their victims, "You are the Son of God!" He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, for they knew he was the Messiah.

+ ⁴² Jesus left at daybreak and looked for a solitary place. People went out in search of him and, finding him, they tried to dissuade him from leaving.⁴³ But he said, "I have to go to other towns to announce the good news of the kingdom of God. That is what I was sent to do."⁴⁴ So Jesus continued to preach in the synagogues of the Jewish country.

You will catch people
(Mt 4:18 ; Mk 1:16)

5 ¹ One day, as Jesus stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, with a crowd gathered around him listening to the word of God, ² he caught sight of two boats left at the water's edge by the fishermen now washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to

pull out a little from the shore. There he sat and continued to teach the crowd.

⁴ When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch."⁵ Simon replied, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will lower the nets."⁶ This they did and caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ They signaled their mates in the other boat to come and help them. They came and helped fill both boats to sinking point.

⁸ Upon seeing this, Simon Peter fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"⁹ For he and his companions were exceedingly amazed at the catch they had made;¹⁰ and so were Simon's partners James and John, Zebedee's sons.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. You will catch people from now on."¹¹ So they brought their boats to land and followed him, leaving everything.

41. Mk 1, 44; 3, 11

43. Is 52, 7; Ps 96, 10
10. Mt 13, 47

1. Mk 4, 1

4. Jn 21, 1

9. Mk 4, 41

11. 12, 35; 14, 33; 18, 22

+ Jesus is a model missionary. He no sooner gathers a few believers together than they want to keep him for themselves, either because they see in him a true prophet, or want to receive more formation, or form a true community under his guidance.

Jesus, however, leaves the task of shepherding (in the sense of guiding a specific community) to others, because he has in mind many more people still awaiting the Gospel.

◆ THE APOSTLES

Here Luke explains in more detail what we have already read in Mark (Mk 1:16)

Jesus invites himself aboard Peter's boat, and Peter is willing to render him this service. But Jesus looks for more: even though many are ready to assist him, he seeks those who are willing to totally surrender to his work. The listeners are many, but he needs *apostles*.

Miracles are another way in which Jesus teaches. The present miracle is God's word for future apostles. *Lower your nets*: Peter obeys even though there is no hope of catching anything. Similarly, the apostles will work and

speak, trusting in Jesus' power rather than in their own abilities. *The nets were at the breaking point*: optimism and confidence in the result. *You will be fishers of people*: to unite people divided by sin, to unite the dispersed children of God in the unique church of Christ.

Depart from me: I am a sinful man. Such is the fear of the one who discovers that God has entered into his inner life: this is a first act of faith in the divinity of Jesus. Yet, Jesus calls on sinners to save sinners.

Leaving everything, they followed him. It is not that they had much, but it was their whole life: work, family and their whole past as fishermen.

Apostle means sent. Christ is the one who chooses his apostles and sends them in his name. But, where will he find someone to send except among those who are willing to cooperate with him? We could wonder why so many Catholics listen to the Gospel and so few really cooperate with Christ.

One begins to be an apostle, or at least to cooperate with Christ, when one looks for something more than performing good works for the

Cure of a leper

(Mk 1:40; Mt 8:20)

o ¹²One day in another town, a leper came to Jesus. Bowing down to the ground, the leper said, "Lord, if you want so, you can make me clean."

¹³Stretching out his hand, Jesus touched the man and said, "Yes, I want it. Be clean." In an instant the leper was healed. ¹⁴Then Jesus instructed him, "Tell this to no one. But go and show yourself to the priest. Make an offering for your healing, as Moses prescribed; that should be a proof to the people."

+ ¹⁵But the news about Jesus spread all the more, and large crowds came to him to listen and be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶As for him, he often would withdraw to solitary places and pray.

The paralytic saved

(Mk 2:1; Mt 9:1)

■¹⁷One day Jesus was teaching and many Pharisees and teachers of the Law had come from every town of

Galilee and Judea and even from Jerusalem. They were sitting there while the power of the Lord was at work to heal the sick. ¹⁸Then some men brought a paralysed man who lay on his mat. They tried to enter the house to place him in front of Jesus, ¹⁹but they couldn't find a way because of the crowd. So they went up on the roof and, removing the tiles, they lowered him on his mat into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus.

²⁰When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "My friend, your sins are forgiven." ²¹At once the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees began to wonder, "What a blasphemy! This man insults God. Who can forgive sins but only God?"

²²But Jesus knew their thoughts and asked them, "Why are you criticizing in your hearts? ²³Which is easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven', or: 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴Do you want to know if the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins?" And Jesus said to the paralysed man, "Get up,

benefit of the parish, when one feels responsible for people: *fisher of people*.

Here, Luke may have combined two different events: the call of the disciples briefly presented in Mark 1:16 and the miraculous catch. John also relates a miraculous catch (Jn 21) but he places it after the resurrection. We have good reasons to think we are dealing with the same miracle, but it suited John to combine it with the appearance of the risen Jesus to the apostles, which occurred later in the same place.

o See commentary on Mark 1:40.

Offer the sacrifice ordered by Moses. The same law which demanded that a leper be isolated (Lev 13:45), provided that if the leper was healed, he could, after examination by the priests, be reintegrated into the community. Because leprosy was seen as God's punishment, healing meant that God had forgiven the sinner who was to express his gratitude with a sacrifice.

+ *There he would pray.* Luke mentions Jesus' prayer several times (3:21; 6:12; 9:28...) Jesus did not withdraw only to be still, but be-

cause on each occasion, prayer was a necessity for him.

■ See commentary on Mark 2:1.

There were many Pharisees and teachers of the Law. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were not yet against Jesus, but being men who had received much religious formation, they were the first to wonder about Jesus' religious claims: was he only a faithful believer respectful of God's law or was he promoting a new sect? Jesus took advantage of their presence to show that he was not simply a disciple of Moses and the prophets, but he was the master of them all.

We easily understand why the teachers of the Law were scandalized. How could this man without studies or title, stand up to them as if he were a teacher? They were looking for the coming of a God who would confirm their teaching and acknowledge their own merits. Jesus, however, was in the midst of common folk and did not pay attention to the authority of the masters of the law who looked down on them. Since the teachers of the Law could not believe, their only recourse was to oppose Jesus.

14. Lev 14, 2

16. 6, 12; 9, 18; 10, 21; 11, 1

17. 6, 19; 8, 46; Acts 10, 38

take your mat and go home." ²⁵At once the man stood before them. He took up the mat on which he lay and went home praising God.

²⁶Amazement seized the people and they praised God. They were filled with a holy fear and said, "What wonderful things we have seen to-day!"

Call of Levi

(Mk 2:13; Mt 9:9)

◆ ²⁷Afterwards Jesus went out and, as he noticed a tax collector named Levi, sitting in the tax-office, he said to him, "Follow me." ²⁸So Levi left everything. He got up and began to follow Jesus.

²⁹Levi gave a great feast for Jesus, and many tax collectors came to his house and took their place at table with the other people. ³⁰Then the Pharisees and their fellow teachers complained to Jesus' disciples, "How can it be that you eat and drink with tax collectors and other sinners?"

³¹But Jesus spoke up, "The doctor is not for the healthy; it is the sick who need him. ³²I have come to call to repentance; I call sinners, not the righteous."

³³Some people asked him, "The

disciples of John fast often and say long prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees. Why is it that your disciples eat and drink?" Then Jesus said to them, ³⁴"You can't make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them. ³⁵Yet the bridegroom will be taken from them and they will fast in those days."

³⁶Jesus also told them this parable, "No one tears a piece from a new coat to put it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new coat and the piece taken from the new will not match the old. ³⁷No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed as well. ³⁸But new wine must be put into fresh skins. ³⁹Yet no one who has tasted old wine is eager to get new, for he says: The old wine is good."

Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath

(Mk 2:23; Mt 12:1; Mk 3:1)

6 ¹One sabbath Jesus was going through the corn fields and his disciples began to pick heads of grain for food, breaking them in their hands. ²Some of the Pharisees asked them, "Why do you do what is forbid-

26. 7, 16; 13, 33	27. Mt 9, 9	30. Mk 2, 16	31. 4, 23	32. 15, 7	33. 11, 1
34. Is 54, 4; 61, 10; Jn 3, 29; Rev 18, 23	35. Zac 12, 11; Jn 16, 20	39. Jn 3, 19; 2, 10	2. 65, 30		

◆ See commentary on Mk 2:13.

The events related in this chapter show how Jesus situates himself in society and with what people he relates: with a little bunch of fishermen who will be in charge of his new religion: with lepers and sick people who seek him. He calls people who, like Levi, belong to a despised group.

○ Here we have two conflicts between Jesus and the religious people of his time concerning the Sabbath.

See commentary on Mk 3:1.

Let us not forget that the word *sabbath* means *rest*. God had requested that one day be made holy each week, not primarily for religious assemblies, but to allow everyone to rest (Ex 20:10). God is glorified when man is not enslaved to his daily sustenance or to his work.

In the first episode, Jesus does not argue with the Pharisees who consider as work the mere act of pulling off a few ears and shelling them. First he recalls that great believers, like David, overlooked the law, at times. He then adds: *The Son of Man rules over the sabbath*. Among the Jews, however, no one, not even the High Priest, could dispense from the sabbath observance. And so Jesus leaves them perplexed and wondering: Who does Jesus pretend to be?

In the second case, Jesus could have said to the man: Why do you ask me to do something forbidden on the sabbath? Come back tomorrow to be healed. But Jesus prefers the confrontation because Gospel means liberation and man becomes free when he admits that there is nothing sacred in a society which attempts to impose its own standards. There is nothing sacred for God outside of the conscience, dignity



den on the sabbath?" ³Then Jesus spoke, "Have you never read what David did when he and his men were hungry? ⁴He entered the house of God, took and ate the bread of the offering and even gave some to his men, even though only priests are allowed to eat that bread."⁵And Jesus added, "The Son of Man is Lord and rules over the sabbath."

⁶On another sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and began teaching. There was a man with a paralysed hand and ⁷the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees watched him: Would Jesus heal the man on the sabbath? If he did, they could accuse him.

⁸But Jesus knew their thoughts and said to the man, "Get up and stand in the middle." ⁹Then he spoke to them, "I want to ask you: what is allowed by the Law on the sabbath, to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" ¹⁰And Jesus looked around at them all.

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was restored becoming as whole as the other. ¹¹But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they could do to Jesus.

The Twelve

(Mk 3:13; Mt 10:1)

+ ¹²At this time Jesus went out into the hills to pray, spending the whole night in prayer with God. ¹³When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them whom he called apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; ¹⁵Matthew and Thomas; James son of Alphaeus and Simon called the Zealot; ¹⁶Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who would be the traitor:

Blessings and woes

(Mt 5:6-7)

o ¹⁷Coming down the hill with them, Jesus stood on a level place. There were many of his disciples and a large crowd of people who had come from all parts of Judea and Jerusalem and from the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They gathered to hear him and be healed of their diseases; and even people troubled by evil spirits were healed. ¹⁹All the crowd tried to touch him because of the power which went out from him and healed them all.

3. 1 S 21, 2	4. Lev 24, 5	6. 13, 14; 14, 1	9. 9, 47; 11, 17; 1 Mac 2, 39
12. Acts 1, 13	13. In 13, 18; 15, 16; 17, 9	14. Gen 17, 5	18. 5, 17 19. 8, 46

and sanctity of his children. As long as people are subject to an order, to laws and authorities which are considered sacred and which no one thinks of criticizing, those people are neither free nor true children of God. (See 1 Cor 3:21-23; 8:45; Col 2:20-23.) A respect for God which would destroy our critical sense would not be in keeping with the Gospel: a religion preventing us from seeking the truth and from questioning every area of human restlessness, would not be the true one. To study the Bible without daring to know and take into account the contributions of modern science for fear that our very naive vision of sacred history would fall apart, would be to sin against the Spirit.

It was necessary that, at least on some occasions, Jesus should disobey the most sacred law of his people. But his reason for doing that was the most powerful reason possible: *to give life* to his brothers and sisters.

+ Jesus keeps those he loves the most in his prayer. Until the resurrection, his mind cannot include everyone and so he focuses his attention on those who live close to him and who will be his apostles. The success of his mission will depend upon them; other people's faith will rest on them. Jesus does not want their call to be his own thing: before calling them, he wants to be certain through prayer that he is doing the Father's will (Heb 1:24). For the simple reason that Christ chose them and entrusted his church to them, they will be tested in a thousand ways (Lk 22:31). Therefore Jesus wants to safeguard them through the power of his prayer (Jn 17:9). The day before his death he will have their consolation that *not one of those the Father gave him has been lost* (Jn 17:12).

o See the commentary on the Beatitudes in Mt 5:1. Matthew adapts them for the members of the church of his time. Luke, on the other



²⁰ Then lifting up his eyes to his disciples, Jesus said,

"Fortunate are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

²¹ Fortunate are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Fortunate are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

²² Fortunate are you when people hate you and reject you and insult you and number you among criminals because of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for a great reward is kept for you within God. Remember that is how the fathers of these people treated the prophets.

²⁴ But unhappy are you who have wealth, for you have been comforted now.

²⁵ Unhappy are you who are full, for you will go hungry.

Unhappy are you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ Unhappy are you when the people speak well of you, for that is how the fathers of these people treated the false prophets.

Love of enemies (Mt 5:40)

+ ²⁷ But I say to you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ To the one who strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek; from the one who takes your coat, do not keep back your shirt. ³⁰ Give to the one who asks and if anyone has taken something from you, do not demand it back.

o ³¹ Do to others as you would have

52. 2, 19; 1 S 2, 26	1. 23, 12; Mk 6, 17	2. Jer 1, 2; Hos 1, 1; Acts 4, 6	4. Is 40, 3
5. 14, 11; 18, 14; Is 2, 2; Ps 68, 16	7. Is 30, 27; 1 Thes 1, 10	8. Jn 8, 33	

hand, puts the beatitudes here just as Jesus proclaimed them to the people of Galilee. In the words of Jesus, the beatitudes were a call and a hope addressed to the forgotten of the world, beginning with the poor among his people, heirs of God's promise to the prophets.

The Gospel, as in Mary's Canticle (1:51-53), reverses the present situation. Since then God shows his mercy, especially by his generosity towards the poor and the despised. He also entrusts his Gospel to them and makes them the first to participate in his work in the world. If the mighty, the scientists and the organizers have their role in the world, the poor are the ones whose contribution is most indispensable in the building up of the kingdom.

There are a thousand ways to present Jesus and his work. However, in order for such teaching to deserve the name *evangelization* (or: communication of the Good News) it must be received as Good News first by the poor. If other social groups feel more identified with the teaching, or they are invited first, it means that something is lacking either in content or in the way of proclaiming the message in such a way that it does justice to the disinherited.

Luke goes on with the woes. Remember similar woes in Isaiah 65:13-14. The rich and the full are the blind ones who fail to recognize God when he manifests himself. They go about with a clear conscience because they are acclaimed by everyone. In fact, their life, their merits and their happiness are lies which vanish in the presence of the Gospel.

When everyone speaks well of you (1 Cor 4:8). The contrast between groups of people who are persecuted and those who are well-thought-of can exist within the very church. At times, we see within the Church groups of influential people who lack nothing and who know how to get official blessings, while other groups are slandered and persecuted for putting the demands of the Gospel into practice. This is the kind of scandal Jesus speaks of in Mt. 13:41. Saints have experienced such tests, but in spite of them, they did not leave the Church.

+ Here Luke presents only a few of Jesus' sayings which Matthew combines in chapters 5 to 7 of his Gospel, and which we have explained.

Some people feel cheated when they see that Jesus speaks about changing our life rather than about reforming society. They think that this is due to the culture of that time when people were not yet thinking about changing unjust social structures. Jesus, in fact, goes to the root of things. The root of evil is within people. It is obvious that evil structures prevent people from living and growing. But it is equally obvious that not a single revolution, however many benefits it may bring about, can establish a less oppressive society, as long as people are not transformed according to the Gospel. Jesus does not provide guidelines only to obtain a better society. His mission is to teach us the way to growth and freedom.

In fact, in any society, the rich, the middle class, the poor and the poorest need conversion to Jesus' word, though in different degrees, man-

others do to you. ³² If you love only those who love you, what kind of graciousness is yours? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do favours only to the people who do you favours, what kind of graciousness is yours? Even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend only when you expect to receive, what kind of graciousness is yours? For sinners also lend to sinners, expecting to receive something in return.

■ ³⁵ But love your enemies and do good to them, and lend when there is nothing to expect in return. Then will your reward be great and you will be sons of the Most High. For he is kind towards the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ Be not a judge of others and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; for-

give and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give and it will be given to you, and you will receive in your sack good measure, pressed down, full and running over. For the measure you give will be the measure you receive back."

³⁹ And Jesus offered this example, "Can a blind man lead another blind man? Surely both will fall into a ditch. ⁴⁰ No disciple is above his master; if he lets himself be formed, he will be like his master. ⁴¹ So why do you pay attention to the speck in your brother's eye while you have a log in your eye and are not conscious of it? ⁴² How can you say to your brother: 'Brother, let me take this speck out of your eye,' when you can't remove the log in your own? You hypocrite! First remove the log from your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

35. 14, 12; Ex 34, 12; Dt 4, 31; Sir 4, 10	36. Ex 34, 6; Mt 5, 48	37. Mt 7, 1; Rom 14, 10
38. Rut 3, 15	39. Mt 15, 14	40. Jn 13, 16; 15, 20; Mt 10, 24
		1. Mt 7, 3

ners and terms. Jesus obvious predilection for the poor and oppressed does not mean they are necessarily better. It means God is compassionate, sharing a deeper mercy where misery is deeper; offering hope and total liberation there where hope is dimmest. The oppressed person is not innocent: if he were not paralyzed by the fear, divisiveness, and greed for the advantages offered to him by his oppressor, he would promote solidarity and attain a moral power capable of renewing the world. Thus, the oppressed will not be freed unless they grow in confidence in God, which will enable them to risk an openness leading to an understanding of others and reconciliation.

The sayings of Jesus, which follow, point out the indispensable changes of heart and approach.

Give to the one who asks. Jesus does not give a rule which is automatically applicable in all situations: we know there are times when we should not give because it would be encouraging bad habits. Jesus wants to challenge our conscience: Why do you refuse to give? Are you afraid you will not be paid back? But, what if this were the opportunity to trust your Father and to let go of something which is "your treasure" (12:34)? You who wish to be perfect, why do you ignore so many opportunities to give up your own wisdom in order to let God take care of your interests?

◦ Here, as in Matthew 5:43, Jesus does not refer mainly to personal resentment and friendships, but to opposition in the social, political or religious order: treating differently the people of one's group or party and those of the opposite side. People usually help, respect and are kind to one another within their own group: but they refuse to help people of another group and show no concern for their rights: they view these people as *bad* and *sinners*.

Jesus invites us to overcome such differences: what counts is the individual and when my neighbour needs me. I must forget his colour or whatever label given him.

If you lend when you expect to receive. Once again, we are dealing with a social attitude: people who look for friends among those who can promote their social climbing and who avoid all who might be a burden because they are people without influence: Lk 14:2.

Then you will be sons of the Most High. Jesus shows us the way to be transformed into: the image and likeness of the Father on high. He demands that we overcome our social prejudices and that we drop our social barriers.

■ See commentary on Mt. 7:1. Perfection for us consists in imitating the Father. He is God by being compassionate; his compassion is his ability to be touched by the poverty and the anguish of his creatures, and to lavish upon them what he can give. The attitude of the person who

◆ ⁴³No healthy tree bears bad fruit, no poor tree bears good fruit. ⁴⁴And each tree is known by the fruit it bears. Moreover, you don't gather figs from thorns, or grapes from brambles. ⁴⁵Similarly a good person draws good things from the good in his heart, and an evil person draws evil things from the evil in his heart. For the mouth speaks from the fullness of the heart.

⁴⁶Why do you call me: 'Lord! Lord!' and not do what I say?

⁴⁷What comparison can I use for him who comes to me and listens to my words and acts according to them? ⁴⁸He is like the builder who dug deep and laid the foundations of his house on rock. The river overflowed and the stream dashed against the house, but could not shake it because the house had been well built.

⁴⁹But if anyone listens and does not act, he is like a man who built his house on the ground without a foundation. As soon as the flood burst against it, the house fell: and what a terrible waste that was!"

The faith of a pagan

(Mk 8:5; Jn 4:46)

7 ¹When Jesus had finished teaching in this way the

people listening to him, he went to Capernaum.

²There was a captain whose servant was very sick and near to death, a man very dear to him. ³So, when he heard about Jesus, he sent some elders of the Jews to persuade him to come and save his servant's life. ⁴The elders came to Jesus and begged him earnestly, saying, ⁵"He deserves this of you, for he loves our people and even built a synagogue for us."

⁶Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the captain sent friends to give this message, "Sir, do not trouble yourself if I am not worthy to welcome you under my roof. ⁷You see I didn't approach you myself. Just give the order and my servant will be healed. ⁸For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to my soldiers and I say to this one: 'Go,' and he goes; and to the other: 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant: 'Do this,' and he does it."

⁹On hearing these words, Jesus was filled with admiration. He turned around and said to the people with him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." ¹⁰The people sent by the captain went back to his house; there they found that the servant was well.

43. Mt 12, 33

47. Mt 7, 24

3. Acts 10, 28

6. Acts 10, 2

judges his brothers is the very opposite of mercy. *Can a blind man lead another blind man?* Our pride is satisfied by comparing ourselves with others, and in order to appear better, we begin by criticizing and judging them. Jesus challenges us to look into our own faults first. Being honest with oneself enables one to see another person's situation more fairly.

◆ *There is no healthy tree* ... These sayings were already mentioned in Mt 7:15. Here, however, Luke gives them a different meaning by referring to a pure conscience. We must purify our mind and our spirit so that, later, the good tree may produce good fruits.

o THE POWER OF GOD

This captain of a foreign army had earned the esteem of the Jews. The amazing thing was not that he should have contributed to the building of the synagogue, but rather that the Jews should

have accepted it from him. He must have been a good man. But he knew the Jews' prejudices too well to have dared to personally approach this Jesus of whom they spoke. Indeed, up to what point did Jesus share his compatriots' pride? Would he respond to the petition of a Roman official? That was why he was sending his Jewish friends to Jesus.

The man is really troubled: will Jesus consent to go to a pagan's house and "become impure?" (Mt 7:14) And the captain goes one step further: Jesus does not have to come to his house. While other sick people seek to be touched by the Master thinking that Jesus possesses some healing power, this man, instead, has grasped that Jesus has the very power of God and does not need to go to the sick servant: it would not be any more difficult to give a command from a distance to a life that was slipping away.



The son of the widow restored to life

◆ ¹¹ The next day Jesus went to a town called Naim and many of his disciples went with him – a great number of people. ¹² As he reached the gate of the town, a dead man was being carried out. He was the only son of his mother and she was a widow; there followed a large crowd of townspeople.

¹³ On seeing her, the Lord felt pity for her and said, "Don't cry." ¹⁴ Then he came up and touched the stretcher and the men who carried it stopped. Jesus said, "Young man, awake, I tell you." ¹⁵ And the dead man got up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶ A holy fear came over them all and they praised God saying, "A great prophet has appeared among us; God has visited his people." ¹⁷ And throughout Judea and the surrounding lands, people talked about Jesus' deeds.

Jesus answers the messengers of John (Mt 11:2)

+ ¹⁸ The disciples of John gave him all this news. So he called two of them and ¹⁹ sent them to the Lord with this message, "Are you the one we are expecting, or should we wait for another?" ²⁰ These men came to Jesus and said, "John the Baptist sent us to ask you: Are you the one we expect, or should we wait for another?"

²¹ At that time Jesus healed many people of their sicknesses or diseases, and freed them from evil spirits, and he gave sight to the blind. ²² Then he answered the messengers, "Go back and tell John what you saw and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the poor are given good news. Now, listen: ²³ Fortunate are those who encounter me, but not for their downfall."

■ ²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus started speaking to the

12. 8, 42; 9, 38

15. 1 K 17, 10

16. Gen 21, 1; Ex 3, 16; Jer 29, 10
 22. Is 29, 18; 35, 5; 61, 1

19. Ps 118, 26; Jn 6, 14; 11, 27

◆ No one has ever attributed power over death to any man. Only Jesus conquers death and he does so very simply.

The woman represents suffering humanity. "You will suffer because of your sons": This was said after the first sin. Humanity cannot avoid accompanying the dead, burying their young people with tears, while continuing to kill them. It kills them with wars, and when it exhausts the resources of the earth which should serve to prepare a better future. It kills them spiritually when it fails to teach them love and self-sacrifice and by destroying their most generous ideals.

THOSE WHO DOUBT

+ John the Baptist had announced the imminent coming of the judgment of God. But Herod had put him in jail and nothing had happened. John introduced Jesus as the awaited Messiah, but Jesus was not revolutionizing the world and in jail, John was beginning to have doubts. It might be more accurate to interpret his question as a pressing invitation: "If you are the one who is to come, why so much delay?"

John's disciples did witness the cures, but the cures are not everything and Jesus adds: the poor hear good news because real evangeliza-

tion restores hope and leaves people renewed.

The blind see, the lame walk ... The prophets had announced these signs (Is 35:5) which were really something new, because in the past God had usually manifested himself as a powerful saviour. These healings pointed to the liberation that Jesus was bringing: not punishment of sinners (which was a great part of John the Baptist's preaching), but, before all else, a reconciliation suited to healing a world of sinners, of violent and resentful people.

Fortunate are those who encounter me but not for their downfall. And fortunate are those who do not doubt Christ's salvation after seeing the fruits of evangelization. Fortunate are those who do not say: this way is too slow. The Gospel first proves its fruitfulness in its power to lift people up. The person who believes is reconciled. The person who encounters Christ discovers himself and this person will not likely change from being oppressed to oppressing, nor from denouncing evils to complicity with evil. Wherever there are renewed people, the whole community becomes aware of its reality and unites in works of liberation.

It does not matter if the world seems to continue to surrender to the forces of evil. The presence of liberated people forces others to define



people about John. And he said, "What did you want to see when you went to the desert? A tall reed blowing in the wind? ²⁵What was there, to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? But people who wear rich clothes and enjoy delicate food are found in palaces. ²⁶What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷For John is the one foretold in Scripture which reads: I am sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare your ways. ²⁸But, I tell you, although no one may be found greater than John, the least in the kingdom is greater than he.

²⁹All the people listening to Jesus, even the tax collectors, had acknowledged the will of God in receiving the baptism of John. ³⁰whereas the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law in not letting themselves be baptized by him, ignored this will of God.

³¹What story can I use for the be-

haviour of this people? What are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace, about whom their companions complain: 'We piped you a tune and you wouldn't dance; we sang funeral songs and you wouldn't cry.'

³³The same has happened when John the Baptist didn't eat bread or drink wine, and you said: 'He has an evil spirit.' ³⁴Next came the Son of Man, eating and drinking, and you say: 'Look, a glutton for food and wine, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' ³⁵Yet the wisdom of God settled all this and her children recognized her."

Jesus, the woman and the Pharisee

◆ ³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to share his meal, So he went to the Pharisee's home and as usual reclined on the sofa to eat. ³⁷And it

24. 1, 15; 7, 35 27. Jn 1, 21; Mal 3, 1 29. Mt 21, 32 30. Acts 2, 23 33. Jn 7, 20 36. 11, 37; 14, 1

themselves in terms of good and evil and this makes the world grow.

With this, Jesus answers the disciples of John, men who are self-sacrificing and concerned for the triumph of God's cause. Perhaps they are so absorbed in their search for justice that they fail to recognize God's powerful working in Jesus' actions which appeared so gentle and mild.

■ *When John's messengers had gone.* Most of John's disciples continued to follow him and did not acknowledge Jesus. Jesus did not accuse them, instead he praised John and situated himself with regard to him.

A prophet and more than a prophet: because the time of the prophets has ended with John. No one (the Gospel uses the Jewish term: among those born of woman, that simply means: no one) could be found greater than John. The common people considered John as the greatest figure of those years: Jesus agreed with them for this reason: John had introduced the Saviour and the kingdom of God.

The least in the kingdom is greater than he, in the sense that Jesus' disciples entered the kingdom which John only announced. However holy John may have been, he was not given the knowledge of God which permeated Jesus. John, the austere prophet, did not experience total reconciliation with the compassionate God, as was the privilege of Jesus' disciples.

Actually Jesus emphasized the superiority, not of his disciples as compared with John, but of his own mission when compared with John's.

John said that each person had to straighten out his life. Jesus insists instead, that all efforts are useless if a person does not believe in the Father's love. John's disciples used to fast; Jesus' disciples will know how to forgive. John attracted to the desert those who knew how to let go of conveniences they were accustomed to; Jesus lives among people and heals their wounds. The baptism of John signified a person's willingness to give up his vices; while the baptism of Jesus bestows the Spirit of God.

They are like children sitting... They do everything at the wrong time; they reproach John for his austerity and Jesus for his lack of austerity. With this answer, Jesus teaches not to always criticize the church of the past centuries, and take its experience into account. Every generation faces different problems and no generation can be totally free from the prejudices and limitations of the culture of the time.

Jesus came after John and he was superior to him, although he needed John. Every effort to evangelize will remain superficial and so will conversions, if the ground has not been prepared by movements which stir up concern for a world with more justice and inspire more self-sacrifice.

happened that a woman of this town, who was known as a sinner, heard that he was in the Pharisee's house. She brought a precious jar of perfume³⁸ and stood behind him at his feet, weeping. As she wet his feet with tears, she dried them with her hair and kissed his feet and poured the perfume on them.

³⁹The Pharisee who had invited Jesus was watching and thought, "If Jesus were a prophet, he would know what sort of person is touching him; is not this woman a sinner?"

⁴⁰Then Jesus spoke to the Pharisee and said, "Simon, I have something to ask you." He answered, "Speak, master." And Jesus said, ⁴¹"Two men were in debt to the same businessman. The first one owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other fifty. ⁴²As they were unable to pay him back, he graciously cancelled the debts of both. Now, which of them will love him more?"

⁴³Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, who was forgiven more." And Jesus said, "You are right."

⁴⁴And turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? ⁴⁵You gave me no water for my feet when I entered your house; but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn't welcome me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since she came in. ⁴⁶You provided no oil for my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷This is why, I tell you, her sins, her many sins, are forgiven, because she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, returns little love."

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹The others sitting with him at the table began to wonder, "Now this man claims to forgive sins!" ⁵⁰But Jesus spoke again to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

38. Mk 14, 3; Jn 12, 3	39. Jn 4, 18	44. Gen 18, 4	47. Mt 21, 31	50. 5, 21; 8, 48
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◆ The Pharisee, Simon, had a few clear and simple religious principles: The world is divided between good people and sinners. Those who obey are the good people; sinners are those with notorious sins. God loves the good and does not love sinners; God stays away from sinners. Being good, Simon stays away from sinners. Since Jesus does not move away from the sinful woman, he must not be guided by the Spirit of God.

Strange, but God does not think like Simon does. He alone is good and thus does not distinguish between good and evil, but instead he wants to forgive everyone. God does not weigh our good and bad actions to see which weigh the most: that would be a child's game. God knows that we need time to test good and evil and also to arrive at a mature and stable orientation. He lets us sin because, in the end, we will know more clearly that we are bad and that we need only Him. Thus God easily forgets our sins and our excesses, if in spite of them or through them, we come to genuine love.

Simon did not welcome Jesus with the signs of hospitality customary at that time. In those days, they reclined on sofas around the table according to the custom of rich people, but Jesus was bored: how could he dialogue with this respectable man who believed he knew the things of God but was incapable of feeling them? And

Jesus was waiting for the arrival of the sinful woman.

The one who is forgiven little (47). This is not always the case. Many of the people who loved Jesus passionately were not great sinners. Here Jesus speaks with irony to a very "decent" man: Simon, you think you owe little (and you are wrong in that), and for this reason you do not love much.

Therefore her sins are forgiven (47). Some see a contradiction between this verse and v. 42, where great love is the fruit of greater forgiveness. In v. 47 great love obtains this forgiveness. Jesus does not attempt to say which of the two – love for forgiveness – comes first: in fact, the two go together. Here Jesus is contrasting two forms of religion: the religion of the Pharisee which is something like bookkeeping: God takes note of good and bad works to later reward more fully the person with more entries for good works. True religion, instead, focuses only on the quality of love and trust and, usually, we love to the degree that we become aware of how much God has forgiven us.

Your sins are forgiven (v. 48). Try to understand the scandal such words must have caused. Actually, whom had the woman loved except Jesus? And who could forgive sins, except God?

This woman may have been the same as

The women who followed Jesus

8 ¹Jesus walked through towns and countryside, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve followed him ²and also some women who had been healed from evil spirits and diseases: Mary called Magdalene, who had had seven demons; ³Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Suzanna and some others who provided for them out of their own funds.

The parable of the sower

(Mk 4:1; Mt 13:1)

⁴As a great crowd gathered and people came to him from every town, Jesus began teaching them through stories, or parables. ⁵"The sower went out to sow the seed. And as he sowed, some of the grain fell along the way, was trodden on and the birds of the sky ate it up. ⁶Some fell on rocky

ground, and no sooner had it come up than it withered because it had no water. ⁷Some fell among thorns; the thorns grew up with the seed and choked it. ⁸"But some fell on good soil and grew, producing fruit—a hundred times as much." And Jesus cried out, "Listen then, if you have ears to hear!"

o ⁹The disciples asked him, "What does this story mean?" ¹⁰And Jesus answered, "You have been granted to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. But to others it is given in the form of stories, or parables, so that *seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand*. ¹¹Now, this is the point of the parable:

The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those along the wayside are people who hear it, but immediately the devil comes and takes the word from their minds, for he doesn't want them to believe and be saved. ¹³Those on the

1. Mt 4, 23; 4, 43	2. Jn 19, 25; Lk 24, 10; 8, 27; Mk 16, 9; Mt 27, 55 8. Dt 29, 3	3. 23, 49 10. Is 6, 10
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Mary, Martha's sister, the one who anointed Jesus' feet on the eve of his death (Jn 12:4). It is most likely that this somewhat strange action of anointing Jesus' feet took place only once and that it was before his passion. If this is the case, then Luke modified some details to make up the present story alluding to Mary's past.

In relating the same event, Matthew, Mark and John remark that Judas became indignant (Jn 12:4), but it is possible that Simon, Jesus' host, was shocked for other reasons: How could Jesus allow this woman to follow him, along with his apostles, even if she had repented of her past sins and demons? No religious teacher would ever have spoken to a woman in public: women did not even enter the synagogues.

JESUS AND THE CULTURE OF HIS TIME

+ See the commentary on Mt 1:18 concerning the tremendously inferior position of women in Jesus' time. Nevertheless, Jesus did not pay the least attention to such universally accepted prejudices. Various women took Jesus' words and attitude as a call to freedom. They even joined the circle of his intimate friends while ignoring the gossip. Here we have a fundamental testimony about the freedom of the Gospel.

Even today, many women are subject to their husbands, asking their permission to partici-

pate in the activities of an institution and they regret not being able to respond to the invitation of the church because their husbands do not allow it. To speak with them of the Christian life is useless as long as they have not taken the first step toward their own liberation by exercising personal freedom without fear of their husbands' anger.

Jesus was truly man, and as such he belonged to a race and to a culture: he was a Jew of his time and his gospel was attuned with the culture which he shared. Yet Jesus did not adopt the inhuman traits of his culture: he did not accept the prejudices of the Jews of his time with regard to women, to public sinners, pagans and so on nor did he share their views in regard to the sabbath. His gospel is a leaven changing cultures for the better: in many respects his way of life goes against the mainstream of cultures.

Mary of Magdala (Magdala was a village on the shore of Lake Tiberias) will be at the foot of the cross along with *Mary*, the wife of Cleophas, the mother of James and Josés. These two women, along with *Joanna*, will receive the first news of the Resurrection (Lk 24:10).

o See commentary on Mt 13:1-23.

This is the point of the parable. The comparison (parable) helps us to understand what happened around Jesus. Many people became very enthusiastic at the beginning, then after a



rocky ground are people who receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe for a while and give way in time of temptation. ¹⁴ Among the thorns are people who hear the word but as they go their way, are choked by worries, riches, and the pleasures of life; they bring no fruit to maturity. ¹⁵ The good soil, instead, are people who receive the word and keep it in a gentle and generous mind; and persevering patiently, they bear fruit.

¹⁶ No one, after lighting a lamp covers it with a bowl or puts it under the bed; rather he puts it on a lampstand so that people coming in may see the light. In the same way, ¹⁷ there is nothing hidden that shall not be uncovered; nothing kept secret that shall not be known clearly. ¹⁸ Now, take care how well you listen, for whoever

has will be given more, but from everyone who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away from him."

Jesus' mother and brothers

(Mk 3:31; Mt 12:46)

+ ¹⁹ Then his mother and his relatives came to him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd. ²⁰ Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and wish to meet you." ²¹ Then Jesus answered, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Jesus calms the storm

(Mk 4:35; Mk 8:18)

²² One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples and said to them,

14. 9, 23

15. 21, 19; 1 Thes 1, 3; 2 Cor 1, 6; 6, 4; 12, 12; Rom 5, 3; 8, 25

17. 12, 2; Mt 10, 26

21. 11, 28

29. 11, 24

while, they left. Only a few persevered and they wondered: How will the kingdom of God come if no one is interested?

The Gospel records Jesus' explanation about the fields on which the seed fell. But there was a lot more to explain. First, the listeners must have been surprised by his comparing the kingdom of God with something which is sown. Throughout Sacred History, there had been abundant sowing and Jesus' contemporaries were expecting a harvest (see Rev 14:15).

We, like Jesus' contemporaries, want to reap, that is to enjoy the fruits of the kingdom of God, namely social peace, justice and happiness. And many wonder how it is possible that people continue to be so evil two thousand years after Christ.

If the kingdom of God has come and it is already in our midst, that does not mean we are going to enjoy its fruits. The kingdom of God is where God rules, and God rules where people accept him for what he is: where he can be Father and where his children can accept his plan for them. The disciple of Christ does not just know God: he knows the Father and the Son and this is enough to make a new person out of him.

From that moment on, people grow in a thousand ways, and social consciousness also develops. People become aware of their dignity and their common destiny, in spite of the fact that it seems more impossible every day to reach the goal.

KINGDOM OR REIGN OF GOD

Jesus spoke Aramaic, a language in which a single term means three different things: the kingdom, that is the place where God acts as king; the reign, or the fact that God acts as king; royalty, or the dignity of God the king.

Jesus often speaks of the kingdom properly: "you will not enter the kingdom of God"; elsewhere, however, the meaning is debatable as for example in the Our Father. Should we say: "Your kingdom come" or "Your reign come"?

In the present parables, traditionally called: the parables of the Kingdom, the two meanings go together. The great news that Jesus proclaimed was the coming of an age totally different from the times of sacred history as the Jews had experienced them. God was obviously present throughout human history, especially Israel's history, yet now he was coming in a different way. Now, and only now, would people know him as he is, and he would make them his children, through his Son become man.

The reign of God began with Jesus revealing: the true face of God; then at his rising as Lord of the living and the dead, he would begin to personally reorient human history.

In reading the marvelous things Paul says about the church (especially in Ephesians), we realize that for him, the church is somehow the very kingdom of God, or rather, the place from which it shines upon the world.

+ See commentary on Mk 3:31.



"Let us go across to the other side of the lake."²³ So they set out and, as they sailed, he fell asleep. Suddenly a storm came down on the lake and the boat began to fill with water, and they were in danger.²⁴ The disciples then went to Jesus to wake him, saying, "Master! Master! We are sinking!" Jesus woke up. He rebuked the wind and the rolling waves; and the storm subsided, and all was quiet.

²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid; they were astonished as well and said to one another, "Who can this be? See, he commands even the wind and the sea and they obey him!"

The possessed and the pigs

(Mk 5:1; Mt 8:28)

²⁶ Jesus and his disciples came to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ As Jesus stepped ashore, a man from the town approached him. This man had demons in him and for a long time had gone without clothes. He would not live in a house but stayed among the tombstones. ²⁸ When he came nearer to Jesus, he yelled and threw himself on the ground before him, and then shouted, "What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me;" ²⁹ for Jesus had ordered the evil spirit to leave the man.

This spirit had seized him many times, when he had been bound with ropes and chains and kept under control. He would then suddenly break the chains and be driven by the evil spirit into wild places.

When Jesus asked him, ³⁰ "What is your name?" the man said, "I am Mob," because many demons had entered into him. ³¹ And they begged Jesus not to command them to go into the bottomless pit ³² Nearby a great

herd of pigs was feeding, so the demons asked to be allowed to enter into the pigs. When Jesus let them go,³³ the demons left the man and entered into the pigs, and the herd rushed down into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴ When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and reported it in the town and countryside. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened and came to Jesus. There they saw the man from whom the demons had been driven out. He was clothed and in his right mind, and was sitting at the feet of Jesus. They were afraid. ³⁶ Then people who had seen it told them how the man had been healed, ³⁷ and all this crowd from the Gerasene country asked Jesus to depart from them, for a great fear took hold of them. So Jesus got into the boat to return.

³⁸ It was then that the man from whom the devils had gone out asked Jesus if he could stay with him. ³⁹ But Jesus sent him on his way, "Go back to your family and tell them how much God has done for you." So the man went away, proclaiming through the whole town how much Jesus had done for him.

The dead girl and the sick woman

(Mk 5:21; Mt 9:18)

⁴⁰ When Jesus returned, the people welcomed him, for all had been waiting for him. ⁴¹ At that time a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, threw himself at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house ⁴² because his only daughter, about twelve years old, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowd pressed from every side.

⁴³ There was a woman who had suffered from a bleeding for twelve years. This woman had spent everything she had on doctors, but none of them had been able to cure her. ⁴⁴ Now

she came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once. ⁴⁵Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" Everyone denied it and Peter said, "Master, the crowd is pushing all around you." ⁴⁶But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I felt power go out from me."

⁴⁷The woman knew she had been discovered. She came trembling and knelt before Jesus. Then she told in front of everyone why she had touched him and how she had been instantly cured. ⁴⁸And Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

⁴⁹While Jesus was still speaking, someone arrived from the ruler's home to tell him, "Your daughter has just died; don't trouble the master any further." ⁵⁰But Jesus heard the news and said to the ruler, "Do not fear, only believe."

⁵¹When he entered the house, Jesus allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James and John, with the father and mother of the child. ⁵²As all the people were weeping and wailing loudly, Jesus said to them, "Do not weep, she is not dead." ⁵³And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴As for Jesus, he took the child by the hand and said to her, "Child, awake!" ⁵⁵And her spirit returned and she got up at once; then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶The parents were amazed, but Jesus ordered them not to let anyone know what had happened.

Jesus sends out the Twelve

(Mt 10:5; Mk 5:6)

9 ¹Then Jesus called his Twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to drive out all evil spir-

its and to heal diseases. ²And he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³He instructed them, "Don't take anything for the journey, neither walking stick, nor bag, nor bread, nor silver coins; and don't bring even a spare tunic. ⁴Whatever house you enter, remain there until you leave that place. ⁵And wherever they don't welcome you, leave the town and shake the dust from your feet: it will be as a testimony against them."

⁶So they set out and went through the villages, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

⁷King Herod heard of all this and did not know what to think, for people said, "This is John, raised from the dead." ⁸Others believed that Elijah or one of the ancient prophets had come back to life. ⁹As for Herod, he said, "I had John beheaded; who is this man about whom I hear such wonders?" And he was anxious to see him.

¹⁰On their return the apostles told Jesus everything they had done. Then he took them aside to a lonely place, and they went away to a town called Bethsaida to be by themselves. ¹¹But the crowd heard of this and caught up with him. So he welcomed them and began speaking about the kingdom of God, curing those who needed healing.

Miracle of the loaves

(Mk 6:30; Mt 14:13; Jn 6:1)

■ ¹²The day was drawing to a close and the Twelve drew near to tell him, "Send the crowd away and let them go into the villages and farms around, to find lodging and food, for we are here in a lonely place." ¹³But Jesus replied, "You yourselves, give

44. Num 15, 38

52. Jn 11, 11; 1 Cor 15, 18

55. 1 K 17, 21

4. Acts 9, 43; 16, 15

5. Acts 13, 51

8. Mal 3, 23; Mt 17, 10

9. 23, 8

11. Mk 6, 34; 14, 14

them something to eat." They answered, "We have only five loaves and two fish; where can we get food and pay for it for so many people?"

¹⁴For there were about five thousand men. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Make people sit down in groups of fifties."

¹⁵So they made all these people settle down. ¹⁶Jesus then took the five loaves and two fish and, raising his eyes to heaven, pronounced a blessing over them; he broke them and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. ¹⁷They ate and everyone had enough; and when they gathered up what was left, twelve baskets were filled with broken pieces.

16. Mt 26, 26

17. Ps 78, 29

18. Jn 6, 69

19. 9, 8

20. 1, 32; 2, 26; 4, 41

■ See commentary on Mk 6:34.

This multiplication of the loaves occurs in all four gospels, which is true of very few events of the Gospel. Besides this account, another multiplication of the loaves is related in Mt 15:32 and Mk 8:1.

This abundance of accounts may be due to the fact that the multiplication of bread is one of the miracles of Jesus which best shows his absolute power over the laws of nature (see commentary on Mk 8:1).

Remember also that the Jews of Jesus' time were a poor people, too numerous for a fertile, but limited land. The Roman occupants were claiming a good portion of the resources and politicians, like Herod, imposed heavy taxes which were partly justified by the need to occupy the extra manpower in grandiose projects.

Many people had no security regarding employment as is true today in many countries, and Jesus along with his followers, shared that situation. In that desolate area, Jesus felt responsible for all his brothers and sisters who became his guests (as also happens in Lk 11:5) and he acted according to faith. Every day, in those times and now, many people must have shared their last resources with someone poorer, confident that God would pay them back. Jesus, in turn, could do no less. The miracle he performed at that moment confirms in their faith many humble believers, who are perhaps not too devoted to the church, but who often know how to risk all they have left.

Jesus is not concerned that this miracle awakens in them a misguided enthusiasm which will end up with a split among his followers (see Mk 6:45). Jesus had not fed them to attract them to his church, but to fulfill God's promises to the poor.

Peter's profession of faith

(Mk 8:27; Mt 16:18)

◆ ¹⁸One day when Jesus was praying alone, not far from his disciples, he asked them, "What do people say about me?" ¹⁹And they answered, "Some say that you are John the Baptist; others say that you are Elijah, and still others that you are one of the former prophets risen from the dead." Again Jesus asked them, ²⁰"What then do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." ²¹Then Jesus spoke to them, giving them strict orders not to tell this to anyone.

○ ²²And he added, "The Son of Man must suffer many things. He will

◆ This occurred near Caesarea Philippi, a famous spa located in the far north of Palestine, at the foot of Mount Hermon. Jesus had gone away because he was not safe in Galilee. As was his custom, he had sent the Twelve ahead of him to the villages he would visit, to prepare for his coming.

What do people say about me? And you, what did you tell them about me when you were among them? Who did you tell them I was? Peter answers first, confident that they were not wrong in presenting their teacher as the Messiah, the One sent by God.

Jesus does not deny that he is, but he forbids them to make it known from then on, because, according to the people, the Liberator had to crush his enemies. Can the apostles simply call Liberator, the one who will die on the cross?

By comparing this text with Mk 8:27 and Mt 16:13, we come to the following conclusion: Matthew combined in a single story two different events in which Peter was first in proclaiming his faith. The first episode is the one which Luke relates at this point.

In the second, Peter recognized Jesus as the Son of God and received the promise which Matthew recalls. Perhaps, this took place after the multiplication of the loaves: compare with John 6:66-69, or perhaps after the Resurrection: compare with John 21:15-17, which insists not on faith, but on the love that Jesus can see in Peter. See also Gal. 2:7-8.

○ Why did Jesus ask his apostles the questions we have just read? The Gospel answers clearly: because the time had come for Jesus to announce his passion to them. Jesus had not only come to teach people but to open for them the door leading to the Resurrection. Since his



be rejected by the elders and chief priests and teachers of the Law, and put to death. Then after three days he will be raised."

²³ Jesus also said to all the people, "If you will be a follower of mine, deny yourself and take up your cross each day; and follow me. ²⁴ For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it, and if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it. ²⁵ What does it profit you to gain the whole world while you destroy and lose yourself? ²⁶ If someone feels ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Glory and in the Glory of his Father with his holy angels. ²⁷ Truly, I say to you, there are some here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God."

The transfiguration

(Mk 9:2; Mt 17:1; Jn 12:28)

+ ²⁸ About eight days after Jesus had said all this, he took Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, his face was changed and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ Two men were talking with Jesus: Moses and Elijah. ³¹ They had just appeared in heavenly glory and were telling him about his departure that had to take place in Jerusalem.

³² Peter and his companions had fallen asleep, but they awoke suddenly and saw Jesus' Glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As Moses and Elijah were about to leave, Peter said to him, "Master, fortunately we are here for we can make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and

24. 14, 27; 17, 33; Jn 12, 25

27. 9, 1; 22, 69

28. 8, 51

31. 24, 4

34. Ex 40, 35

apostles now know him to be the Saviour promised to Israel, they must learn that there is no salvation if death is not conquered (1 Cor 15:25). And Jesus will obtain this victory when he freely chooses the way of the cross: the Son of Man has to suffer much and be rejected by the authorities.

Immediately after that, Jesus adds that we must all share in his victory over death: *You must deny your very self*: this is the fundamental orientation of our life. We must choose between serving and being served, sacrificing ourselves for others or taking advantage of them. Or, as a well-known prayer puts it: Let me not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

Take up your cross each day. Here comes the acceptance of the cross which the Lord gives to each one of us and which we do not have to choose because we find it in our destiny. We must not carry it because we are compelled to, but rather we must love it because the Lord wished it for us.

If you choose to save your life. Jesus refers to the general orientation of our life. He has nothing in common with those who are only concerned about avoiding "sins" while they pursue their ambitions and their desire to enjoy this life to the maximum. The mere fact of seeking to live without risks separates us from God's way.

If someone feels ashamed of me. Besides the cross given to us each day, God will ask us to witness to our faith and in that we will have to run risks, even if it is nothing more than the risk of

being ridiculed by our friends and our bosses. There will also be times when faithfulness to the Gospel will mean risking death. When a country is ruled by violence and those promoting integrity and solidarity are murdered, Christians may well be tempted to resign themselves to "spiritual" meetings and keep silent about social sins around them. *If you are ashamed of me and of my words.* Among Jesus' words are those which announce liberation for the oppressed and demand our making common cause with them.

+ Recall the divine revelation Jesus received at the beginning of his ministry (Lk 3:21). This other divine manifestation Jesus receives at the Transfiguration is due to the beginning of a new stage: the Passion.

Jesus has already been preaching for two years, but there is no hope that Israel will overcome the violence which will lead to its ruin. Even if Jesus' miracles do not convince his compatriots, Jesus will have to face the forces of evil: his sacrifice will be more effective than his words in arousing love and the spirit of sacrifice in all the people who will continue his saving work in the future.

During the Transfiguration, Jesus is assured that he will soon die in Jerusalem (*they were telling him about his departure from Jerusalem*); he is also given a foretaste of the Resurrection. (See commentary on Mk 9:2).

He took Peter, James and John with him: these men had a privileged place among the Twelve (Mk 1:29; 3:16; 5:37; 10:35; 13:3). In spite of the fact that the Twelve worked and lived



one for Elijah." For Peter didn't know what to say.³⁴ And no sooner had he spoken than a cloud appeared and covered them; and the disciples were afraid as they entered the cloud.³⁵ Then these words came from the cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen one, listen to him."³⁶ And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was there alone.

The disciples kept this to themselves at the time, telling no one of anything they had seen.

The epileptic demoniac

(Mk 9:14; Mt 17:14)

³⁷ The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus.³⁸ A man in the crowd called out, "Master, I beg you to look at my son, my only child. When the evil spirit seizes him, he suddenly screams.³⁹ The spirit throws him into a fit with foaming at the mouth; it scarcely ever leaves him and is wearing him out."⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not."

⁴¹ Jesus answered, "You faithless people! How wrong you are! How long must I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."⁴² And while the boy was being brought, the

demon knocked him to the ground and threw him into a fit. But Jesus spoke sharply to the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father.⁴³ And all of them were astonished at God's wonderful work.

(Mk 9:30)

While all were amazed at everything Jesus did, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴"Listen and remember what I tell you now: The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men."⁴⁵ But the disciples didn't understand this saying; something prevented them from grasping what he meant, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Who is the greatest?

◆ ⁴⁶ One day the disciples were arguing about which of them was the most important.⁴⁷ But Jesus knew their thoughts, so he took a little child and stood him by his side.⁴⁸ Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me: and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. And listen: He who is found to be the least among you all, he is the greatest."

⁴⁹ Then John spoke up, "Master, we saw a man who drove out demons by

35. 3, 22; 23, 35; Dt 18, 15

41. Dt 32, 5

45. 18, 34

49. Acts 16, 18; 19, 3

together, they had not all reached the same level and they could not go with Jesus into the Cloud.

He went up into the mountain to pray. It is quite possible that it was during a night of prayer that the event that Jesus expected took place. Meanwhile, the apostles were asleep until the Glory of Jesus transfigured awakened them.

They saw his glory: this recalls how Moses' face was transfigured after talking with God (Ex 34 29-35). Here, however, the glory comes from Jesus himself and it even affects his clothing.

Listen to him: Jesus is the Prophet, announced by Moses, and all should hear him. For us, however, it is not a question of receiving new laws. Instead, we listen to the one who reveals the Father to us and who moves us to be reconciled with him. To achieve that, we must pay close attention to him as the apostles did.

◆ See commentary on Mk 9:33.

Mark remarks that Jesus took a child in his arms: something unusual for people of the time since children did not count, and religious teachers only urged that they be well punished. The model of religion seemed to be a serious man who did not laugh, did not run, did not look at less responsible people, especially women and children. Oftentimes, we see something of such a mentality in those who criticize children's baptism and first communion.

Jesus does not answer the apostles' question: Who is the greatest? because what matters is not becoming the greatest, but being the one closest to Christ. And in order to receive Christ, we must welcome him in the person of the little ones.

+ After remembering Jesus' deeds in Galilee, Luke begins the second part of his gospel in

calling upon your name, and we tried to stop him because he doesn't follow you with us."⁵⁰ But Jesus said, "Don't stop him. He who is not against you is for you."

Jesus unwelcome in a Samaritan village

+ ⁵¹As the time drew near when Jesus would be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem. ⁵²He had sent ahead of him some messengers who entered a Samaritan village to prepare a lodging for him. ⁵³But the people would not receive him because he was on his way to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴Seeing this, James and John, his disciples said, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to reduce them to ashes?" ⁵⁵Jesus turned and rebuked them, ⁵⁶and they went on to another village.

The cost of following Jesus

◆⁵⁷ As they went on their way, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."⁵⁸ Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

⁵⁹ To another Jesus said, "Follow me." But he answered, "Let me go back now, for first I want to bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their dead; as for you, leave them and proclaim the kingdom of God."

⁶¹Another said to him, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to my family."⁶² And Jesus said to him, "Whoever has put his hand to the plough and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of God."

50. 11, 23 Phil 3. 13	51. 2 K 2, 1 1. 9. 3-5	52. Sir 50, 28; Jn 4, 9; Acts 8, 5 2. In 4. 38	54. 2 K 1, 10	62. 1 K 19, 19;
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which he puts together sayings and words that Jesus uttered on different occasions.

The first paragraph reminds us that between the two provinces of Galilee and Judea, there was Samaria. Its people were Samaritans, non-Jews, and the two people really hated each other. When Jews from Galilee were going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, throughout Samaria every door was closed to them.

In this chapter Luke refers several times to the story of the prophet Elijah. Here Luke refers to the story told in 2 Kg 1:9: according to the story (or legend), those who despised the prophet were destroyed by the fire of God.

Here, Jesus calls on his apostles to be less impulsive: the Samaritans refusing to welcome Jesus on this occasion are not more guilty than those who close their doors to a stranger. Why destroy this little village if by doing this they still had to look for a place in another village? It was better to move on without delay.

Call fire down from heaven: fortunately Jesus did not give all of us the power to work miracles. We would often use this power for our own personal revenge, confusing God's cause with ours.

◆ BREAKTHROUGHS – BECOMING FREE

In contrast with Jesus' customary understanding attitude about human nature, here we see Jesus very demanding with the disciple who wants to follow him: Jesus cannot waste his time in forming men who are not ready to sacrifice

everything for the sake of the Gospel.

The first of these admirers of Jesus had not realized that he was tied down by his love of comfort. The third, perhaps, was secretly hoping that at the time of saying good-by, his family would beg him not to do such a foolish thing, and so he would stay with his good intentions: I would like to, but...

The second case is different: the apostles must feel free from commitments to their families and their environment. It is difficult to think one is free if one has not had the opportunity to prove it by doing things differently from what is understood and accepted. Think about Francis of Assisi begging for bread in his own town after having lived as the son of a rich family.

For centuries, entrance into religious orders was almost the only way to liberation from an all-powerful family environment in order to be able to follow the gospel way better. In our age, we have to be freed, at times, from all kinds of social obligations – good things – but so numerous that we forget the only thing which is necessary.

I want first to bury my father: Perhaps this means that he had to bury his dead father; but perhaps the disciple wanted to look after his old father until he had buried him.

Let the dead bury their dead: we cannot look after the needs of everyone. Those who "are alive" dedicate themselves primarily to evangelization which only they understand. Meanwhile, there will be people from among "the dead" to

Jesus sends out the seventy

(Mt 10:15; Mk 6:7)

10 ¹After this the Lord appointed seventy other disciples and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was to go. ²And he said to them, "The harvest is rich, but the workers are few. So you must ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers to his harvest. ³Courage! I am sending you like lambs among wolves. ⁴Set off without purse or bag or sandals; and do not stop at your acquaintances' homes.

⁵Whatever house you enter, first bless them saying: 'Peace to this house.' ⁶If a man of peace lives there, the peace shall rest upon him. But if

not, the blessing will return to you. ⁷Stay in that house eating and drinking at their table, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move from house to house.

■ ⁸When they welcome you in any town, eat what they offer you. ⁹Heal the sick who are there and tell these people: 'The kingdom of God has drawn near to you.'

¹⁰But in any town where you are not welcomed, go to the market place and proclaim: ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off and leave with you. Yet know and be sure that the kingdom of God had come to you.' ¹²I tell you that on the Judgement Day it will be better for Sodom than for this town.

4. 22, 35; 2 K 2, 49 5. 2, 14 7. 1 Cor 9, 14; 2 Cor 11, 7; 1 Tim 5, 18 9. Acts 28, 8

take care of the obligations of solidarity and compassion that we ourselves cannot attend to.

Let the dead bury their dead : It is obvious that Jesus speaks as the prophets did. In asserting this deep truth, he was not giving a law to be practiced systematically.

o See commentary on Mt 10:5 and Mk 6:7.

Luke reports a mission of the *seventy* (or 72) after the mission of the Twelve (9:1).

There were *twelve* apostles according to the number of the tribes of Israel: this means that at first, the Gospel was proclaimed to the people of Israel. Then came the mission of the seventy-two (or of the seventy): these numbers symbolized the multitude of pagan nations. This mission, then, is a figure of the task which is the responsibility of the church until the end of the world: to evangelize all nations (Mt 28:19).

When the church has been present long enough in a particular place, we tend to believe that everyone has had the opportunity to receive the Gospel: this is an illusion. Even in the best of circumstances, many families, especially the poorest ones, have waited for years for some missionary's visit.

In visiting homes, the first thing to do is to give peace, that is, to come as a friend, on behalf of Christ and his church, taking the time to listen to the people visited and to find out their concerns. Then, and only then, will we be able to give them a good answer and to tell them: *the Kingdom has come to you*, or, even though you may have a thousand problems, believe that today God has come closer to you to reconcile you. This is the time to be reconciled with family members and neighbours, to let go of resentments. Begin

undertaking what you can do, and trust that, in his own way, God will solve what is beyond our own power.

Cure the sick: see what follows.

Many of the people who welcome the missionaries with joy are not going to persevere: they are not going to enter a Christian community. That does not necessarily mean that the missionaries' efforts have been wasted. These people will remember this moment of grace from the Lord and it will help them in keeping some degree of faith in their daily lives. In any case, there will be some whose hearts were touched by the Lord at that time and they will become active members of his church.

The mission helps form the missionaries and also awakens those they visit. Jesus formed his disciples not only through his teaching, but also by sending them on missions. That is the way he formed the seventy a few months after they met him. Likewise now, the best people for this missionary work are often those who have been recently converted.

CURING THE SICK

■ *Cure the sick*, Jesus says. We have already said that Jesus did not come to bring good health to all the sick people, but rather to bring us salvation. Since we are sinners, our salvation is worked out through suffering and through the cross.

Jesus' messengers do not try to replace doctors. They do not proclaim faith as a means to be cured; that would lower it. They do, however, offer "healing" to the people who have not yet discovered that the *Kingdom of God* and his mercy have come to them.



¹³Alas for you Corazin! Alas for you Bethsaida! So many miracles have been worked in you! If the same miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would already be sitting in ashes and wearing the sack cloth of repentance. ¹⁴Surely for Tyre and Sidon it will be better than for you in the Judgment Day. ¹⁵And what of you, city of Capernaum? Will you be lifted up to heaven? You will be thrown down to the place of the dead.

¹⁶Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me; and he who rejects me, rejects the one who sent me."

Jesus gives thanks to the Father

(Mt 11:25)

o ¹⁷The seventy disciples returned full of joy. They said, "Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we called on your name." ¹⁸Then Jesus replied, "I

saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹You see, I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the Enemy, so that nothing will harm you. ²⁰Nevertheless, don't rejoice because the evil spirits submit to you; rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven."

²¹At that time Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit and said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and made them known to little children.

²²Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. I have been given all things by my Father, so that no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

²³Then Jesus turned to his dis-

13. Mt 11, 21; 16, 31

15. Is 14, 13

16. Jn 13, 20

19. Ps 91, 13

20. Dn 12, 1; Rev 3, 5; 13, 8

21. 8, 10; Jn 7, 48; 1 Cor 1, 17; 1, 26

22. Mr 28, 18; Jn 3, 35; 13, 3; 17, 2; Phil 2, 9

Wherever there are communities of Christians, they must care for the sick and visit them as a sign of their being concerned for everyone and being everyone's family. The love shown by a visitor encourages the sick person, gives him joy and arouses gratitude in him, and thus disposes him for an in-depth renewal and for the forgiveness of sins. See also James 5:13.

In his first letter to the Corinthians 15:9, Paul speaks of the various gifts that the spirit gives to the Christian community and he singles out the gift to work miracles and to heal the sick. This last gift may correspond to a natural disposition the person had before.

The church must appreciate every form of care given to the sick. Obviously we should encourage those who can pray and impose their hands over the sick. But, doctors and hospital personnel must look on their skillful care of patients as a service done for the sick on behalf of God.

And do not stop at your acquaintances' home: that would be the same as taking provisions along. A missionary must rely only on the Father's Providence: he will know how to touch the heart of someone listening to the Good News so that the missionary will be welcome. Missionaries would certainly lose their missionary zeal if they lived with people who did not understand the Kingdom.

o At first, the person who preaches Christ and works for him is scared. Then, follows the joy of having surpassed oneself, and even more the joy of having believed and worked with the very power of Jesus. Jesus gives thanks for the seventy (or seventy-two) and for all those who will follow them.

What are *these things* that God has revealed to the *little ones* but the mysterious power of the Gospel to transform people and show them the truth? The apostles marvel at the power coming from the *name of Jesus* (Mk 16:9). Jesus underlines the defeat of the Adversary, Satan, the father of lies, of false freedom and of golden chains.

The learned and the clever think they know, but they do not know what is essential. They speak of a God who is no more than a caricature of the true God and they do not recognize him in Jesus. They do not know where the world is heading because they do not see how God's power is working wherever Jesus is being proclaimed.

The *little ones*, on the other hand, have understood. A short while ago they saw them selves as a sacrificed generation. For the little ones are used to sacrificing themselves for their children from generation to generation or they are sacrificed by powers under the pretext of bringing happiness to their descendants. They



ciples and said to them privately, "Fortunate are you to see what you see,"²⁴ for I tell you that many prophets and kings would have liked to see what you see but did not, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

The good Samaritan

(Mt 22:24; Mk 12:28)

+ ²⁵ Then a teacher of the Law came and began putting Jesus to the test. And he said, "Master, what shall I do to receive eternal life?"²⁶ Jesus replied, "What is written in the Scripture? How do you understand it?"²⁷ The man answered, "It is written: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself.*"²⁸ Jesus replied, "What a good answer! Do this and you shall live."²⁹ The man wanted to

keep up appearances, so he replied, "Who is my neighbour?"

³⁰ Jesus then said, "There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him and went off leaving him half dead.

³¹ It happened that a priest was going along that road, and saw the man, but passed by on the other side.³² Likewise a Levite saw the man and passed by the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, too, was going along that road and, as he came upon the man, was moved with compassion.³⁴ He went over to him and treated his wounds with oil and wine and wrapped them with bandages. Then he put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn where he took care of him.

³⁵ The next day he had to set off, but he gave two silver coins to the inn-

24. 11, 31-32; 1 Pet 1, 12

27. Dt 6, 5; Lev 19, 18

30. Mt 5, 43

34. Is 1, 6

did not live for themselves, rather they were preparing a place for others. But now, the little ones, namely, the humble believers have everything if they have Jesus because everything has been given to him by the Father.

Little ones live their faith in simple ways but they know that none of their sacrifices are lost. It is Jesus who reveals the Father to us, and knowing him in truth, we also share in his control over events. Our desires and our prayers are powerful because we have come to the center from which God directs the forces saving humankind: because we work for eternity, our names are already written in heaven.

To evangelize does not mean to advertise the Gospel but rather to prove its power to heal people from their demons and we need not become activists to that effect. We must admit that we have no power in these things and we must give thanks to God who enabled us to see, to hear and to communicate his salvation.

Fortunate are you to see... Stop being envious of famous people, kings and prophets of the past. You who are alive now and who are neither kings nor prophets have been given a better part.

+ *Who is my neighbour?* The teacher of the law expected to be given the precise limits of his obligation. Whom was he supposed to look after? members of his family? people of his own race? or perhaps everybody?

It is significant that Jesus concludes his story with a different question: *Which of the three made himself neighbour?* It is as if he said: do not try to figure out who is your neighbour, listen instead to the call within you, and become a neighbour, be close to your brother in need. As long as we see the command to love as an obligation, we are not loving as God wants.

Love does not simply consist in being moved by another person's distress. Notice how the Samaritan stopped by in spite of it being a dangerous place, how he paid for the expenses and promised to take care of whatever else might be necessary. Instead of just 'being charitable' he took unconditional and uncalculated risks for a stranger.

On one occasion, Martin Luther King pointed out that love is not satisfied with comforting those who suffer: "To begin with, we must be the good Samaritan to those who have fallen along the way. This, however, is only the beginning. Then, some day we will necessarily have to realize that the road to Jericho must be made in such a way that men and women are not constantly beaten and robbed while they are going along the paths of life."

With this example, Jesus also makes us see that, many times, those who seem to be religious officials, or who believe they fulfill the law, are incapable of loving. It was a Samaritan, considered a heretic by the Jews, who took care of the wounded man.

keeper and told him: "Take care of him and whatever you spend on him, I will repay when I come back."

³⁶Jesus then asked, "Which of these three, do you think, made himself neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷The teacher of the Law answered, "the one who had mercy on him." And Jesus said, "Go then and do the same."

Martha and Mary

◆³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he entered a village and a woman called Martha welcomed him to her house. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary who sat down at the Lord's feet to listen to his words. ⁴⁰Martha, meanwhile, was busy with all the serving and finally she said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the serving?"

⁴¹But the Lord answered, "Martha,

Martha, you worry and are troubled about many things, ⁴²whereas only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her."

Lord, teach us to pray

(Mt 6:9; 7:7)

11 ¹One day Jesus was praying in a certain place and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." ²And Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say this:

Father, hallowed be your name,
may your kingdom come,
³give us each day our daily bread,
⁴and forgive us our sins, for we also forgive all who do us wrong,
and do not let us fall into temptation.

○⁵Jesus said to them, "Suppose

38. Jn 11, 1; 12, 1
2. Mk 14, 36; Gal 4, 6

42. 1 Cor 7, 35; Mt 6, 33;
3. Mt 6, 34

Jn 6, 27; 12, 31; Acts 6, 2
5. James, 1, 13

1. 5, 33

For the Jews, neighbours were the members of Israel, their own people, dignified by sharing the same religion; in fact, this fraternity came from "blood and flesh." For Jesus, instead, true fraternity leads us to give up any discrimination.

◆ There are many things which seem necessary in family life: cleaning, preparing meals, taking care of children. By doing this, somehow, we are looking after Christ. Yet, *only one thing is needed* for all: to listen to Christ when he is present. To do this, everything else must be put aside.

Martha offers her material services to Jesus when he wishes to give her eternal riches. She is working and worrying and does not have the time to be with Jesus. Love is something else. Jesus is peace and the person who does not attend to him in peace does not receive him. There is a way of serving and working feverishly which leaves us empty, whether it is at home or in the community; instead Jesus wants us to find him in our daily work.

Our prayer can also be a way of fidgeting like Martha: when we fret in saying prayers, when we use a lot of words to present our worries to the Lord a hundred times over; when the person responsible for the celebration becomes nervous and overly concerned about the perfection of the singing or the homily. All of us should look for a form of prayer in which we take

time to put ourselves in the presence of God, before beginning to pray at all: we must listen, giving time to silent meditation on God's Word. We must silence our desires in order to direct our attention only to God who is present in secret. How strange that in some non-Christian religions, people learn to bring their minds to peace and silence and reach true serenity. Meanwhile, we enter prayer with our concerns and do not let go of them until the prayer is ended.

If the Mary in this episode were the same as Mary of Magdala who accompanied Jesus (Lk 8:2) we could imagine the following:

Mary is part of the group of disciples who, along with Jesus, are received by Martha, her "sister or relative." Mary is not in the least concerned about preparing the food and Martha is complaining. Jesus, then, praises Mary, not only because she is listening to him, but because a while back, she had already decided to follow him with the apostles. Like the apostles, Mary has chosen the better part.

■ The apostles already knew how to pray and they prayed in common as all the Jews did in the synagogue and at key times during the day. Yet, in living close to Jesus, they discovered a new way to live in close fellowship and they felt a need to address the Father. See Mt 6:9.

○ Jesus urges us to ask with perseverance without ever getting tired of asking, but rather

one of you has a friend and goes to his house in the middle of the night and says: 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶for a friend of mine who is travelling has just arrived and I have nothing to offer him.' ⁷Maybe your friend will answer from inside: 'Don't bother me now; the door is locked and my children and I are in bed, so I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸But I tell you, even though this man will not get up and attend to him because he is a friend, yet he will get up because the other is a bother to him, and he will give him all he needs.

⁹And so I say to you, 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.' ¹⁰For the one who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.'

¹¹Many of you are fathers; if your

son asks for a fish, will you give him a snake instead? ¹²And if your son asks for an egg, will you give him a scorpion? ¹³Even you evil people know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more then will the Father in Heaven give holy spirit to those who ask him!"

Jesus and Beelzebul

(Mk 3:22; Mt 12:23; Mk 4:21; 9:40)

◆ ¹⁴One day Jesus was driving out a dumb demon. When the demon had been driven out and the man could speak, the people were amazed. ¹⁵Yet some of them said, "He drives out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the chief of the demons." ¹⁶So others wanted to put him to the test, by asking him for a heavenly sign.

¹⁷But Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every nation di-

8. 18, 4

13. Mt 7, 11

Jn 14, 13

16. Mt 16, 1; Mk 8, 11

ting God. God will not always give us what we ask for, nor in the way we ask, since we do not know what is good for us. But he will give us a holy spirit, or a clearer vision of his will, and at the same time, the courage to follow it.

Knock and it will be opened to you. A page from Father Molinier is a commentary on this verse. "If God does not open up at once, it is not because he enjoys making us wait. If we must persevere in prayer, it is not because we need a set number of invocations, but rather because a certain quality, a certain way of prayer is required. If we were able to have that at the beginning, our prayer would be heard immediately."

Prayer is the groaning of the Holy Spirit in us as Saint Paul says. Yet, we need repetition for this groaning to open a path in our stony heart, just as the drop of water wastes away the hardest rocks. When we repeat the Our Father and the Hail Mary with perseverance, one day we can pray them in a way which is in perfect harmony with God's will. He himself was waiting for this groaning, the only one which can move him since, in fact, it comes from his own heart.

As long as we have not played this note, or rather, drawn it from within, God cannot be conquered. It is not that God defends himself since he is pure tenderness and fluidity, and as long as there is nothing similar in us, the current cannot pass between him and us. Man gets tired of praying, yet if he perseveres instead of losing heart, he will gradually let go of his pride until being exhausted and overcome, he obtains much more than he could have wished for."

PETITIONS – THE SAINTS

Jesus invites us to ask with perseverance, not so that God will grant us our wishes, but so that we may be more attuned to his thoughts and desires. Persevering petitions cease being self-centered and become prayer, that is, they lift us up and bring us closer to God.

Jesus does not say anything about asking the saints because, very often, the person who begs the saints takes a road opposed to real prayer. Such a person is not interested in discovering God's mercy but in obtaining some favour. He does not care whom he addresses as long as he finds an efficient and automatic dispenser of benefits. And so begins the search for saints, shrines and devotions.

The church is a family. Just as we ask our friends to pray for us, so too and much more we should ask our brothers, the saints. No one will criticize us if, at times, we show our confidence in their intercession, especially the intercession of those whom we admire more because we know their lives and their deeds. This "petition" to the saints cannot, however, be confused with the perseverance in asking, which introduces us into God's mystery. Mary, the mother of God, is the only creature who can accompany us in prayer, because God made her our mother; because he deposited in her all the compassion he had for us; and because he united her to himself in such a way that when we look at her, we always find the living presence of God.

◆ See commentary on Mk 3:22 and Mt 12:23.



vided by civil war is on the road to ruin, and one after another will fall.

¹⁸If Satan also is divided, his empire is coming to an end. How can you say that I drive out demons by calling upon Beelzebul? ¹⁹If I drive them out by Beelzebul, by whom do your fellow members drive out demons? They themselves will give you the answer.

²⁰But suppose I am driving out demons by the finger of God; would not this mean that the kingdom of God has come upon you? ²¹As long as the strong and armed man guards his house, his goods are safe. ²²But when a stronger one attacks and overcomes him, the challenger takes away all the weapons he relied on and disposes of his spoils.

+ ²³Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.

■ ²⁴When the evil spirit goes out of man, he wanders through dry lands looking for a resting place. And finding none, he says, "I will return to my house from which I came." ²⁵So he returns and finds the house swept and everything in order. ²⁶Then he goes to

fetch seven other spirits even worse than himself, to enter that house and settle in it. And the last state of that man is worse than the first.

o ²⁷As Jesus was speaking, a woman spoke from the crowd and said to him, "Blessed is the one who bore you and nursed you!" ²⁸Jesus replied, "Surely blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it as well."

◆ ²⁹As the crowd increased, Jesus began to speak in this way, "People of the present time are evil people. They ask for a sign, but no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰As Jonah became a sign for the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be a sign for this generation. ³¹The Queen of the South will rise up on Judgment Day with the people of these times and accuse them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and here there is greater than Solomon. ³²The men of Nineveh will rise up on Judgment Day with the people of these times and accuse them, for Jonah's preaching made them turn from their sins, and here there is greater than Jonah.

20. Ex 8, 15; Lk 17, 21

29. Jn 6, 30; 1 Cor 1, 22

23. 9, 50; Jn 10, 12; 4, 36; Mt 12, 43

30. Mt 12, 40; Jn 1, 17

28. 8, 21; 1, 45; 2, 19; Rev 1, 3

31. 1 K 10, 1

32. Jn 3, 1

By the finger of God (v. 20). In Exodus 10:15, the same expression is used to designate the power of God working miracles.

+ *Whoever is not with me ...* This phrase seems to contradict Lk 9:50: *Whoever is not against you is with you*. In fact, in Lk 9:50, Jesus admits that his spiritual family goes much beyond the visible group of his disciples: those who, without belonging to the church, work for the same goals, must be considered as friends.

In Luke 11:23, on the other hand, Jesus speaks of people who refuse to be defined in terms of his message and who want to remain uncommitted: they do not join him and later, they will criticize him.

■ The Jews believed that evil spirits preferred to live in the desert or, rather, that God had banished them there. Here, Jesus is speaking of people who only believe for a while because they do not repent enough of their past sins: they enjoyed listening to the word but they did not

take the costly measures which would have allowed them to heal the root of evil.

o The woman is actually praising Jesus. When she says: *Your mother is blessed*, she means: *Who can speak like you?* Jesus, however, answers: *if my words are so good, do not praise my relatives who may be proud of me, but rather those who make the most of my words.*

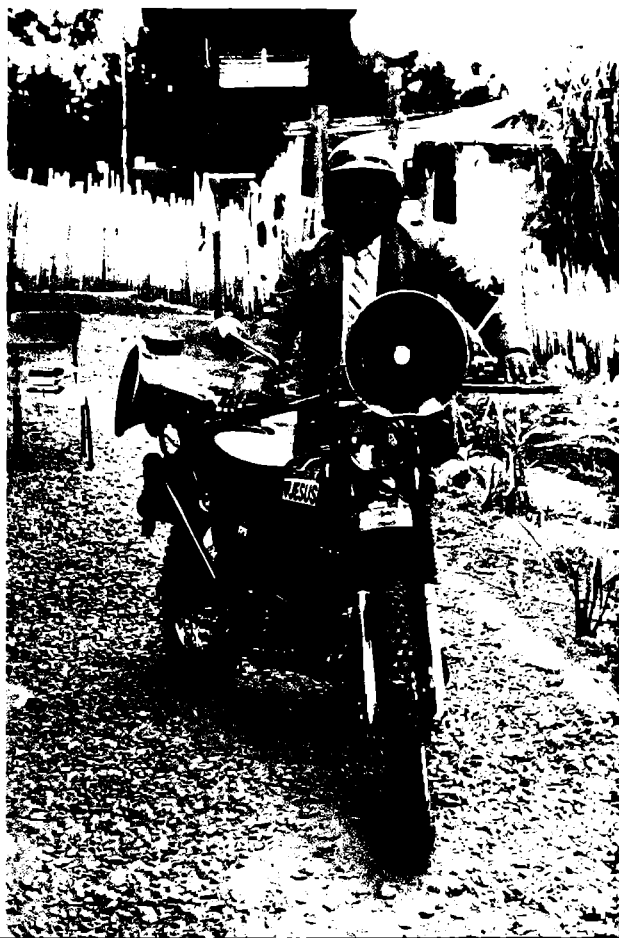
As for Mary, the mother of Jesus, we have already said that she was the first one to believe (Lk 1:38); she was happy to have believed (Lk 1:45) and she kept all the words and deeds of the Lord in her heart (Lk 2:51).

◆ The Ninevites, being sinners, received no other divine sign than the coming of Jonah who invited them to repent. Jesus' contemporaries believe they are "good" because they belong to the people of God and they do not realize that the hour has come for them to repent.

How difficult it is for us to understand that God does not judge anyone! See Jn 5:22 and

In the Mountains of Sinai. In the
wilderness which is 5,000 ft
above sea level, the monastery of
St. Catherine was founded in the
first Christian centuries to celebrate
the site of the Burning Bush.





The word of God
is to be proclaimed to all,
not only to the church-goers.



³³ No one lights a lamp to hide it; rather he puts it on a lampstand so that people coming in may see the light.

³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye sees clearly, your whole person benefits from the light; but if your eyesight is poor, your whole person is without light. ³⁵ So be careful lest the light inside you become darkness. ³⁶ If your whole person receives the light, having no part that is dark, you will become light, as when a lamp shines on you."

Woe to you Pharisees!

(Mt 23:1)

o ³⁷ As Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to have a meal with him. So he went and sat at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee then wondered why Jesus did not first wash his hands before dinner. ³⁹ But the Lord said to him, "So then, you Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside yourselves you are full of plundering and evil. ⁴⁰ Fools! He who made the outside, also made the inside. ⁴¹ But according to you, by the mere giving of alms everything is made clean.

⁴² A curse is on you, Pharisees; you give for the Temple a tenth of all, in-

cluding mint and rue and the other herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. This ought to be practised, without neglecting the other.

⁴³ A curse is on you, Pharisees, for you love the best seats in the synagogues and to be greeted in the market-place.

⁴⁴ A curse is on you for you are like tombstones of the dead which can hardly be seen; people don't notice them and make themselves unclean by stepping on them."

⁴⁵ Then a teacher of the Law spoke up and said, "Master, when you speak like this, you insult us too." ⁴⁶ And Jesus answered, "A curse is on you also, teachers of the Law. For you prepare unbearable burdens and load them on the people, while you yourselves don't move a finger to help them. ⁴⁷ A curse is on you, for you build memorials to the prophets your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you approve and agree with what your fathers did. Is it not so? After they got rid of the prophets, you can now build."

■ ⁴⁹ (The Wisdom of God also said,) "I will send prophets and apostles and this people will kill and persecute some of them. ⁵⁰ But the present generation will have to answer for the blood of all the prophets

33. 8, 16; Mk 4, 21

36. Mt 6, 22

38. Mk 7, 3; Mt 15, 2; 15, 20

42. 18, 12; Dt 14, 22

47. 7, 30; 13, 33

49. Mt 23, 34

5:27. Our fellowmen are the ones who will ask us to give an account of so many riches entrusted to us by God for the benefit of everyone. riches which, through our own fault, did not produce fruit.

o See commentary on Mt 23.

The Bible does not demand these ritual purifications which Mark also mentions in 7:3, but the teachers of Jesus' time insisted that they were necessary. Jesus rebels against these new religious obligations. Why do they not pay more attention to inner purification?

Then, we read about the reproaches Jesus addressed to the Pharisees on various occasions. All of these words and reproaches are also for us who appear to be the thinkers, or the pastors, or the best in the church. Theoretically it is a gift to be well informed about doctrine, to have a

ministry, or to be part of a group more serious about Christian life. Yet, in practice, all of this makes it more difficult for us to be truly humble and many times, it prevents us from being in the last place which should be ours. Then, only God's visitation can save us. When he manifests himself, he and only he, can strip us of all the merits we thought we had and leave us with the vision of our sins. This is what happened to the Pharisee Paul (or Saul) when he encountered Jesus (Acts 9; Phil 3:4-11).

■ Those who before Luke, wrote down this saying of Jesus: *I will send prophets* ... (which we also read in Mt 23:34), introduced it with the formula: "Wisdom says," which was a way of designating Jesus. When Luke placed these lines within Jesus' discourse, he forgot to take out these words. Removing them would have made

that has been shed since the foundation of the world,⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was murdered between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, the people of this time will have to answer for them all.

⁵² A curse is on you, the teachers of the Law, for you have taken the key of knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you prevented others from entering."

⁵³ As Jesus left that place, the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees began to harass him, ⁵⁴ asking him endless questions, setting traps to catch him in something he might say.

Open and fearless speech

(Mk 3:28; Mt 10:19; 12:31; Mk 8:38)

◆12 ¹ Meanwhile, such a numerous crowd had gathered that they crushed one another. Then Jesus spoke to his disciples in this way, "Beware first of the yeast of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. ² Nothing is covered that will not be uncovered, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ Whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places, will be proclaimed from the housetops.

⁴ I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who put to death the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will tell you whom to fear: Fear the One who after putting to death is able to throw into hell. This you must fear. ⁶ Don't you get five sparrows for two pennies? Yet not one of them has been forgotten by God. ⁷ Even the hairs of your head have been numbered. So do not fear: are you not worth more than thousands of sparrows?

⁸ I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before people, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. ⁹ But the one who denies me before people will be denied before the angels of God.

¹⁰ There will be pardon for the one who criticizes the Son of Man, but there will be no pardon for the one who slanders the Holy Spirit.

¹¹ When you are brought before the synagogues, governors and rulers, don't worry about how you will defend yourself or what to say. ¹² For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time all that you have to say.

The rich fool

¹³ Someone in the crowd spoke to Jesus, "Master, tell my brother to share with me the property of our

51. Gen 4, 8; 2 Cor 24, 20	52. Mt 23, 13	1. Mt 16, 6	2. 8, 17	4. Jn 15, 15	5. James 4, 12
8, 9, 26	10. Acts 3, 17; 13, 46; Mk 3, 29	11. 21, 14	12. Acts 4, 8; 5, 32		

the text a lot clearer.

See commentary on Mt 23:34. Jesus states that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law are going to be mainly responsible for the persecution against the first Christians (against those apostles and prophets he is going to send). Jesus also declares that the punishment for this persecution will fall on the present generation, and thus, he announces the destruction of the Jewish nation in 70 A.D.

Jesus' warning also applies to priests, religious, Christian institutions and the "good Christians," when their role in the church is similar to that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law in the Jewish religion and society of that time.

In our case, too, it might be that we build a Church allied with power, which is ruled by the

most educated circles, and looking for respectability, unconsciously look down on the poor and the workers. With this, we, ourselves have prepared the persecution against the prophets of our time. In many places where militant Christians and even religious were repressed or murdered, there have been "church" people next to those who either ordered or approved those crimes.

You did not enter and you prevented those who want to enter from entering. Is not this one of the reasons why so many simple people go to other churches?

◆ *Nothing is hidden that will not be known:* this could be interpreted in different ways. In these paragraphs, Jesus refers to the courage

father." ¹⁴He replied, "My friend, who has appointed me as your judge?" ¹⁵Then Jesus said to the people, "Be on your guard and avoid every kind of greed, for even though you have many possessions, your life doesn't depend on them."

¹⁶And Jesus continued with this story, "There was a rich man and his land had produced a good harvest. ¹⁷He thought: 'What shall I do? For I am short of room to store my harvest.' ¹⁸So he planned: 'I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones to store all this grain which is my wealth. ¹⁹Then I may say to myself: My friend, you have a lot of good things put by for a lot of years. Rest, eat, drink and enjoy yourself.' ²⁰But God said to him: 'You fool! This very night your life will be required of you; tell

me who shall get all you have put aside?' ²¹This is the lot of those who pile up riches instead of becoming rich before God."

Do not worry!

(Mt 6:25)

²²Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you not to worry about your life: What are we to eat? or about your body: What are we to put on? ²³For your life is more than food and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Look at the crows: they neither sow nor reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than the birds! ²⁵Which of you for all his worrying can make himself a bit taller? ²⁶And if you are not able to control such a little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

15. Sir 11, 19; James 4, 13; 1 Cor 15, 32 19. Mt 6, 19; Rev 3, 17

geous testimony of faith. We have to speak the truth without worrying about what people will think of us. Here, *hypocrisy* refers to those who are always trying to be diplomatic and whose primary concern is not to lose friends.

Do not fear: See commentary on Mt 10:28.

Everyone who criticizes the Son of Man:

See commentary on Mk 3:29.

GREED – PRODUCTIVITY

o *Who has appointed me as your judge?* Jesus reserves his authority for what is essential: suppressing the greed ingrained in our hearts is more important than looking at every person's right with a magnifying glass.

Avoid every kind of greed: it is not a matter of being resigned to mediocrity or destitution, satisfied to have ten people sleep in the same room, and without any opportunity for education. We know that all this prevents the growth of people in awareness of their dignity and of their divine vocation. Jesus does not criticize our efforts to achieve a more just society, since the whole Bible requires it. Instead, he asks us to create a more authentic human community which cannot exist when only a few are in charge of wealth, culture and responsibilities.

But it is one thing to seek justice because without justice there is neither peace nor communion: it is quite another to look at what others have with the desire to share their greed. Today we clamour for justice but tomorrow we may only think of having more superfluous necessities. Such greed will never let us rest, and what

is more, it will close the door of the Kingdom on us. (Mk 10:23; 1 Tim 6:8).

Possessions do not give life. Make sure that your concern to have what you lack does not make you neglect what could give you life now.

In this regard, we should allow the poor to speak, all those brothers and sisters of ours who, though immersed in poverty, continue to be persons who live, in the strongest sense of this word. Should we pity them, or should we count them among the few who already enjoy the Kingdom of God? One of the greatest obstacles preventing the liberation of people is their own greed. The day they agree to participate in powerful boycotts and not go their own way in the pursuit of advantages for one or other category, they shall begin to live as people.

What shall I do? The simplest thing to do was to share earthly riches created for the benefit of everyone. But, instead, he was worrying about keeping them and thus rendering them useless. The very same thing occurs now: The first concern of our societies is not to provide the basic necessities of life for all. Greed is the driving force of our economies. Because of this, production is wasted and many live in sub-human conditions. The rich man in the parable was planning bigger barns; today's manufacturers look for markets everywhere and their best recourse is to persuade people that they need lots of things they had never thought of before.

The person *who works for God* knows how to find happiness in the present moment. Wherever he is, he tries to create a network of social



²⁷ Look at the wild flowers: they do not spin or weave; yet I tell you, even Solomon with all his wealth was not clothed as one of these. ²⁸ But if in the fields God so clothes the grass which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, people of little faith.

²⁹ As for you: do not set your heart on what you are to eat and drink; stop worrying. ³⁰ Let all the nations of the world run after these things; your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Seek rather the Kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.

+ ³² Do not be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell what you have and give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, and make

safe investments within God, where no thief comes and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your investments are, there will your heart be also.

Be ready

(Mk 13:33; Mt 24:43; 6:19)

■ ³⁵ Be ready, dressed for service, and keep your lamps lit, ³⁶ like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding. As soon as he comes and knocks, they will open to him. ³⁷ Happy are those servants whom the master finds wide-awake when he comes. ³⁸ Truly, I tell you, he will put on an apron and have them sit at table and wait on them. Happy are those servants if he finds them awake when he comes at midnight or day-break!

31. Mt 6, 20 33. 6, 30; 16, 9; 19, 8; Acts 9, 36; 10, 2; 11, 29 35. Ex 12, 11 36. Mt 25, 1

relationships through which everyone gives to others and receives from them instead of wanting and getting things in a selfish way.

THE POOR CHURCH

+ *Do not fear little flock.* Nowhere in the Gospel does Jesus allow us to believe that with time most people will be converted.

We know that the non-Christian world is numerically much more important than the "Christian" world and it grows more rapidly. While large numbers in the "Christian" world give up religious practice, we understand that the church is both a sign and a little flock.

Jesus asks each one of us to be detached from earthly things and he also asks the same of the flock. What matters for the church is not the building of powerful institutions nor the holding of key posts in society "for the greater glory of God," because the world is passing and we are waiting for the coming of the Lord.

Sell what you possess. Are the common people convinced that the Church has done this? Christian people rejoice when their bishop and pastors condemn injustice and remind them of the rights of the working class and the marginalized. But it is not enough for us to preach to others. God asks justice of the world and poverty of his Church. Our call for justice will not be heard as long as the Church does not accept for herself the whole Gospel.

It has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom: compare this with Lk 10:23 and Mt 16:16. If we really want to love the Father, we must always keep in mind that he has chosen us

before others to be, in the world, this little flock that seeks what is essential.

■ Jesus develops the parable of the servant expecting his master's return. This servant is here contrasted with the rich man who is concerned about a long and comfortable life. The servant works for God.

Happy the servants whom the master finds wide-awake (v. 37). Wide-awake, that is, concerned about tomorrow's world. Wide-awake also means being aware of the truth: we do not consent to call 'good' evil, and 'evil' good; we do not forgive ourselves for allowing evil and we are not intimidated before injustice.

The Son of Man will come like a thief (v. 40). We should not think only of the day of death, nor should we be afraid of God's judgement if we live in his grace. Jesus tells us about the master returning from the wedding who is so happy that he reverses the usual order and begins to serve his servants. If we have been serving God for years, how could we not reach this other phase of spiritual life in which it would seem that God is concerned only in giving and feasting over us?

Peter said to him: (v. 41). This new paragraph is aimed at those who hold responsible positions in the church.

My master delays in coming (v. 45). Those who are responsible may betray their mission. More often, they make the mistake of seeing only to the good functioning of the institutions and they forget that Christ is coming.

God comes all the time through events which, unexpectedly, ruin our plans. Therefore, the



³⁹Pay attention to this: If the master of the house had known at what time the thief would come, he would not have let him break into his house. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect."

⁴¹Peter said, "Lord, did you tell this parable only for us, or for everyone?" ⁴²And the Lord replied, "Imagine, then, the wise and faithful steward whom the master sets over his other servants. ⁴³Fortunate is this servant if his master on coming home finds him doing his work. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you, the master will put him in charge of all his property."

⁴⁵But it may be that the steward thinks: 'My Lord delays in coming,' and he begins to abuse the men servants and the servant girls, eating and drinking and getting drunk. ⁴⁶Then the master may come on a day he does not expect him and at an hour he doesn't know. He will discharge his steward and number him among the unreliable."

⁴⁷The servant who knew his

master's will but did not prepare to do what his master wanted, will be punished with a sound beating; but the one who did what deserved a punishment ⁴⁸without knowing it shall receive a lighter beating. Much will be required of the one who has been given much, and as more things are entrusted to him, more will be asked of him.

(Mt 10:34; 5:25; 16:2)

⁴⁹I have come to bring fire upon the earth and how I wish it were already kindled; ⁵⁰but I have a baptism to undergo and what anguish I feel until it is over!

⁵¹Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵²From now on, in one house five will be divided; three against two, and the two against the three. ⁵³They will be divided, father against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

40. 1 Thes 5, 2; Rev 3, 3; 3, 20; Mk 13, 35

50. Jn 12, 27

51. Jer 6, 14; 8, 10; Eze 13, 10

49. 3, 16; Mal 3, 19; Acts 2, 3

53. 21, 16; Mt 7, 6

church must not rely too much on planning its activity: who knows what God has in store for us tomorrow? Instead the church should see to its prayer and its availability so that the Lord will let her be in the best situation when he shakes up our little universe.

Be awake to admire, rejoice in and discover the presence of God and his blessings which enlighten our lives.

o I have come to bring fire. Must we think of fire as referring to something precise such as love: the Gospel or the gift of the Holy Spirit would be? It is better to stay with the image of fire which purifies, burns all that is old, gives warmth and fosters life: fire of the judgement of God destroying all that is not submitted to its reforming action.

Jesus does not come to solve everyone's problems individually but to remake the world and to bring the jewels which will remain for eternity out of the rubble. But those wishing to have a share in the glory of God the Father, as Jesus does, must take part in this work of salvation

which includes the whole world with its tensions, violence, its wise and crazy achievements.

I must receive a baptism ... Jesus is both the leader and the first one who is going to face death as a means of obtaining resurrection. This step as 'agonizing' for Jesus as it is for us, is the baptism of fire (see Lk 3:16) which introduces us into a glorious and eternal life. This is prefigured in some way when we receive Christian baptism (Rom 6:3-5).

I came to bring division: This is followed by words of Jesus which are so upsetting for those who wish to rest at his side. Jesus is a source of division among nations (see commentary on Jn 10:1-4) and social groups. Often people have tried to make religion into the cement of national unity or family peace. It is true that faith is a factor in peace and understanding; but it also separates those who are truly alive from those others, be they brothers or friends, who cannot have all that is now the most important to them. Many times, the wound and the scandal of this separation is so painful for them, that they turn

+⁵⁴Jesus said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once: 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. ⁵⁵And when the wind blows from the south, you say: 'It will be hot'; and so it is. ⁵⁶You superficial people! You understand the appearances of the earth and the sky, but you don't understand the present times. ⁵⁷And why do you not judge for yourselves what is fit? ⁵⁸When you go with your accuser before the court, try to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge and the judge deliver you to the jailer, and the jailer throw you in prison. ⁵⁹I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the very last penny."

The fig tree without fruit

13 ¹One day some persons told Jesus what had occurred in the Temple: Pilate had Galileans killed and their blood mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. ²Jesus replied, "Do you think that these Galileans

were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this? ³I tell you: no. But unless you change your ways, you will all perish as they did.

⁴And those eighteen persons in Siloah who were crushed when the tower fell, do you think they were more guilty than all the others in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you: no. But if you won't change your ways, you will all perish as they did."

⁶And Jesus continued with this story, "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it, but found none. ⁷Then he said to the gardener: 'Look here, for three years now I have been looking for figs on this tree and I have found none. Cut it down, why should it use up the ground?' ⁸The gardener replied to him: 'Leave it one more year, so that I may dig around and put in some fertilizer; ⁹and perhaps it will bear fruit from now on. But if it doesn't, you can cut it down."

54. Mt 16, 2

56. 7, 22; 11, 20

58. Mt 5, 25

2. Jn 9, 2

into our persecutors.

The Gospel does not put this world on the road to an earthly paradise, but it challenges it to grow. The death of Jesus brings into full light what was hidden in hearts (Lk 2:35); likewise it reveals the lies and the violence underlying our societies just as they did in the Jewish society of his time.

+ *When you see a cloud.* The signs revealed around Jesus are enough for everyone to understand that now is the time announced by the prophets when people must be converted and Israel must acknowledge its Saviour: tomorrow will be too late (v. 57-59).

When you are going before the court. In Matthew's Gospel this refers to brotherly reconciliation. Here instead, Luke refers this phrase to our conversion. We are on our way to God's judgement and it is the same as going before the authorities; therefore we must take advantage of the time given to us to straighten up our situation. We must not waste this moment when we can be saved from Judgement by believing in Christ's message.

◆ *They told Jesus ...* about an uprising of Galileans in the temple court and the immediate

intervention of the Roman guard stationed at a nearby fortress. They profaned the holy grounds strictly reserved for the Jews and shed blood in the Holy Place.

Those relating the story expect that Jesus will answer in a way expressing his national and religious solidarity over the killing of his compatriots and the offense against God. But, Jesus does not want to focus on these issues: as usual he lets people become more absorbed in human rather than divine causes and he calls their attention to what counts: those Galilean patriots were violent men, just like the Roman soldiers who killed them. Right then, God was calling everyone to a conversion on which their survival depended. There was such a violent atmosphere that there is no way out for the dominated and insignificant Jewish people except through faith: because faith works through the spirit of forgiveness.

GOD'S PUNISHMENT

Suppose we have a neighbour and we think he is a very evil man, then the fields he has sown are burned by frost: we proclaim at once that God has punished him. And if a misfortune comes down on us, we ask: "What sin have I

The healing on a sabbath day

o ¹⁰ Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the sabbath ¹¹ and a sick woman was there. An evil spirit had kept her bent for eighteen years so that she could not straighten up at all. ¹² On seeing her, Jesus called her and said, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." ¹³ Then he laid his hands upon her and immediately she was made straight and praised God.

¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had performed this healing on the sabbath day and he said to the people, "There are six days in which to work; come on those days to be healed and not on the sabbath."

¹⁵ But the Lord replied, "You hypocrites! Everyone of you unties his ox or his donkey on the sabbath and leads it out of the barn to give him water.

¹⁶ And here you have a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound for

eighteen years. Should she not be freed from her bond on the sabbath?"

¹⁷ When Jesus said this, all his opponents felt ashamed. But the people rejoiced at the many wonders that happened through him.

Two parables

(Mt 13:31; Mk 4:30)

■ ¹⁸ Jesus continued speaking, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹ Imagine a man who has taken a mustard seed and planted it in his garden. The seed has grown and become like a small tree, so that the birds of the air shelter in its branches."

²⁰ And Jesus said again, "What is the kingdom of God like? ²¹ Imagine a woman who has taken yeast and hidden it in three measures of flour until it is all leavened."

o ²² Jesus went through towns and villages teaching and making his way

10. 6, 6; 14, 1; Mt 12, 1

16. 19, 9

19. Dn 4, 9

20. Mt 13, 33

committed to be punished like this by the Lord?"

If we speak so readily about God's punishment, it is because of two mistakes we make:

- for one, we think that God's justice resembles men's and we believe we know who deserves to be punished by him.
- then, we totally ignore the other life beyond death and we think that God must punish (or reward) men in this life.

In fact, we have met the Father in his Son, Jesus. Jesus' way teaches us that the justice of God the Father – does not resemble ours. The Father is perfect: *his sun shines on the bad and the good, and his rain falls on the just and on sinners* (Mt 5:45).

Yet, it is true that God warns us through signs although he does not always convert sinners by sending them misfortunes. At times, an unexpected favour confuses us and we say with shame: How God looks after me in spite of my being so stupid! Such was the case of Zaccheus (Lk 19:1). This is how God gives us many warnings so we will look at the way we live and realize that with all our irresponsibility and selfishness, we are on the way to being lost. There is really only one punishment from God and that is to be lost him forever.

Then, why is there so much about God's punishment in the Old Testament? Precisely be-

cause the Bible was addressing people whose religion was not well formed; they did not know about an afterlife and it was necessary to speak of God's punishments in this life for these people to believe in his justice. And God may have multiplied signs of disapproval of sinners in order to strengthen good people.

o The word *untie* was used by the Jews to express that someone's sin or penalty was forgiven. It also meant freeing an animal from its yoke. Jesus is the one who frees the human person and who invites us to follow his example.

We should not be surprised at the indignation of the chief of the synagogue. Since he had never been able to help his sick sister, he must have felt discredited by Jesus' move. Would it not be the same with us? But it never occurred to Jesus to ask the authorities for permission to save people.

■ See commentary on Mt 13:31.

At the conclusion of his Galilean ministry, Jesus invites optimism: although the results are few, something has been sown and the Kingdom of God is growing.

o See commentary on Mt 7:13.

Is it true that few people will be saved? Jesus considered this a useless question. What should have been asked instead was whether



to Jerusalem. ²³Someone asked him, "Lord, is it true that few people will be saved?"

And Jesus answered, ²⁴"Do your best to enter by the narrow door, for many, I say to you, will try to enter and will not be able. ²⁵When once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you will stand outside; then you will knock at the door calling: 'Lord, open to us.'

²⁶Then you will say: We ate and drank with you and you taught in our streets! ²⁷But he will reply: 'I don't know where you come from. Away from me all you wicked people.'

²⁸You will weep and grind your teeth when you see Abraham and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves left outside. ²⁹Yet others will sit at table in the kingdom of God, people coming from east and west, from north and south. ³⁰And it will be true that, 'Those who were last are now first, while the first have become last.'

³¹At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and gave him this warning, "Leave this place and go on your way, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²Jesus said to them, "Go and tell that fox my answer: 'I drive out demons and heal today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my course!' ³³Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and

tomorrow and for a little longer, for it would not be fitting for a prophet to be killed outside Jerusalem.

Alas for you, Jerusalem

■ ³⁴O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you slay the prophets and stone your apostles! How often have I tried to bring together your children as a bird gathers her young under her wings, and you would not! ³⁵From now on *your Temple will be left empty for you* and you will no longer see me until you say: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*"

14 ¹One sabbath Jesus had gone to eat a meal in the house of a leading Pharisee, and he was carefully watched. ²In front of him was a man with swollen arms and legs; ³so Jesus asked the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath or not?" ⁴But no one answered. Jesus then took the man, healed him and sent him away. ⁵And he addressed them, "If your lamb or your ox falls into a well on a sabbath day, who among you doesn't hurry to pull him out?" ⁶And they could not answer.

The first places

+ ⁷Jesus then told a parable to the guests, for he had noticed how they tried to take the places of honour. And

29. 14, 15; 22, 16; Is 25, 6	30. Mt 19, 30; 20, 16; Mk 10, 31	33. 22, 53; Jn 7, 30; 11, 47
34. Mt 23, 37	35. Jer 12, 7; Mt 3, 12; Ezk 8; Ps 118, 26	1. 7, 36; 11, 37
2. 6, 6; 13, 10	3. 13, 15	7. Pro 25, 6

Israel had listened to the call from God and if she was following the narrow road which would save her.

People will come from the east and from the west (v. 29) People from all nations will be converted and come into the church while the Jewish people – for the most part – will remain outside.

■ See commentary on Mt 23:37.

Jesus had not come to "save souls" as many people imagine in our days. Rather, he was opening up new ways for the national commu-

nity as well as for people. If the Jews had listened to him, the social and political tensions which led to the revolt of the year 66 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D., would not have taken place.

+ Here Jesus develops a biblical proverb inviting us to be modest in social gatherings (Prov 25:6-7). In doing this he teaches us a new way of life which is fitting for God's children. Whatever the area of human activity may be, we should let others seek the first place while we stepping on other people as they do so. We know that what matters is not what is seen: God

he said, ⁸"When you are invited to a wedding party, do not choose the best seat. It may happen that someone more important than you has been invited, ⁹and your host, who invited both of you, will come and say to you: 'Please give him your place.' What shame is yours when you go to the lowest seat!

¹⁰Whenever you are called, go rather to the lowest seat, so that your host may come and say to you: 'Friend, you must come up higher.' And this will be a great honour for you in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be made great."

o ¹²Jesus addressed also the man who had invited him and said, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, don't invite your friends, or your brothers and relatives and wealthy neighbours. For, surely, they will also invite you in return and you will be repaid. ¹³When you give a feast, invite instead the poor, the crippled, the

lame and the blind. ¹⁴Fortunate are you then, because they can't repay you; and you will be repaid at the Resurrection of the upright."

A man once gave a feast
(Mt 22:1)

◆ ¹⁵Upon hearing these words, one of those at the table said to Jesus, "Happy are those who eat at the banquet in the kingdom of God!"

¹⁶Jesus replied, "A man once gave a feast and invited many guests. ¹⁷When it was time for the feast he sent his servant to tell those he had invited to come, for everything was ready. ¹⁸But all alike began to make excuses. The first said: 'Please excuse me. I must go and see the piece of land I have just bought.' ¹⁹Another said: 'I am sorry, but I am on my way to try out the five yoke of oxen I have just bought.' ²⁰Still another said, 'How can I come when I have just married?'

²¹The servant returned alone and reported this to his master. Upon hearing the account, the master of the

11. 1, 52; 18, 14; Ezk 21, 31; Mt 23, 12

14. 14, 21; 6, 35

15. Rev 19, 9

has called us to work for the community and for him and he knows how to exalt the humble and place them where it best suits him.

Moreover, when we go from the earthly church to the Kingdom of heaven, there will be changes in who occupies the first places and we will not necessarily come before those among us who do not go to Mass or those whom we usually criticize. Someone who was pope, or bishop or a prominent "Catholic" may count less than the little old lady who was selling newspapers.

o Everyone of us seeks to be near those who are above us since we think we benefit more from being connected with those who are superior than with those who are inferior. We even think it is a part of good education to teach children to stay away from their companions with "bad manners" – or, to be honest, from those companions who will not help them find a better position in society.

Jesus warning points to one of the main causes of injustice. We all share in the guilt when we decide with whom it is more beneficial to be associated; and so everyone tries to climb

higher, always leaving the weakest in the most isolated and helpless position.

It would be a strange sight to see public officials pay more attention to the poorly dressed, or to see the poorest areas supplied with water and power before the residential districts, or to see doctors go to the rural areas to practice.

EXCUSES

◆ In many parts of the Old Testament there was talk of a 'banquet' that God would prepare for good people, for his servants, upon coming to establish his Kingdom. Jesus also developed this theme many times because the banquet represents the communion of saints. The parable here is very similar to the one which Matthew relates in 22:1.

Happy are those who sit at the table in the Kingdom of God. says the man speaking to Jesus. Perhaps the man did not suspect that in order to participate in the eternal feast, it was necessary to respond then to the call from God inviting us to gather in his community, the church, and to build a more fraternal world. The one who turns away from his brothers and sisters today will not eat with others at the banquet.

house flew into a rage and ordered his servant: 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

²² The servant reported after a while: 'Sir, your orders have been carried out, but there is still room.'

²³ The master said: 'Go out to the highways and country lanes and force people to come to make sure my house is full. ²⁴ I tell you, none of those invited will get a taste of my food.'

The cost of following Jesus

(Mt 10:37)

■ ²⁵ One day, when large crowds were walking along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If you come to me, without giving up your love for your father and mother, your spouse and children, your brothers and sisters, and indeed yourself, you cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever

does not follow me carrying his own cross cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ Do you build a house without first sitting down to count the cost to see whether you have enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, if you have laid the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone will make fun of you: ³⁰ He began to build and was not able to finish.

³¹ And when a king wages war against another king, does he go to fight without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand men can stand against the twenty thousand of his opponent? ³² And if not, while the other is still a long way off he sends messengers for talks of peace. ³³ In the same way, none of you may become my disciple if he doesn't give up everything he has.

³⁴ However good the salt may be, if it has lost its taste, you cannot make it salty again. ³⁵ It is fit for neither soil nor manure. Let them throw it away. Listen then, if you have ears!"

21. 10, 21; 14, 13 24. 13, 28 26. 18, 29 27. 9, 23; Mt 10, 28; Jn 12, 26 33. Mt 5, 13; Mk 9, 50

We are given the reasons why those invited did not respond to the call of the Lord when he summoned them to build a responsible world along with him. *I have bought a field, ... I just got married ...* These are all good reasons. Yet, the financial interests of the family must neither prevent our community involvement, nor prevent us from participating in the Christian assembly. Many times, those who enjoy greater cultural formation, allow themselves to be paralyzed by the needs of a "happy home," with well educated children, and they will do nothing. The best Christians, by the mere fact of participating in the life of the church and by being committed, reach a broader culture and they are connected with people of all classes. This is all good. Yet, if we are not very demanding with ourselves, we will lose interest in the Kingdom of God.

Bring the poor ... compel them to come to my church: force them also to fulfill the role fitting to them in society. God relies on the poor and the marginalized to maintain the aspirations toward peace and justice in the world, to awaken the consciences of those "good" people who are too comfortable.

■ Jesus thinks about people who, after becoming enthusiastic about him and giving up

their personal ambitions to dedicate themselves to the work of the Gospel, would turn back to seek a more "normal" and more secure life, according to average people. Jesus needs disciples who commit themselves once and for all and he believes that people can really risk their lives for him.

Why this comparison with *the king going to war*? because the person who frees himself to serve the work of the Gospel, is in fact a king to whom God will give greater rewards than anyone else could give (see Mk 10:30). But he must also know that the fight is against the "owner" of this world, the devil, who will stop him with a thousand unexpected tests and traps. Had he not totally surrendered, the disciple would surely fail and he would be worse off than if he had not even begun.

So long as you don't give up ... Jesus asked some people to give up their loved ones and their family problems. He shows everyone that they will never be free to respond to God's calls if they refuse to think in an entirely new way about family bonds, the use of time and the value, before God, of our family life.

Without turning your back on your Father and your children ... This is found in Mt 10:37. Luke adds: your wife.

The lost sheep

(Mt 18:12)

15 ¹Meanwhile tax collectors and sinners were seeking the company of Jesus, all of them eager to hear what he had to say. ²But the Pharisees and the scribes frowned at this, muttering, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³So Jesus told them this parable,

◆ ⁴"Who among you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, will not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and seek out the lost one till he finds it? ⁵And finding it, will he not joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. ⁶Then he will call his friends and neighbours together and say: 'Rejoice with me for I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷I tell you, just so there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine upright who have no need to repent.

⁸What woman, if she has ten pieces of silver and loses one, will not light a lamp and sweep the house in a thorough search till she finds the lost

piece? ⁹And finding it, will she not call her friends and neighbours and say: 'Rejoice with me for I have found the silver piece I lost.' ¹⁰I tell you, there is rejoicing in the same manner among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.'

The prodigal son

○ ¹¹Jesus continued, "There was a man with two sons. ¹²The younger said to his father: 'Give me my share of the estate.' So the father divided his property between his two sons.

¹³Some days later, the younger son gathered all his belongings and packed up for a distant land where he squandered his wealth in licentious living. ¹⁴Having spent everything, he was hard pressed when a severe famine broke out in that land. ¹⁵So he hired himself out to a well-to-do citizen of that place and he was sent to work on a pig farm. ¹⁶So famished was he that he longed to fill his stomach even with pig's food, but no one offered him anything.

¹⁷Finally coming to his senses, he

1. Mt 9, 10	4. Mt 18, 12	Esk 34, 4	7. 19, 10; 16, 15; 18, 9	15. Dt 14, 8
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THE BLACK SHEEP

◆ Why are the Pharisees complaining? Not out of love for religion but because they feel left out: if Jesus is going with sinners and treating them in the same way, what have they gained with all their observances? But Jesus did not come to give prizes, but to save. The person who loves tries to save his neighbour instead of condemning him.

Happy the one sheep Jesus went after, leaving the ninety-nine! Poor righteous ones who do not need God's forgiveness!

In large cities, today, the church seems to be left with only one sheep. How come it does not get out, namely, let go of its income, its privileges or its devotions of a commercial style, to go out looking for the ninety-nine who got lost? To leave the comfortable circle of believers who have no problems, to look beyond our renewed rituals and to be ready to be criticized just as Jesus was criticized, is the challenge today.

Who lights the lamp, sweeps the house and searches except God himself? But, out of respect for God, the Jews of Jesus' time preferred

not to name him, and they used expressions such as *the angels or heaven*.

ORIGINAL SIN

THE PRODIGAL FATHER

○ There are three characters in this parable: the father, representing God; the older son, the Pharisee. But who is the younger son? Is he the sinner, or perhaps, man?

Man wants freedom and he thinks, many times, that God takes it away from him. He begins by leaving his father, whose love he does not understand and whose presence has become a burden to him. After having wasted this heritage whose value he does not appreciate, he loses his honor and becomes the slave of other men and of shameful actions (pigs were unclean animals to the Jews).

But the son returns. Having become aware of his slavery, he convinces himself that God has a better destiny in mind for him, and he begins on the road back to his home. Upon returning, he discovers that the Father is very different from the idea that he had formed of him: the father is



said: 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against God and before you. ¹⁹ I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me then as one of your hired men.' With that thought in mind he set off for his father's house.

²⁰ He was still a long way off when his father caught sight of him. His father was so deeply moved with compassion that he ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. ²¹ The son said: 'Father, I have sinned against God and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son . . .'

²² But the father turned to his servants: 'Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Take the fattened calf and kill it. We will celebrate and have a feast. ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found.' And the celebration began.

²⁵ Meanwhile, the elder son who had been out working in the fields was now on his way home. As he neared the house he heard the sound of music

and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the servants and asked what it was all about. ²⁷ The servant answered: 'Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father is so happy about it that he has ordered this celebration and killed the fattened calf.'

²⁸ The elder son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ The indignant son said: 'Look, I have slaved for you for all these years. Never have I disobeyed your orders. Yet you have never given me even a young goat to celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ Then when this son of yours returns after squandering your property with loose women, you kill the fattened calf for him.'

³¹ The father said: 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and is found. And for that we had to celebrate and rejoice.'

The crafty steward

+16 ¹At another time Jesus told his disciples, "There was a rich man whose steward was reported

18. Jer 3, 2; Hos 2, 6

20. Is 49, 14; Jer 31, 20

22. Gen 41, 2

waiting for him and runs to meet him; he restores his dignity erasing the memory of the lost heritage. And there is the celebration of the feast to which Jesus referred so many times.

At last we understand that God is Father. He did not put us on earth to collect merits and rewards but to discover that we are his children. However, we are, in fact, born sinners. We are born sinners: from the start of our lives we are led by our feelings and the bad examples of the society in which we have been raised. There is still more: as long as God does not take the initiative and reveal himself to us, we cannot think of freedom other than in terms of becoming independent from him.

God is not surprised by our wickedness since in creating us free, he accepted the risk that we might fall. He does not go along with our distinctions between righteous and sinners, which presupposes that some deserve reward and others punishment. On the contrary, God is with all of us in our experiences of good and of evil.

until he can call us his children, thanks to his only Son, Jesus. Note this marvellous sentence: *I have sinned against God and before you*. God, who is Truth and Holiness, is offended by sin. But he is also the Father who cares for the son: the son sins before him who brings holiness out of error.

Such is our God and Father, the one who brings good out of evil, who creates us day after day, without our being aware of it while we go on our way: the one who seeks sinners whom he can fill with his treasures.

But, the older son, the man who obeys though with a closed heart, understands none of this. He has served with the hope of being rewarded, or at least, the hope of being seen as superior to others: and so he is unable to welcome sinners or to participate in the feast of Christ, because, in fact, he does not know how to love.

+ Jesus is not concerned about condemning the improper actions of the administrator, but



to him for fraudulent service.² He summoned the steward and asked him: 'What is this I hear about you? I want you to render an account of your service for it is about to be terminated.'

³The steward thought to himself: 'What am I to do now? My master will surely dismiss me. I am not strong enough to do hard work, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I will do. I must make sure that when I lose this job, there will be some people to welcome me into their house.'

⁵So he called his master's debtors one by one. He asked the first who came: 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶The reply was: 'A hundred jars of oil.' The steward said: 'Here is your bill. Sit down quickly and write there fifty.' ⁷To the second he put the same question: 'How much do you owe?' The answer was: 'A thousand bushels of wheat.' Then he said: 'Take your bill and write eight hundred.'

⁸The master commended the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the people of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind

than are the people of light.⁹ And so I tell you: use filthy money to make friends for yourselves, so that when it fails, these people may welcome you into the eternal homes.

¹⁰He who can be trusted in little things can also be trusted in great ones; he who is dishonest in slight matters will also be dishonest in greater ones.¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling the questionable money, who could entrust you with true wealth? ¹²And if you have not been trustworthy with things merely exterior to you, who will give you the wealth which is your own?

◆ ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Either he does not like the one and is fond of the other, or he regards one highly and the other with contempt. You cannot give yourself both to God and to Money."

¹⁴The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and sneered at Jesus.¹⁵ He said to them, "You do your best to be considered righteous men by people. But God knows the heart and what is exalted among men is loathed by God.

9. 14, 11, 18, 14

10. 19, 17

12. 12, 15

15. 11, 41; 12, 16

rather he points out his cleverness in terms of assuring his future: this man was able to discover in time that friends last longer than money. In the same way, in promoting a new way of living, the sons of light must strip money of its halo as Supreme Good. It seems that money put in a safe place is the best way to assure our existence and our future. On the contrary, Jesus tells us to use it and to exchange it without hesitation for something much more valuable.

We are not owners but administrators of our wealth and we must administer it for the good of all. Money is not a bad thing as long as we use it as a means to facilitate exchanges. Jesus, however, calls it *unjust* (we use the word *filthy*) because money is not a true good (it is not money that makes us just before God); and because it is impossible to accumulate money without failing in trust in the Father and without hurting our neighbours.

Money is something that people acquire and lose, it does not make anyone greater. Therefore, money is not part of the goods which are our own (12).

THE RICH

◆ The Pharisees were laughing at him. More than the other evangelists, Luke notes the incompatibility between true religion and love for money. The Pharisees could justify their love for money by quoting some sayings from the Bible. In fact, in the beginning, the Jews saw wealth as a blessing from God. Not knowing anything about a beyond, it seemed just to them that God should reward his faithful with good health and money: that is why they had such an exceptional remembrance of King Solomon in spite of the fact that at the end of his life he showed total indifference to religion. Then, with the passing of time, they came to see that money was more of a danger and that, often, it was the privilege of those without faith (Ps 49, Job).

Nevertheless, as soon as someone has money he is convinced that he possesses truth, and thus the Pharisees felt authorized to judge and decide on things of God. After them, there has been no lack of Christians who, belonging to influential circles, planned to extend the King-

■ ¹⁶ The time of the Law and the Prophets has ended with John. Since then the kingdom of God is spreading as good news and this is the time for everyone to conquer it.

¹⁷ It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for a single stroke of Scripture not to be fulfilled.

¹⁸ The man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and the man who marries a woman divorced by her husband also commits adultery.

The rich man and Lazarus

o ¹⁹ Once there was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted every day. ²⁰ At his gate lay Lazarus, a poor man covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to eat just the scraps falling from the rich man's table. Dogs used to come and lick his sores. ²² Finally the poor man died and

angels carried him to take his place with Abraham. The rich man followed shortly and was buried. ²³ From hell where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham afar off] and with him Lazarus at rest.

²⁴ He called out: 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus with the tip of his finger dipped in water to cool my tongue, for I suffer so much in this fire.'

²⁵ Abraham replied: 'My son, remember that in your lifetime you were well-off while the lot of Lazarus was misfortune. Now he is in comfort and you are in agony. ²⁶ But that is not all. Between your place and ours a great chasm has been fixed, so that no one can cross over from here to you, and from your side to us.'

²⁷ The rich man implored once more: 'Then I beg you, father Abraham, to send Lazarus to my father's

16. Mt 11, 12; 13, 24 17. Mt 5, 18 18. Mt 5, 32, 19, 9 19. 6, 24 21. Mt 15, 27 23. 23, 43] dom of God by accumulating money and monopolizing power. Such people favor a moral order which conceals their privileges but they stifle the gospel values of justice, humility and poverty. They manage to put strong pressure on the church, but in the long run, they bring on themselves and on the church, rejection by the poor and by sincere people.

Why have so many people of humble origins felt inferior to the rich in the church? They got used to seeing them heading church organizations and accustomed to receiving the word of God from them, in spite of Jesus' warnings.

THE LAW

■ We are about to read three of Jesus' sayings whose only connection is their reference to the Law. The Law meant the laws that God had given to the Jews. Besides, the Law and the Prophets was a way to refer to the entire Scripture. Jesus uses this expression here to point to Old Testament times, to all that prepared for his own coming.

Not a single comma of the Law will pass: that means that everything in it had its significance despite the fact that Jesus states that the decisive point has come with him, what was needed to prepare for his coming will no longer be observed in the same way as before (see Mt 5:17-20).

For the Jews who observed the Law and in particular for those who had followed John the Baptist, another step was needed for them to be-

lieve in Jesus and with this, to conquer the Kingdom of God (Lk 7:24). In spite of appearances, it is much easier to follow religious practices, to observe laws and to fast, than it is to believe and to risk the unknown, by following the crucified Jesus.

o This parable deals with the worldwide gap between the rich and the inhumanly poor. There is a deadly law of money which makes the rich live separately: housing, transportation, recreation, medical care. The wall the rich man willingly built in this life, becomes, after his death, an abyss which no one will be able to bridge. The one who accepted this separation will find himself on the other side forever.

A poor man named Lazarus: Jesus names the poor man, but not the rich one, thus reversing the order of the present society which treats "Mr X" as a person but not the ordinary worker. We also see that, on dying, Lazarus finds many friends: the angels, Abraham, the father of all believers. The rich man, on the other hand, finds neither friends nor lawyers to relieve his situation: hell is isolation.

Some people would like to know what was the rich man's sin for which he was condemned to hell. Was it because he denied some crumbs from his table to Lazarus? But the Gospel does not say this. Instead it shows that the rich man did not even see Lazarus lying at his door: Remember that you received your riches during your life.

house ²⁸ where my five brothers live. Let him warn them so that they may not end up in this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham replied: 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' ³⁰But the rich man said: 'No, father Abraham. But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹Abraham said: 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the grave.'

17 ¹Jesus said to his disciples, "Scandals will necessarily come and make people fall; but woe to the one who has brought it about. ²It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck. Truly this would be better for him than to cause one of these little ones to stumble and fall.

³Be careful. If your brother offends you, rebuke him and if he is sorry, forgive him. ⁴And if he offends you seven times in a day but says to you seven times: 'I'm sorry,' forgive him."

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, "In-

crease our faith." And the Lord said, ⁶"If you have faith at least as big as a mustard seed, you may say to this tree: 'Be uprooted and plant yourself in the sea', and it will obey you.

⁷If you have a servant coming in from the fields after ploughing or keeping sheep, do you say to him: 'Come at once and sit down at table'? ⁸No, you tell him: 'Prepare my dinner. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink; you can eat and drink afterward'. ⁹Do you thank this servant for doing what you commanded? ¹⁰So you also. When you have done all that you have been told to do, you must say: 'We are no more than servants; we have only done our duty.'

The ten lepers

+ ¹¹On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was passing along the border between Samaria and Galilee and, ¹²as he entered a village, ten lepers came to meet him. ¹³Keeping their distance, they called to him, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." Now, as they went their way,

1. Mt 18, 7 4. Mt 18, 15 6. Mk 4, 31; Mk 11, 23 14. Lev 13, 45

In several countries, the privileged minorities have not only taken over the table to which everyone was entitled: power, the laws and the culture, but they have also organized the country's economy in a way that suits them. They have even destroyed the national industries and job opportunities. Their country's economic dependence enables them to continuously feast, while condemning millions of Lazaruses to unemployment, and consequently, to being progressively marginalized until they die of hunger and destitution.

Modern-day Lazarus is kept at a distance from the residential areas by police, dogs and barbed wires. He would like to get his fill of the crumbs which are left over from the feast, but there are few crumbs 'falling' back to the homeland, after everything is wasted on imported products or deposited in foreign banks. Lazarus lives among rubble and rubbish: he becomes a prostitute, or a pickpocket, until a premature death enables him to find someone who loves him: at the side of Abraham and the angels. And at last, he will

find a home where others will not be able to strip him. watch him, and beat him in the name of their own Security.

Meanwhile, the rich man works hard, not so much to enjoy life as to convince himself that he is right: even the church should justify him. And it is this perversion of his mind that takes him to hell after having inspired in him hatred or contempt for all those who proclaim the demands of justice taught by Moses and the prophets. that is to say, by the Bible.

The Gospel, in its desire to save the rich as well as the poor, asks us to work with a view to removing the abyss which separates them.

+ The ten lepers were cured but only one of them was told: *Your faith has saved you*. He was the one who responded straight from the heart. While the others were concerned about fulfilling the legal requirements, he only thought about giving thanks to God right where the grace of God had found him: such is the faith which saves and transforms us.

Among the many people asking God for heal-



they found they were cured.¹⁵ One of them, as soon as he saw he was cleansed, turned back praising God in a loud voice and, ¹⁶ throwing himself on his face before Jesus, he gave him thanks. This man was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Then Jesus said, "Were not all ten healed? Where are the other nine?"

¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God but this alien?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has saved you."

The coming of the kingdom of God (Mt 24:17)

◆ ²⁰ The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was to come. He answered, "The kingdom of God is not like something you can observe ²¹ and say of it: 'Look, here it is! There it is!' See the kingdom of God is among you."

²² And Jesus said to his disciples, "The time is at hand when you will long to see one of the glorious days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. ²³ Then people will tell you: 'Look there! Look here!' Do not go, do not follow them. ²⁴ For the Son of Man will appear like lightning that flashes from one end of the sky to the other. ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this people.

²⁶ As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be on the day the Son of Man will come. ²⁷ Then people ate and drank; they took husbands and wives. But on the day Noah entered the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ Just as it was in the days of Lot; people ate and drank; they bought and sold, planted and built. ²⁹ But on the day Lot left Sodom, God made fire and sulfur rain down from heaven which destroyed them all. ³⁰ So will it be on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

³¹ On that day, if you are on the rooftop, don't go down into the house to get your belongings, and if you happen to be in the fields, do not turn back. ³² Remember Lot's wife. ³³ Whoever tries to save his life will lose himself, but whoever gives his life will be born again.

³⁴ I tell you, though two men are sharing the same bed, it may be that one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Though two women are grinding corn together, one may be taken and the other left."

³⁷ Then they asked Jesus, "Where will this take place, Lord?" And he answered, "Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather."

19. 7, 50; 8, 48	21. 11, 20; 12, 54	22. Mt 24, 3	23. 21, 8; 19, 11	25. 9, 22
27. Gen 7, 7; 19, 24	32. Gen 19, 17	33. Mt 10, 39; Jn 12, 25	34. 1 Thes 4, 17	

ing and favours, how many will really come to love God?

◆ *When will the kingdom of God come?* It does not come as a revolution or the change of the seasons each year: it is at work in people who have received the Good News. Those who believe already enjoy the Kingdom.

Then come the words of Jesus concerning the end of Jerusalem and his second coming (Mk 13:14). We should speak about the end of the world in every time of anxiety. Jesus gives us two comparisons: the lightning which is seen everywhere and the vultures which gather without fail wherever there is a corpse. In the same way, everyone, without fail, will be aware of Christ's return.

Yet, his return will catch off guard those who

are not expecting it (just as in the days of Noah). Judgement will separate the elect from the condemned – nothing separated them in daily life – : from two people working side by side, one will be taken, the other left behind.

In Matthew 24:17 the reference to the man outside of his house is connected with the end of Jerusalem, and here it means it will be necessary to escape quickly. In the present text this has another meaning: when the end of the world comes it will be too late to worry about saving one's life or possessions.

Where will this take place? (v. 37): foolish question as in Lk 17:20, because the Lord will not come to take his people to a geographic location. On that day, the good will be taken into the presence of God as infallibly as the vultures gather around the corpse.



Pray and never lose heart

18 ¹Jesus told them a parable to show them that they should pray continually and not lose heart. ²He said, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor people. ³In the same town was a widow who kept coming to him, saying: 'Give me my rights against my opponent'. ⁴For a time he refused, but finally he thought: 'Even though I neither fear God nor care about people, ⁵this widow bothers me so much I will see that she gets justice; then she will stop coming and wearing me out.'"

⁶And Jesus explained, "Listen to what the evil judge says: ⁷will God not give justice for his chosen ones who cry to him day and night while he delays in answering them? ⁸I tell you, he will speedily give them justice. Yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The Pharisee and the tax collector

■ ⁹Jesus told another parable to some persons fully convinced of their own righteousness, who looked down on others, ¹⁰"Two men went up to the

Temple to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and said: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people, grasping, crooked, adulterous, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give the tenth of all my income to the Temple.'

¹³In the meantime the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying: 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'

¹⁴I tell you, when this man went down to his house, he was reconciled with God, but not the other. For whoever makes himself out to be great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be made great."

¹⁵They even brought babies to Jesus to have him touch them; but then the disciples rebuked these people. ¹⁶So Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the children come to me and don't stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁷Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."

1. Rom 1, 10; Col 1, 3; 2 Cor 4, 1
Mt 24, 12; 5, 32; 15, 7; Mt 16, 15

7. Ps 43, 23;
14, 14, 11

Rev 6, 9; 2 Pet 3, 9
15, 9, 47; Mk 10, 13

8. Sir 35, 12; 2 Thes 2, 3;
17, 10, 21

○ If there is a just God, why does he not do justice? (Ps 44:23; Hb 1:12; Rv 6:9). Jesus answers: Do you desire and ask with enough faith for the justice of God? He will undoubtedly do justice, but you will have to wait.

A judge who does not regard people: many people seeing what is unjust and absurd in life, view God this way. But, if we pray with perseverance, we will gradually discover that all of this is not as absurd as it seems and we will come to recognize the face of the God who loves us in what happens.

If they cry to him day and night. Jesus, who so insists on our responsibility to the world, is the one who also urges us to call on God day and night. Why are people so readily divided (or why do we divide them) into pray-ers and doers?

Will I find faith on earth? Jesus confirms an opinion already found among the Jews of his days. In the last days before Judgement, the

power of evil will be so great that *in many love will grow cold* (Mt 24:12).

In fact, with the first coming of Jesus, the Old Testament ended in seeming failure, since few believed in him and most became influenced by the confusion, the false saviours and the violence which precipitated the fall of the nation, forty years after the death of Jesus.

■ *The Pharisees* were very determined to fulfill God's law and they fasted often and did many works of mercy. Unfortunately, they took the credit for such a model life: they thought they no longer needed God's mercy because their good deeds forced him to reward them.

The publican, on the other hand, admits to his sinfulness before God and men and he waits for forgiveness. He is in the truth, and God's grace is with him when he returns home (the text says: *he was made righteous*, that is to say that God had reconciled him to himself). But the Pharisee

Jesus and the rich ruler

(Mk 10:17; Mt 19:16)

¹⁸A ruler asked Jesus, "Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: *Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not accuse falsely, honour your father and your mother.*" ²¹And the man said, "I have kept all these commandments from my youth."

²²Then Jesus answered, "There is still one thing you lack. Sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in God. And then come and follow me."

²³When he heard these words, the man became sad for he was very rich.

²⁴Jesus noticing this said, "How hard it is for people who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶The bystanders said, "Who then can be saved?" And ²⁷Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

²⁸Then Peter said, "As for us, we

left everything we had and followed you." ²⁹Jesus replied, "Truly, I tell you, whoever has left house or wife, or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰will receive much more in the present time; and in the world to come he will have eternal life."

³¹Jesus then took the Twelve aside and told them, "Now, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything the Prophets have written about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³²He will be delivered up to the foreign power. People will mock him, insult him and spit on him. ³³After they have scourged him, they will kill him, but he will be raised on the third day."

³⁴The apostles could make nothing of this; the meaning of these words remained a mystery to them and they did not understand what he said.

The blind man of Jericho

(Mk 10:46; Mt 20:23)

³⁵When Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road, begging. ³⁶As he heard the crowd passing by, he inquired what it was, and ³⁷they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was going by. Then he cried!

18. 10, 25; Mr 19, 20	20. Ex 20, 12	27. 1, 37	28. Acts 4, 32	29. Mr 19, 10
	31. 9, 22; 12, 50; 13, 32;	17, 25	35. Mr 9, 27	

leaves just as he had come, locked up in his own self-sufficiency and closed to the grace of God.

Jesus spoke for the benefit of some *who were convinced they were righteous* (v. 9). The Bible calls *righteous* those who are pleasing to God because they do his will. Thus, in Mt 1:19 and Lk 1:6 Joseph and Zechariah are called just: they are good people. In many places in Scripture a great deal of importance is placed on externals: the just one is the one who fulfills the law; elsewhere the Bible singles out the inner faithfulness of the righteous one, who, like Abraham is a friend of God (15:6).

Jesus, for his part, states that no one can attribute righteousness or genuine sanctity to self or to one's merits because God's children receive everything from the Father (Jn 5:19).

We must confess that, a few generations back, Christian morality was often preached according to the Pharisees' approach. What seemed important was for people to behave

decently externally, and they were allowed to believe that they would deserve salvation if they did good works. We did not insist much on the fact that salvation comes from the grace of God: who calls whom he wants and gives them true holiness.

"Good people" often prayed for the conversion of "sinners," forgetting that they needed God's forgiveness too, and that, perhaps, sinners received God's grace in the course of their very sins. The way of condemning a single mother, an adulterous woman: our paternalistic way of speaking of repentant sheep, while forgetting that in the church, we are all equal, are other forms of Pharisaism. When now, "active" and committed militants look down on Christians who, according to them, are satisfied with "eating hosts," and do not do all that they themselves do, or when others think they are the good ones because they have "opted for the poor," we have not left Pharisaism yet.



¹⁴But his compatriots who disliked him sent a delegation after him with this message: 'We do not want this man to be our king.'

¹⁵He returned, however, appointed as king. At once he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made. ¹⁶The first came in and reported: 'Sir, your ten pounds earned ten more.'

¹⁷The master replied: 'Well done, my good servant. Since you have proved yourself capable in a small matter, I can trust you to take charge of ten cities.' ¹⁸The second reported: 'Sir, your investment earned five more pounds'. ¹⁹The master replied: 'All right, take charge of five cities.'

²⁰The third came in and said: 'Sir, here is your money which I hid for safekeeping. ²¹I was afraid of you for you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.'

²²The master replied: 'You worthless servant, I will judge you by your own words. So you knew I was an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow! ²³Why, then, did you not put my money on loan so that when I got back I could have collected it with interest?'

²⁴Then the master said to those standing by: 'Take from him what I have given, and give it to the one with ten pounds.' ²⁵They objected: 'But, sir, he already has ten!'

²⁶I tell you: everyone who has will be given more; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ²⁷As for my enemies who did not want me to be king, bring them in and execute them right here in my presence."

Jesus enters Jerusalem

(Mk 11:1; Mt 21:1; Jn 12:12; Mt 24:2)

²⁸So Jesus spoke, and he went on ahead of them, going to Jerusalem.

²⁹When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, close to the mountain called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples with these instructions, ³⁰"Go to the village opposite and as you enter it you will find a colt tied up that no one has yet ridden on: untie it and bring it here. ³¹And if anyone says to you: 'Why are you untying this colt?'" You shall give this answer: 'The Master needs it.'

³²So the two disciples went and found things just as Jesus had said.

³³As they were untying the colt, the owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴And they answered, "The Master needs it." ³⁵So they brought it to Jesus and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they put Jesus on it. ³⁶And as he went down, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷When Jesus came near Jerusalem, at the place where the road sloped down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the miracles

17. Rom 8, 18; 2 Cor 4, 17

26. 8, 18; Mt 13, 12

27. 19, 43; 21, 20

37. 1 K 1, 33

must make grow. They should not wait in idleness for his return since his enemies will take advantage of his absence to struggle against his influence. Jesus' servants will participate in his triumph to the degree that they have worked.

This page is closely connected with the parable of the talents (Mk 25:15). Two differences are pointed out in what follows.

For one thing, in the introduction and in the conclusion, Jesus refers to his country's political life. The country depended on the Roman Em-

pire and its kings had to be acceptable to the Roman government which protected them.

On the other hand, the parable insists on God's justice: everyone receives according to his merit. Heavenly happiness is not something which can be distributed equally. Everyone will know God and will share his riches to the degree that one has been able to love throughout life. Every step we take by way of obedience, sacrifice and humility, develops our capacity to receive God and to be transformed by him.



they had seen,³⁸ and they cried out, "Blessed is he who comes, as king in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and Glory in the highest heavens."

³⁹Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Master, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out."

⁴¹When Jesus had come in sight of the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, "If only today you knew the ways of peace! But now your eyes are held from seeing." ⁴³Yet days will come upon you when your enemies will surround you with barricades and shut you in and press on you from every side. ⁴⁴And they will dash you to the ground and your children with you, and leave not a stone within you, for you did not recognize the time and the visitation of your God."

⁴⁵Then Jesus entered the Temple area and began to drive out the merchants. ⁴⁶And he said to them, "God says in the Scriptures: *My house shall be a house of prayer*; but you have turned it into a den of robbers."

⁴⁷Jesus was teaching every day in the Temple. The chief priests and teachers of the Law wanted to kill him and the elders of the Jews as well, ⁴⁸but they were unable to do anything, for all the people were listening to him and hanging on his words.

20 ¹One day when Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law came with the elders of the Jews, ²and said to him, "Tell us, what right have you to act like this? Who gives you authority to do the things you do?"

³Jesus said to them, "I also will ask you a question; tell me, ⁴Was John's

ministry and baptism from God, or was it merely something human?" ⁵And they argued among themselves.

"If we answer that the baptism of John was from God, he will say: 'Why then did you not believe him?' ⁶But if we answer that it was merely something human, all the people will stone us, for they all regard John as a prophet." ⁷So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." ⁸and Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you what right I have for acting like this."

The murderous tenants

(Mk 12:1; Mt 21:33)

⁹Jesus went on to tell the people this parable, "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants before going abroad for a long time.

¹⁰In due time he sent a servant to the tenants to get some fruit from the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him back empty-handed." ¹¹Again the man sent another servant; they beat him as well and treated him shamefully and finally sent him away empty-handed. ¹²The owner then sent a third, but this one was wounded and thrown out.

¹³The owner then thought: 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; surely they will respect him.' ¹⁴The tenants, however, as soon as they had seen him, said to one another: 'This is the one who will inherit the vineyard; let us kill him and the property will be ours.' ¹⁵So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ¹⁶Now, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

On hearing this, some of the rulers said, "May it not be so!" ¹⁷Then Jesus looked directly at them and said,

38. Ps 118, 26; 2, 14

40. Acts 2, 11

42. 13, 34

45. Jn 2, 14

46. Is 57, 6; Jer 7, 11

48. 21, 38

1. Mk 11, 27

6. 7, 39

9. Is 5, 2

13. Mr 3, 17

15. Heb 13, 12

"What does this text of the Scriptures mean: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone.* ¹⁸ *Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces and anyone the stone falls on will be crushed?*"

¹⁹ The teachers of the Law and the chief priests would have liked to arrest him that very moment, for they realized that Jesus meant this parable for them, but they were afraid of the crowd. ²⁰ So they left, looking for another opportunity.

Paying taxes to Caesar

(Mk 12:13; Mt 22:15)

They sent spies who pretended to be righteous men, in order to trap him in his words and deliver him to the authority and power of the Roman governor. ²¹ They asked him, "Master, we know that you teach what is right and your answers do not vary according to the people listening to you, for you truly teach the way of God. Tell us: ²² Are we allowed to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

²³ But Jesus saw through their cunning and said, ²⁴ "Show me a silver coin. Whose head is this and whose name?" They answered, "Caesar's". ²⁵ And Jesus said to them "Return to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God what belongs to God."

²⁶ So they were unable to trap him in what he said in public: they were surprised at his answer and kept silent.

Resurrection of the dead

(Mk 12:18)

■ ²⁷ Then some Sadducees arrived. These people claim that there is no resurrection ²⁸ and they asked Jesus, this question, "Master, in the Scripture Moses told us: 'If anyone dies leaving a wife but no children, his brother must take the wife, and the child to be born will be regarded as the child of the dead man.' ²⁹ Now, there were seven brothers; the first married a wife, but he died without children; ³⁰ and the second ³¹ and the third took the wife; in fact all seven died leaving no children. ³² Last of all the woman died. ³³ On the day of the resurrection, to which of them will the woman be wife? For the seven had her as wife."

³⁴ And Jesus replied, "Men and women marry because they are children of this world, ³⁵ but for those who are considered worthy of the world to come and of resurrection from the dead, there is no more marriage. ³⁶ Know that they are like angels and cannot die anymore. They are now sons of God, for he raised them.

³⁷ Yes, the dead will be raised, and even Moses showed it to be true in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*. ³⁸ For he is God of the living and not of the dead, and all live for him."

³⁹ Some teachers of the Law then agreed with Jesus, "Master, you have

17. Is 28, 16; Ps 188, 22; Acts 4, 11

21. Gal 2, 6; Col 3, 25; Eph 6, 9

■ See commentary on Mk 12:8.

Luke has his own expressions in speaking of the resurrection in verses 34-36. It was because in those countries of Greek culture (Luke wrote for them) many people believed in the immortality of the soul as something natural to man. Luke clarified for them that the other life is not something natural; it is a gift of God for those who are considered worthy to enter it.

They are sons of God since he has raised

18. Is 8, 14;

25. Rom 13, 7

Dn 2, 44; Rom 9, 35; 1 Pet 2, 5

28. Dt 25, 5

37. Ex 3, 6

19. 19, 48; Acts 5, 26;

38. Rom 6, 10; Gal 2, 19;

them. According to a Hebrew expression, the text says: they are sons of God because they are sons of the resurrection. This resurrection is not like coming back to the life we know, it is the work of the Holy Spirit who transforms and sanctifies those he resurrects. Therefore they resurrected are sons of God in a much more authentic way than those of this world: delivered from sin, they are reborn of God.

All live for him. They started to become alive



¹⁹ Stand firm and you will save yourselves.

²⁰ But, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you must know that the time has come when she will be reduced to a wasteland.

²¹ Then, if you are in Judea, flee to the mountains; if you are in the city, leave it; and let those who are in the fields not return to the city.

²² For these will be the days of her punishment and all that was announced in the Scripture will be fulfilled. ²³ How hard will it be for pregnant women and for mothers with babies at the breast! For a great calamity will come upon the land, and divine justice upon this people. ²⁴ They will be put to death by the sword or taken as slaves into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled upon by the nations until the time of the nations is fulfilled.

The coming of the Son of Man

²⁵ Then there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anguish of perplexed nations on hearing the roaring of the sea and its waves. ²⁶ People will faint with fear at the mere thought of what is to come upon the world, for the forces of the universe will be shaken. ²⁷ And they

will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

The signs of the times

²⁸ Now, when you see the first events, stand and lift up your heads, for your deliverance is drawing near."

²⁹ And Jesus added this comparison, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees."

³⁰ As soon as their leaves sprout, you know that summer is already near."

³¹ In the same way, as soon as you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² Truly, I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all this has happened: ³³ heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

o ³⁴ Be on your guard; let not your hearts be weighed down with a life of pleasure, drunkenness and worldly cares, lest that day catch you suddenly as a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all the inhabitants of the whole earth."

³⁶ But watch at all times and pray that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

³⁷ In the daytime Jesus used to teach in the Temple; then he would leave the city and pass the night on the mount of Olives. ³⁸ And early in the morning the people would come to the Temple to hear him.

20. Mt 24, 15	24. Rom 11, 25; Zac 12, 3	25. Is 13, 10; Ezk 32, 7; Is 34, 4	27. Dn 7, 13
28. Rom 8, 23	32. Mk 13, 30	35. Rom 13, 13; 1 Thes 5, 3; Is 24, 17	38. Mt 21, 17; In 8, 1

land (v. 23). Luke announces the destruction of the Jewish nation more clearly than Matthew and Mark.

Until the times of the nations are fulfilled (v. 24). Luke divides history into two ages. One corresponds to the Old Testament: that was the time when Sacred History was almost the same as the history of Israel. Then, after Jesus, came the *times of the nations*. The destruction of the Jewish nation and the dispersal of its people inaugurated a new era which would be mostly the history of the evangelization and formation of the nations by the church. We could call that period the times of the New Testament which will end with the great crisis concluding human history.

o *Be on guard.* After speaking about the imminent end of Jerusalem (v. 28-32) Luke speaks of that day which will conclude human history with the coming of Christ, the Judge (v. 34-36).

Be on guard. This invitation is not only addressed to those who will know that day, but it is for everyone, throughout the history of the church.

Watch and pray: from the interior attitude of the Christian, always on guard, we move to all church practice: vigils and prayers which continue while the world is asleep (see Eph 6:18).

That you may be able to stand: Prayer and vigils serve to ask for God's assistance in the great tests preceding the coming of Christ: to avoid errors and deceit (2 Thes 2:9); to remain holy and blameless before God (1 Thes 3:13).



The conspiracy against Jesus

(Mk 14:1; Mt 26:1)

22 ¹The feast of Unleavened Bread which is called the Passover, was now drawing near, ²and the chief priests and the teachers of the Law were looking for a way to kill Jesus, because they were afraid of the people. ³Then Satan entered into Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve, ⁴and he went off to talk with the chief priests and the officers of the guard about how to deliver Jesus to them. ⁵They were delighted and agreed to give him money; ⁶so, he accepted and from that time he was waiting for an opportunity to deliver him without the people knowing.

◆ ⁷Then came the feast of the Unleavened Bread in which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸So Jesus sent Peter and John saying, "Go and get everything ready for us to eat the Passover meal." ⁹They asked him,

"Where do you want us to prepare it?"

¹⁰And he said, "When you enter the city, a man will come to you carrying a jar of water. Follow him to the house he enters and ¹¹say to the owner: 'The master asks: where is the room where I may take the Passover meal with my disciples?'" ¹²He will show you a large, furnished room upstairs, and there you will prepare for us."

¹³Peter and John went off and having found everything just as Jesus had told them, they prepared the Passover meal.

The supper of the Lord

(Mk 14:2; Mt 26:17)

■ ¹⁴When the hour came, Jesus took his place at table and the apostles with him. ¹⁵And he said to them, "I was eager to eat this passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷Then they passed him a cup and

2, 20, 19;

3, 4, 13; Jn 13, 2

4, Acts 4, 1

15, 1 Cor 11, 23; Ex 12, 14

The Our Father expresses the same concern of those who are expecting the coming of the Kingdom: do not put us to the test and deliver us from evil.

In fact, vigils and prayers do not serve only to prevent possible falls. If the believer and the church are more awake, they cooperate more in the development of the divine plan and they hasten the coming of the Lord.

◆ *Where do you want us to prepare it?* This was the first preoccupation of pilgrims to Jerusalem: finding a house where they could eat the sacrificed lamb.

A man will come to you. Usually, the water jar was carried by women, and so it was easy to identify a man with a water jar. Jesus knew that Judas was betraying him and he did not want to indicate the place of the supper ahead of time: he could have been apprehended there. So, he trusted a prophetic intuition: the Father had designated the place for the last supper. It was, in fact, the home of a rich man, a disciple of Jesus in Jerusalem. This may have been the house where the apostles gathered after Jesus' death and where the church started.

■ See commentary on Mk 14:12.

Jesus took his place at table, or rather as the Gospel says "he reclined," as was the custom in banquets among the well-to-do: guests would recline on sofas around the table.

It is very difficult to know whether this last supper of Jesus started with the meal of the passover lamb and concluded with the eucharist, or whether Jesus only celebrated the eucharist, without having shared the passover meal. In any case, the Gospel wants to teach us that the eucharist will be for the church what the passover meal was for the people of Israel.

They passed him a cup. The person presiding at the passover meal would take four cups which he would bless and which the participants would pass around.

I will not drink of the grape of the vine. Jesus recalled that for the Jews, the passover meal was already an anticipated figure of the banquet of the Kingdom of God. On that night, this was taking place for Jesus in a very special way.

This is my body. Is the consecrated bread the symbol of the body of Christ, or is it the body of Christ in fact? There have been great controversies between Catholics and Protestants about this. Catholics understand that the bread is really the body of Christ: Protestants maintain that the bread does not contain the physical presence of the body of Christ and they look upon it as a mere symbol. Both have tried to come to a mutual understanding.

The faith of the church states that the consecrated bread is symbol and reality at the same

when he had given thanks he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves: ¹⁸for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the grape of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹Jesus also took bread and, after giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, (which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰And he did the same with the cup after eating, "This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood which is poured out for you.)

²¹Yet the hand of the traitor is with me on the table. ²²Know that the Son of Man is going off the way he had to go. But alas for that man who delivers him up!" ²³So they began to ask one another which of them could do such a thing.

Last conversation with Jesus (Mk 10:42; Jn 13:1)

+ ²⁴But they also began to argue among themselves which of them should be considered the most im-

portant. ²⁵And Jesus said, "The kings of the pagan nations rule over them as lords, and the most hardhearted rulers claim to be called 'Gracious Lord'. ²⁶But not so with you; let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. ²⁷For, who is the greatest, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? He who is seated. Yet I am among you as the one who serves.

²⁸But you have been with me and stood by me through my troubles; ²⁹because of this, just as the kingship has been given to me by my father, so I give it to you. ³⁰You will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones and govern the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to sift you like grain, ³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have recovered you shall strengthen your brothers." ³³Then Peter said, "Lord, with you I am ready to go even to prison and death." ³⁴But Jesus replied,

20. Jer 31, 31; Ex 24, 8	21. Jn 13, 21	22. 17, 1; Acts 2, 23	24. 9, 46	27. 12, 37; Jn 13, 4
28. Jn 15, 27; Rev 2, 27	30. 1 Cor 6, 2; Rev 20, 4	32. 24, 34; 1 Cor 15, 5; Mr 16, 6	33. Mk 14, 29	

time. The presence of the body of Christ is not symbolic but real, though not a material presence, as if we could say: "Jesus is here on the table." The body of Christ is present, but through the sacramental sign of bread and wine. In communion we receive the body of the 'risen' Christ (it is another reason to think that it is not a material presence, but rather of another type, no less real, but different). His presence to the believer in communion is a mysterious and intimate reality. The main objective of the eucharist is to renew and strengthen the communion (fellowship) between Jesus and those who share in the table of the Lord.

My blood poured out for you. Jesus gives us the meaning of his death: he will be the Servant of Yahweh promised by Isaiah (53:12), who takes upon himself the sins of a multitude. That is why in Matthew and Mark Jesus says: *My blood poured out for a multitude.* This multitude is made up primarily of Christians; that is why we read here *poured out for you*, the same as in 1 Cor 11:24.

The new covenant: see commentary on Mk 14:12.

Do this in remembrance of me. With these

words Jesus institutes the eucharist as the church will celebrate it. *In remembrance of me:* not to remember a dead man. At the Passover the Jews remembered the intervention of God who had delivered them from Egypt; in the eucharist, we remember the intervention of God who saved us through the sacrifice of his Son.

The parenthesis of v. 20-21 includes words which are not in many ancient manuscripts and perhaps do not belong to Luke's gospel.

+ After the narrative of the Last Supper (Mk 14:12), Luke brings out some memories of the conversation during which Jesus took leave of his apostles. In reality, Jesus was alone: the contact between him and his disciples had been broken. It seemed that they had not learned anything in so many months and at the end of the Last Supper, which was the first Eucharist, they only expressed their all-too-human concerns.

The apostles were vying for the first place in the Kingdom: what concept, then, did they still have of the Kingdom? During the supper Jesus had acted as the servant of the house (Jn 13:1).

Jesus does not get discouraged when he sees that the apostles are not in touch with his

"I tell you Peter, the cock will not crow this day before you have three times denied that you know me."

³⁵ Jesus also said to them, "When I sent you without purse or bag or sandals, were you short of anything?" They answered, "No." ³⁶ And Jesus said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it and a bag as well. And if anyone is without a sword, let him sell his cloak to buy one." ³⁷ For Scripture says: *He was numbered among criminals*. These words had to be fulfilled in me, and with this the reading is coming to an end."

³⁸ Then they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords," but he answered, "That is enough."

Gethsemane

(Mk 14:32)

◆ ³⁹ After this Jesus left to go as usual to the Mount of Olives and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he

came to the place, he told them, "Pray that you may not be put to the test."

⁴¹ Then he went a little further, about a stone's throw, and kneeling down he prayed, ⁴² "Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done." ⁴³ And an angel from heaven appeared to give him strength.

⁴⁴ As he was in agony, he prayed even more earnestly and great drops of blood formed like sweat and fell on the ground. ⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer, he went to his disciples but found them worn out by their grief and asleep. ⁴⁶ And he said to them, "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you may not be put to the test."

⁴⁷ Jesus was still speaking when a group of people appeared and the man named Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ and Jesus said to him, "Did you need this kiss to betray the Son of Man?"

35. 10, 4 36. 12, 51 37. Is 53, 12; Acts 8, 32 39. 21, 37 40. 11, 4 43. 1 K 19, 4; Mr 4, 11; Jn 12, 29

thoughts and desires while time is coming to an end for him. He has surrendered his life and his work to the Father: if he has seemingly failed, he knows that after his death his work will rise to new life along with him and so he confirms his promises to his apostles.

You will sit ... How hard it is for us to understand Jesus' faithfulness with his own people. All that is his, he shares with those who have committed themselves to his work. *The twelve tribes of Israel* means the entire people of God. With this, Jesus designates all of us who come from many nations to accept the faith of the apostles.

Peter believes that since he is the head, he will be stronger than the others. Jesus, on the other hand, sees Peter's future mission, and in spite of his fall, he wants to give him a special grace so that he will be able to strengthen the rest. Such is Jesus' way of doing things: he *saves what was lost*, and having seen the incurable weakness of man in Peter, he uses him to give the church a stability to which no other human society can aspire. Indeed, the continuity of the church through the centuries is, in part, due to the popes, Peter's successors.

At the end, Jesus uses some images to indicate that the crisis announced so many times is at hand: the apostles do not really understand and they look for swords.

◆ It appears that Jesus celebrated the Passover in a house at the southwest of the old town of Jerusalem. He went down the stepped street to what had been the stream of Tyropeon, went up the Ophel area, the old city of David, to go down to the Kidron torrent, almost always without water. From there he must have taken a path to go up to the Mount of Olives. It was called that because its western slopes were covered with olive trees. Jesus went to a garden called Gethsemane, or "olive press." This land may have belonged to one of the disciples of Jesus, since he had been there many times (Jn 18:2).

Some of the ancient manuscripts of the Gospel do not have these verses 43 and 44: probably they were taken out because many people were scandalized by this "weakness" of Christ.

He was in agony. Jesus faces a despairing vision of the world's sin imposing itself upon him in the same measure in which the presence of his Holy Father invades him. Should we want to understand something of what took place in those moments, we must learn about the testimonies of the great saints who, in their way, also experienced this extremely difficult test. We are very wrong when we think we understand what Jesus felt before his death on the basis of the psychology of the average man who, before all else, fears for his life. Yet, in the history of the church, we find some people who, through the



⁴⁹As those with Jesus saw what would happen, they said to him, "Master, shall we use the sword?"⁵⁰And one of them struck the High Priest's servant and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹But Jesus stopped him, "No more of this." He touched the man's ear and cured him.

⁵²Then Jesus spoke to those coming against him, the chief priests, officers of the Temple and elders and he said to them, "Did you really set out against a robber? Do you need swords and clubs to arrest me?"⁵³Day after day I was among you teaching in the Temple and you could have arrested me. But this is the hour for the power of darkness; this is your hour."

The trial of Jesus, Peter's denial (Mk 14:53; Mt 26:57)

■ ⁵⁴Then they seized him and took him away, bringing him to the High Priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance.

⁵⁵A fire was kindled in the middle

of the courtyard where people gathered, and Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶A maid-servant noticed him. Gazing at him intently in the light of the fire, she exclaimed, "This man also was with him!" ⁵⁷But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."

⁵⁸A little later someone who saw him said, "You are also one of them!" Peter replied, "Man, I am not!"⁵⁹After about an hour another asserted, "Surely this man was with him, for he is a Galilean."

⁶⁰Again Peter denied, "My friend, I don't know what you are talking about." He had not finished saying this when a cock crowed. ⁶¹The Lord turned around and looked at Peter and he remembered the word that the Lord had spoken, "Before the cock crows today you will have denied me three times." ⁶²Peter went outside, weeping bitterly.

⁶³Meanwhile the guards were mocking and beating Jesus. ⁶⁴They blindfolded him, slapped him and then asked, "Who hit you? Tell us."

53. 19, 47; 21, 37

54. Jn 18, 15

grace of God, came to some form of feeling, suffering, understanding and loving totally different from our experience. Through them, we come a bit closer to what the agony of Jesus was like.

An angel from heaven. At times, the Bible speaks of an angel to mean that God intervened in a mysterious way, by encouraging, teaching or punishing... This *angel* reminds us of the one who came to encourage Elijah (1 Kg 19:4). We must understand that, at that moment, God gave Jesus supernatural help without which his human strength would have failed him.

This symptom is well-known to doctors and it betrays both intense anxiety and suffering. The scientific study of the Shroud of Turin corroborates this Lukan detail.

The hour and the form of Jesus' arrest were suited to evildoers driven by the *Power of darkness*. There are times when all hope and justice have apparently disappeared from the earth.

■ WHY DID THEY KILL HIM ?

Regarding the two trials of Jesus, one religious, the second political, see commentary on Mk 14:53.

Jesus' trial and condemnation to death were not very different from what happens to many

Christian militants and martyrs. The mere fact of preferring relationships with the poor, of educating simple people so they can be free and responsible, does not constitute a crime in any country, and yet, throughout the centuries, it has been sufficient to bring persecutions on a person. We have already mentioned that Jesus preached in extremely difficult circumstances, since his nation was under the law of the Roman occupants and any liberating message smacked of subversion.

Undoubtedly, people had plenty of reasons to hate Jesus. However, the Gospel records that the accusations focused on the key point of his teaching. They condemned Jesus because he claimed to be divine: *the Christ, the Son of God, the one who will sit at the right hand of God*.

The chief priests of the time belonged to wealthy families who fought for the position because they could use the temple money. Annas and his sons (and his son-in-law Caiphas) are known for having acted with utter shamelessness, silencing protests with the sticks of their guards who formed an illegal militia. Here, they appear with the leaders of the Jews, or the Elders, who belong to the richest families.



prophet." ⁶⁵And they hurled many other insulting words at him.

⁶⁶At daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, among which were the chief priests and the scribes, assembled again. Then they had Jesus brought before them, and they began questioning him: ⁶⁷"Tell us, are you the Christ?" Jesus replied, "You will not believe if I tell you. ⁶⁸and neither will you answer if I ask you. ⁶⁹Yet from now on *the Son of Man will have his seat at the right hand of the Mighty God.*"

⁷⁰In chorus they asked, "So you are the Son of God?" And Jesus said to them, "You are right, I am."

⁷¹Then they said, "What need have we of witnesses? We have heard it from his own lips."

Jesus before Pilate

(Mt 27:1; Mk 15:1; Jn 18:28)

+23 ¹The whole council rose and brought Jesus to Pilate.

²They gave their accusation: "We found this man subverting our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming to be Christ the king."

³Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "You said so." ⁴Turning to the chief priests and the crowd, Pilate said, "I find no basis for a case against this man." ⁵But they insisted, "All the country of the Jews is being stirred up with his teaching. He began in Galilee and now he has come all the way here."

⁶When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷Finding the accused to come under Herod's jurisdiction, Pilate sent Jesus over to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸Herod was really delighted to have Jesus before him now, for he had wanted for a long time to see him because of the reports he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see Jesus work some miracle. ⁹He piled up question after question, but got no reply from Jesus.

¹⁰All the while the chief priests and the scribes remained standing there, vehemently pressing their accusations. ¹¹Finally, Herod ridiculed him and with his guards mocked him. And when he had put a rich cloak on him, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹²Pilate and Herod who were enemies before, became friends from that day.

¹³Pilate then called together the chief priests and the elders before all the people, ¹⁴and said to them, "You have brought this man before me and accused him of subversion. In your presence I have examined him and found no basis for your charges. ¹⁵And neither has Herod, for he sent him back to me. It is quite clear that this man has done nothing that deserves a death sentence. ¹⁶I will therefore have him scourged and then release him."

o ¹⁸Howling as one man, they protested: "No! Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us, instead."

68. Jn 10, 24-25 69. Ps 110, 1; Acts 2, 36 2. Acts 17, 7 4. Acts 3, 13; 13, 28 8. 9, 9; Acts 4, 27

+ Pilate does not want to condemn Jesus partly because he hates Jewish priests, and so he sends him to Herod. By putting a white robe on Jesus, Herod treats him as a madman pretending to be a king.

They became friends from that day on, because, in spite of the fact that they were so different, they realized that they belonged to the same class of people with power to play with the life of a man of the people.

o Barabbas may have been one of those terrorists harassing the Roman oppressors. The chief priests who wanted to have peace with the Romans hated these people. Yet, the chief priests were the ones who persuaded the people to ask for the release of Barabbas. Even though they hated those priests, the people listened to them. With that, Pilate's plan - he wanted to release Jesus - failed.

¹⁹ This man had been thrown into prison for an uprising with murder in the city, but, on the Passover Pilate had to release a prisoner.

²⁰ As Pilate wanted to release Jesus, he appealed to the crowd once more, ²¹ but they shouted back, "To the cross with him! To the cross!" ²² A third time Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? Since no crime deserving death has been proved, I shall release him after having him scourged."

²³ But they went on crying out and demanding that Jesus be crucified, and their shouts were growing louder.

²⁴ So Pilate decided to pass the sentence they demanded. ²⁵ He released the man they asked for, the one who was in prison for rebellion and murder, and he delivered Jesus in accordance with their wishes.

The way of Calvary

(Mt 27:32; Mk 15:16)

²⁶ When they led Jesus away, they seized Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the fields, and laid the cross on him, to carry it behind Jesus.

◆ ²⁷ A large crowd of people followed him; among them were women beating their breast and wailing for him, ²⁸ but Jesus turned to them and said, "Women of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, weep rather for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the days are coming when people will say: 'Happy are the women without

child! Happy are those who have not given birth or nursed a child! ³⁰ And they will say to the mountains: *Fall on us! and to the hills: Cover us!* ³¹ For if this is the lot of the green wood, what will happen with the dry?"

³² Along with Jesus, two others who were criminals were led out to be executed. ³³ There at the place called The Skull, he was crucified together with the criminals – one on his right and another on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." And the guards *cast lots to divide his clothes among themselves.*

³⁵ The people stood by watching. As for the rulers, they made fun of him, saying to one another, "Let the man who saved others save himself now, for he is the Messiah, the chosen one of God!"

³⁶ The soldiers also made fun of him and when they drew near to offer him bitter wine, ³⁷ they said, "So you are the king of the Jews? Free yourself!" ³⁸ For above him was an inscription which read, "This is the King of the Jews."

○ ³⁹ One of the criminals hanging with Jesus insulted him, "So you are the Messiah? Save yourself and us as well!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Have you no fear of God? You receive the same sentence as he did. ⁴¹ We deserve the punishment; this is payment for what we have done. But this man has done no evil."

26. 9, 23; 14, 27

27. Zac 12, 10

30. Hos 10, 8

31. Eek 21, 3; Lk 6, 43; Heb 6, 8

34. Acts 3, 17; 7, 60

35. Ps 22, 8; Is 49, 7; Lk 9, 35

36. Ps 69, 22

◆ *What will happen with dry wood?* Jesus had taught that the sacrifice which is accepted, is fruitful: but at that point he mourns the unnecessary sufferings of a people who have let the opportunity pass them by and who will be destroyed through their own fault.

These words are also meant for all those who make the blood of Christ useless for themselves.

A large crowd followed him, especially women ... Luke is the only evangelist recording this

compassionate attitude. Contrary to Matthew who insists on the guilt of the Jewish people, Luke wants to point out that Jesus' condemnation moved many people. Jesus' words recall what he already said about the destruction of the Jewish nation (Mk 13 and 11:26).

○ The leaders of the Jews have put Jesus where he belongs since he decided to take our sins upon himself. The two men look at the one who has come to share their destiny.

Turning to Jesus, ⁴² he said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ Jesus replied, "Truly, you will be with me today in paradise."

⁴⁴ It was now about noon. ⁴⁵ The sun was hidden and darkness came over the whole land until mid-afternoon; and at that time the curtain of the Sanctuary was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus gave a loud cry, "Father, I commit my spirit into your hands." And after he said that, he gave up his spirit.

⁴⁷ The captain saw what had happened, and acknowledged the hand of God. He said, "Surely this was an upright man." ⁴⁸ And all the people who had gathered to watch the spectacle, as soon as they saw what happened went home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ Only the acquaintances of Jesus stood at a distance, and especially the women who had followed him from Galilee; and they witnessed all this.

⁵⁰ Now a member of the Jewish supreme council, a good and righteous

man named Joseph ⁵¹ from the Judean town of Arimathea, did not agree with the decision and action of his fellow members, for he lived uprightly in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God. ⁵² He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³ He then took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid it in a yet unused tomb cut out of a rock.

⁵⁴ It was Preparation Day and the sabbath was approaching. ⁵⁵ So the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph to see the tomb and how his body was being placed. ⁵⁶ And returning home, they prepared perfumes and ointments.

The Lord has risen

(Mk 16:8; Mt 28:1)

24 ¹ On the sabbath the women rested according to the commandment, but the first day of the week, at dawn, they went to the tomb with the perfumes and ointments they had prepared. ² Seeing the stone rolled away from the opening of the tomb,

44. Eek 10, 22

46. Ps 31, 6

'You will be in Paradise. What is paradise? We lack adequate words to express what lies beyond. In Jesus' time, the Jews used to compare the Place of the Dead to a huge country divided up into regions separated by insurmountable barriers. Hell was one of the regions: it was reserved for the wicked, from there no one could come out. Another region was Paradise where the good people would be with the first ancestors of the holy people, awaiting the moment of resurrection.

You will be with me, says Jesus, that is with the Saviour who, for a day and a half, was in the peace and the joy of God, before the resurrection. This statement puts us at ease as to our own destiny at death, although we cannot know what will become of us before the Resurrection. We will not be anesthetized nor will we cease to exist, as some claim, but rather, we will possess everything, being with Jesus who came to share death and his brothers' rest (see Phil 1:23 and Rv 14:13).

■ *The Lord Jesus:* With this expression, not found in the rest of the Gospel but very much in use in the early church, Luke shows us that the Risen Jesus has entered a kind of existence

which is different from that of his mortal life. Let us remember the following:

1) None of the Gospels describe the Resurrection of Jesus: it was an event which could not be seen.

2) The apostles' preaching about the risen Jesus is based on two facts: the empty tomb and the appearances (see commentary on Mt 28:1).

3) Before the Gospels were written, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in the year 57, gave a list of Jesus' appearances (1 Cor 15:3).

4) Although the four Gospels agree as to what is essential, there are, nevertheless, differences as to the order of the appearances and the place where they occurred. Luke does not mention appearances in Galilee. Matthew gives the impression that all that was important took place in Galilee and that the Ascension took place there also. Paul speaks first of an appearance to Peter and he does not mention the appearance to Mary Magdalen. An in-depth study of the texts sheds some light on these discrepancies: they did not want to reveal everything, and at times, they preferred to modify details of the place or the chronology to fit the demands of their book and for the purpose of teaching.



³they entered and were puzzled to find that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there.

⁴Two men in dazzling clothes appeared beside them. ⁵In fright the women bowed to the ground. But the men said, "Why look for the living among the dead? ⁶(You won't find him here. He is risen.) ⁷Remember what he told you in Galilee, that the Son of Man had to be given into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day." ⁸And they recalled Jesus' words.

⁹Returning from the tomb, they informed the Eleven and their companions. ¹⁰Among the women who brought the news were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. ¹¹But however much they insisted, those who heard did not believe the seemingly nonsensical story. ¹²(Then Peter got up and ran to the tomb. All he saw there on bending down were the linen cloths. He went home wondering.)

On the road to Emmaus

(Mk 16:12)

o ¹³That same day, two of them were going to Emmaus, a village seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and

they talked about what had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and wondering, Jesus came up and walked with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were held and they did not recognize him.

¹⁷He asked, "What is this you are talking about?" The two stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one named Cleophas answered, "Why, it seems you are the only one in Jerusalem who doesn't know what has happened! There these past few days." ¹⁹And he asked, "What is it?"

They replied, "It is about Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, you know, mighty in word and deed before God and the people. ²⁰But the chief priests and our rulers sentenced him to death. They handed him over and he was crucified. ²¹Yet we had hoped that he would redeem Israel.

It is now the third day since all this took place. ²²What amazes us greatly is the strange tale some of our women pass around. They went to the tomb early this morning, ²³but didn't find his body. When they came back to us, they had a story about seeing a vision of angels who told them that Jesus was alive. ²⁴Some friends of our group went to the tomb and found everything just as the women said, but him they did not see."

9. 8, 2; Jn 20, 3

5) As for Jesus' Ascension, it was not a "trip" to heaven; he was already "in heaven," in the sense that he shared the glory of God from the moment of his Resurrection. The Ascension is simply the last of his appearances (see commentary on Heb 1:9).

o These two disciples were merely coming home to return to their work after their hopes had been crushed. But we have become used to calling them the *pilgrims* of Emmaus.

The Jewish people, the people of Israel were pilgrim people because they never had the possibility of lingering on the way. The departure from Egypt, the conquest of the Land, the fights against invaders, the development of religious culture were so many stages along the way. Each time they thought that in reaching their goal, their problems would be solved, and each time

they had to realize that the road was taking them further.

Cleophas (v. 18): the husband of Mary, mother of James and Joses (see Jn 19:25 and Mk 15:40).

Cleophas and his companion were pilgrims since they followed Jesus, thinking that *he would redeem Israel*. But, in the end, there was only the death of Jesus. This is the moment when Jesus becomes present and teaches them that one does not enter the Kingdom without passing through death.

They recognized him (v. 16). Perhaps Jesus looked different as we see in John 20:14. This is what Mark says in 16:12. But Luke also wants us to understand that the same people, whose eyes could not recognize Jesus, will see him when they come to believe.

Starting with Moses ... and going through



²⁵He said to them, "How dull you are, how slow of understanding! You fail to believe the message of the prophets. ²⁶Is it not written that the Christ should suffer all this and then enter his glory?" ²⁷Then starting with Moses and going through the prophets, he explained to them everything in Scripture concerning himself.

²⁸As they drew near the village they were heading for, Jesus made as if to go farther. ²⁹But they prevailed upon him, "Stay with us, for night comes quickly. The day is now almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When they were at table, he took the bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave each a piece.

³¹Their eyes opened, they recognized him; but he vanished out of their sight. ³²Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts filled with ardent yearning when he was talking to us on the road and explaining the Scriptures?"

³³They immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were greeted by these words from them, "Yes, it is true, the Lord is risen! He has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then the

two told what had happened on the road and how Jesus made himself known when he broke bread with them.

Jesus appears to the apostles

(Jn 20:19)

+ ³⁶As they went on talking about this, he himself stood in their midst. (And he said to them, "Peace to you".) ³⁷In their panic and fright they thought they were seeing a ghost, ³⁸but he said to them, "Why are you upset and why do such ideas cross your mind? ³⁹Look at my hands and feet and see that it is I myself. Touch me and see for yourselves that a ghost has no flesh and bones as I have." ⁴⁰(As he said this, he showed his hands and feet.)

⁴¹In their joy they didn't dare believe and were still astonished. So he said to them, "Have you anything to eat?" ⁴²and they gave him a piece of broiled fish. ⁴³He took it and ate it before them.

Last instructions

◆ ⁴⁴Then Jesus said to them, "Remember the words I spoke to you when I was still with you: Everything

25. 18, 31; Acts 3, 24

27. 1 Pet 1, 11

34. 1 Cor 15, 5

42. Jn 21, 5

the prophets (v. 27). Remember that "Moses and the prophets" is a way of designating Scripture. Jesus invites them to pass from Israel's faith or hope in a happy future for the whole nation, to faith in his very person, accepting the mystery of his rejection and of his Passion. *The things of Scripture that relate to himself* (v. 27). Jesus not only found all the texts which announced his Passion and Resurrection such as Is 50; Is 52:13; Zec 12:11; Ps 22; Ps 69; but also those texts showing that God's plan censors human history.

Something similar happens now to believers when so often we complain and show our impatience. Yet Jesus did not leave us alone. He has not risen in order to sit in heaven; but he is ahead of humanity on pilgrimage and he draws us toward that final day when he will come to meet us.

But at the same time *he walks with us* and

when our hopes are dashed, that is the moment when we discover the meaning of the Resurrection.

Thus, the church does for us what Jesus did for the two disciples. First, it gives us the 'interpretation of Scripture': what matters in our efforts to understand the Bible is not to know many passages by heart, but to discover the thread connecting various events and to understand God's plan concerning people. In his first biblical lesson, Jesus taught them that the Christ had to suffer.

Then, the church also celebrates the Eucharist. Notice how Luke says: *he took bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it*; these same four words were used among believers to speak of the Eucharist. We can come close to Jesus in conversation and meditating on his word; we find him present in our fraternal meetings, but *he*

written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

And he went on, ⁴⁶"You see what was written: the Messiah had to suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. ⁴⁷Then repentance and forgiveness in his name would be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸Now you shall be witnesses to these things ⁴⁹and this is

why I will send you what my Father promised. So remain in the city until you are invested with power from above."

⁵⁰Jesus led them almost as far as Bethany; then he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹And as he blessed them, he withdrew (and was taken to heaven. They worshipped him). ⁵²They returned to Jerusalem full of joy and ⁵³were continually in the Temple praising God.

49. Acts 1, 8; Acts 1, 4 51. Acts 1, 9

makes himself known in a different way when we share the bread which is his body.

+ Jesus had been reborn to glorious life from the day of his Resurrection. He was already "in the Father's glory," but he wanted to be with his disciples on various occasions in order to convince them that his new condition was not a lesser life, or something ghostly, but rather a superlife.

◆ Jesus uses these encounters to clarify the meaning of his short and bright mission for his apostles. He saves us from sin which means nothing less than reordering history and raising people.

Everything written about me had to be fulfilled. What the prophets had announced about a saviour who would be rejected by his people and take the sin of his people upon himself, had to be fulfilled. What sin? Everyone's sins, of course, but also the violence of the whole Jewish society at the time of Jesus. This was the sin that he took to the cross.

As a matter of fact, this way of death and resurrection was not reserved only for Jesus, but also for his people. In that precise period, Israel, subject to the Roman Empire, had to accept the death of its earthly ambitions: autonomy, national pride, the religious superiority of the Jews over other people ... in order to rise as the people of God scattered among nations and to become the agent of salvation. But Israel did not follow this way and Jesus was hoping that his church would fulfill that role.

Conversion and forgiveness in his name. Christian conversion is not just any change of

life. It means a change in the person at the deepest level upon discovering the extravagant love of God. This is where our renewal begins. But it is not merely a matter of giving up our lies, drunkenness and thefts. Our conversion does not evolve as long as we do not realize all the forces, barriers, customs, the laws which make us irresponsible and violent and thus make us accomplices in this situation, out of selfishness and especially out of cowardice. Therefore the preaching to the nations also means the education of the nations and even of international society. This is something which takes longer than ten or a hundred years.

You shall be witnesses to all this. Jesus calls his apostles to be the official witnesses of his Gospel and the ones who will judge authentic faith.

Stay in the city. The apostles are not to plant missionary work. It is advisable that they dedicate themselves to strengthening brotherly fellowship and the fervour of the community of the disciples as they wait for the time chosen by the Father to give them the power coming from above.

I will send you what my Father promised. Jesus could not affirm his divine authority and the unity of the three divine persons more powerfully.

He withdrew: this was the last of Jesus' appearances to the group of disciples.

And so concludes Luke's first book. His second book, The Acts of the Apostles, follows the Gospels and it begins precisely where this Gospel ends.



INTRODUCTION

The first three Gospels presented the works and words of Jesus which were most appropriate for the foundation of the Church's basic catechesis. John's Gospel, on the other hand, has a more definite goal: "This has been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God..." (In 20:31).

All in the Church professed faith in Jesus, Son of God, how did they understand these words? Jesus' resurrection had manifested the divine aspect of his person; one could ask since when was Jesus the Son of God and to what extent did he participate in the divine existence?

John's Gospel clearly affirmed for the first time, Jesus' existence in God himself from all eternity. This clarity regarding Jesus' origin also made clearer the vastness of his work. Jesus, being the eternal Son of God made man, did not come solely to teach us to be better or more religious, but to transform creation and to make of us true sons and daughters of God.

This Gospel records only seven miracles of Jesus (seven is a symbolic number). But it sees in these miracles the announcement of the work that the Son of God will realize throughout history. When Jesus is shown discussing something with the unbelieving Jews, it is not difficult to see that John makes reference to certain weaknesses of faith in the early Christians. In the long discourse that the evangelist puts in the mouth of the Lord, he reveals his own understanding of Jesus' words as this developed with the passage of time.

This Gospel emphasis on Jesus' divinity could diminish interest in his concrete life among people. From the beginning, some Christians used John's Gospel to justify a false concept of Jesus and his redemption, as forgetting that he really died on the cross. Possibly, John's first letter written to present the Gospel, refers to these persons.

It is certain that the evangelist composed, rearranged and completed these writings over a long period of time. When he died at a ripe age in about 95 (C.E.), his disciples published this work. This laborious process explains why there are repetitions and in many places apparent disorder, in what is nevertheless a carefully planned composition.

The Word made man

o 1

¹In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
and the Word was God;

²he was in the beginning with God.

³All things were made through him
and without him nothing came to be.

⁴Whatever has come to be, found life in him,
life which for man was also light.

⁵Light that shines in the dark:
light that darkness could not overcome.

⁶A man came, sent by God;
his name was John.

⁷He came to bear witness,
as a witness to introduce the Light
so that all might believe through him.

⁸He was not the Light
but a witness to introduce the Light.

⁹For the Light was coming into the world,
the true Light that enlightens every man.

¹⁰He was already in the world
and through him the world was made,
the very world that did not know him.

¹¹He came to his own,
yet his own people did not receive him;

1. Gen 1, 1; 1 Jn 1, 1; Rev 19, 13; Phil 2, 6; Col 1, 16
4. 1 Cor 8, 6; 1 Jn 2, 8

5. 1 Thes 5, 4

2. Heb 1, 2

9. 3, 19; 8, 12; 12, 46

3. Wis 9, 1; Pro 8, 22

o The Gospel does not speak solely of God, nor of God's covenant with peoples; rather, it first points to an exceptional relationship of the Father with his only Son: Jesus is *the* Son who has come from God. Immediately, some doubts occur to us:

1) There is no middle ground between Creator and creature. Is the Son then God with the Father; or is he the first and most eminent of all creatures?

2) In God there can be nothing that is not God. Is the Son just as eternal and just as much God as the Father is?

3) If God is only One, how can we understand that the Father and the Son are in Him?

In this *Prologue* or *Introduction* to the Gospel, John wants to clarify the mystery.

In the beginning. Gen. 1:1 spoke to us of the beginnings of time and the universe. Everything came from God in the beginning; but for God, time does not pass. God was and is and will always be in the beginning. If we want to understand why God created the world, we should know that for God, this beginning does not pass away. God was like the irrepressible and eternal force of Love. Therefore, God manifested his

immense generosity and generated his Son, of Himself and in Himself.

The Word was with God. God is the Father inasmuch as he engenders his Son. In Him he projects and contemplates his own riches: how could one recognize his own face without a mirror in which to look at himself? The Son (or Word) reflects the Father, the Son in no way inferior to the Father.

John speaks to us of the *Word* of God. This term can be translated: the Word, or the Thought, or still better: the *Expression* of God: and this is his Son.

The Son is the splendor (Heb 1:1) and the image (Col 1:15) of the Father. The Son is not part of the Father, nor is the Son another God, since he has nothing of his own, but all that the Father has is his (Jn 16:15). For this reason he is also God together with the Father.

All things were made through him. God creates the universe *through* and *for* the Word, discovering in him the innumerable creatures, worlds and spirits – including all those who, together with him, will be made sons of God (Eph 1:3-5). Everyone of us is God's thought made real; each of us has been fashioned and

¹²but all who have received him
he empowers to become children of God
for they believe in his Name.

¹³This birth is without seed
or carnal desire or will of man:
they are born of God.

¹⁴And the Word was made flesh
and dwelt among us;
and we have seen his Glory,
the Glory of the only Son
coming from the Father:
fullness of loving-kindness and faithfulness.

¹⁵John bore witness to him openly, saying:
This is the one who comes after me
but he is already ahead of me
for he was before me.

¹⁶From his fullness we have all received,
favour upon favour.

¹⁷For God had given us the Law through Moses,
but Loving-kindness and Faithfulness
came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸No one has ever seen God,
but the only Son made him known:
the one who is in and with the Father.

10. 14, 17; 17, 25	12. Gal 3, 26; 1 Jn 5, 13	13. 3, 5; James 1, 18; 1 Jn 5, 18
14. Rom 1, 3; Gal 4, 4; 1 Tim 3, 16; Heb 2, 14; 1 Jn 4, 2; Rev 21, 3; Ex 25, 8; Dt 4, 7; Bar 4, 1; Ex 37, 27; Ex 34, 6; Ps 89, 2; Hos 2, 21	15. 1, 27; Mt 3, 11	16. 3, 34; Col 2, 9
Rom 6, 14; Jn 7, 19; 10, 4	18. 5, 37; 6, 46; Ex 33, 20; 1 Tim 1, 17; 6, 16; 1 Jn 4, 12; Mt 11, 27	17. Ex 31, 18;

blessed by God "in" the perfect model of all – the Word.

Whatever has come to be, finds life in him. It is of the nature of life to grow, by its inner forces, until it reaches maturity. This growth seems natural to us in a son (in whichever son). Such a growth is fitting to the Son: not to the Father. There are two aspects in the Son: on the one hand, like the Father he is God and does not suffer pain or diminishment. But on the other hand, the Son is in an attitude of offering. He surrenders himself, so that the Father may exalt and glorify him anew.

For this reason, the Son of God came into our world not only to save us, but also to dispossess himself of his glory and become as nothing until his Father would glorify him (Phil 2:5-11). Likewise, all of creation which was made through him, is governed by the same law of life, death and resurrection.

A man came, sent by God. In the two stanzas 6-8 and 15, John, the author of the Gospel, speaks to us of John the Baptist, Jesus' precursor.

Before Jesus was born, the Word of God was the light that guided humankind. He is the

wisdom of God (Prov 8:22-24 and Wis 7:22-30) that *enlightens every man*, even those far from the faith. This light never failed, even among those who did not know God; he was in the consciousness of the righteous of all races and times.

But in Jesus, *the light came* to humankind in a new way. He came unto his own, to his own house, that is, to the people of Israel.

The Word was made flesh. John uses the word *flesh* to underline the utter humility of God, who, despite being spirit, became a creature with a mortal body. John says: *was made*, and not: "took the appearance" of man, because the Son of God was truly made man.

He dwelt among us. John says precisely: "He pitched his tent among us." With that, he alludes to the sacred tent that served as the Hebrews' sanctuary in the desert: in that tent, God was present beside them (Ex 33:7-11). In reality, Jesus, the Son of God made man, is the true Temple of God among people (Jn 2:21), a temple as humble and apparently fragile as the tent in the desert was: nevertheless, in him is the fullness of God. The apostles saw his glory at certain moments of his mortal life (Jn 2:11 and



FIRST PART: JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH SIGNS

John the Baptist presents Jesus, the Lamb of God

+ ¹⁹ This was the testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ John recognized the truth and did not deny it. He said, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ And they asked him, "Then, who are you? Elijah?" He answered, "I am not." They said, "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

²² Then they said to him, "Tell us who you are, so that we can give some answer to those who sent us. How do you see yourself?" ²³ And John said, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "I am the voice crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord."

²⁴ These persons had been sent by the Pharisees; ²⁵ so they put a further question to John: "Then, why are you

baptizing if you are not the Messiah or Elijah, or the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered, "I baptize you with water but among you stands one whom you do not know; ²⁷ although he comes after me, I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal."

²⁸ This happened in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. ³⁰ It is he of whom I said: A man comes after me who is already ahead of me, for he was before me. ³¹ I myself did not know him but I came baptizing to prepare for him, so that he might be revealed in Israel."

³² And John also gave this testimony, "I saw the Spirit coming down on

19. Lk 3, 3	20. 3, 28; Acts 13, 25; Mt 11, 14;	17, 10	21. Dt 18, 14; Mal 3, 25
23. Is 40, 3	25. Mt 16, 19; Mk 11, 30	27. Acts 13, 25	29. 1 Cor 5, 7; 1 Pet 1, 18; 2, 24
30. Zac 3, 9; Rev 5, 6; Mt 8, 17	32. Is 11, 2;	61, 1	33. Mt 3, 16

Lk 9:32). They saw his glory in his Passion and Resurrection.

How does the Word come to save us? John does not speak only of Jesus rescuing us from the abyss of sin; he prefers to speak of Jesus allowing us to attain a situation which was totally unexpected and beyond our reach: *he made them children of God*. We are made children of God by the very Son of the Father, provided that we believe in his Name, that is in his divine personality.

In him was the fullness of Love and Faithfulness. Love (or Grace) and Faithfulness are God's two main qualities (Ex 34:6-7). These words are repeated like a refrain throughout Psalm 89. John, then, means that he has recognized the fullness of Jesus' divinity (Col 2:9).

God has given us the Law. While recounting the sins of Israel, the biblical story foretold the time in which there would be no need for a Law engraved in stones or written in books (Jer 31:31). Some day, God would change the sinners' hearts (Ez 36:26) so that relationships of mutual Love and Faithfulness between him and humankind would begin (Hos 2:21-22). John affirms that the promised time of Love and Faithfulness (of perfect religion) arrived through Jesus Christ.

+ THE LAMB

The authorities asked among themselves: "Who is this who on his own initiative has begun to preach?" At that time, various Jewish groups "baptized", or bathed, as a means of purification and to hasten the coming of the Messiah.

Regarding John the Baptist's preaching and baptism, see Lk 3:10.

The *Messiah* is the name the Jews gave to the expected Saviour. They also expected their *Prophet*, but it was not clear whether or not the *Prophet* would be someone other than the *Messiah*. It was believed that the prophet Elijah would reappear before Jesus' arrival (Mk 9:11).

There is the Lamb. In the language of the Jews, the word "Lamb" can mean both servant and lamb. Jesus is the Servant of God announced by the prophets, who was to sacrifice himself for his brothers and sisters. He is also the true Lamb that replaces the Paschal Lamb (Mk 14:18).

A man comes after me. In history, Jesus appears after John, but being the Word of God, he existed before all creatures. He also goes ahead of all, that is to say, all – including John the Baptist – are guided by his light.



him like a dove from heaven and resting on him.³³ I myself did not know him but God who sent me to baptize told me: 'You will see the Spirit coming down and resting on the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ Yes, I have seen! and I declare that this is the Chosen One of God."

Jesus meets the first disciples

■³⁵ On the following day John was standing there again with two of his disciples.³⁶ As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and said, "There is the Lamb of God."³⁷ On hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus.³⁸ He turned and saw them following, and he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They answered, "Rabbi (which means *Master*), where are you staying?"³⁹ Jesus said, "Come and see." So they went and saw where he stayed and spent the rest of that day with him. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, the brother of Simon

Peter, was one of the two who heard what John had said and followed Jesus.⁴¹ Early the next morning he found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means *the Christ*),⁴² and he brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John, but you shall be called Cephas" (which means *Rock*).

⁴³ The next day, Jesus decided to set off for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter.⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found the one that Moses wrote about in the Law, and the prophets as well: he is Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

⁴⁶ Nathanael replied, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said of him, "Here comes an Israelite, a true one; there is nothing false in him."⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him,

34. Lk 4:2, 2

40. Lk 5:1

42. 21:15; Mk 16:16; Gal 2:11

45. 7:41; Dt 18:18

■ DISCOVERING JESUS

This Gospel is the work of John the Evangelist who should not be confused with John the Baptist. John the Evangelist was one of the first two disciples to follow Jesus (v. 39).

John, concerned about helping us understand the profound meaning of Jesus' actions, dwells on details that we would not immediately pay attention to. For example, the Bible begins with the poem describing Creation as happening in seven days, and because of the Creation account, the evangelist describes the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as happening within a week (seven being a symbolic number) (vv. 29; 35; 43).

On the first day John the Baptist affirmed: there is one among you whom you do not know. We see how, during the week, John the Baptist was the first to discover Jesus. Then later, John, Andrew and Simon also discovered him. The last day of the first week will be at the wedding in Cana, where Jesus will let them discover his glory.

What are you looking for? John did not forget these first words Jesus spoke to them. We want to know who Jesus is, but he asks us what

our inner dispositions are: because we will gain nothing through finding him unless we are disposed to submit ourselves to him.

These two disciples began to live with Jesus. With time, they would discover that he is *the Teacher, the Messiah, the Son of God*. So, too, with us. We progress in this knowledge of Jesus Christ as we go on our journey through life.

John the Baptist was without jealousy; he had encouraged his disciples to follow Jesus, and later, these first two brought the others. Likewise, we come to Jesus because of another person who spoke to us of him, or involved us in an apostolic task.

These two disciples recognized Jesus. It would be more exact to say that Jesus recognized those whom the Father had entrusted to him. Thus he recognized Nathanael when he was *under the fig tree*. Among the Jews, this expression referred to a teacher of the Law engaged in teaching religion, since ordinarily they taught under the shade of a tree. Thus, too, Jesus recognized Simon whom the Father chose to be the first Rock of the Church (Mt 16:13).

You will see the heavens opened. See Gen 28:12.

"How do you know me?" And Jesus said to him, "Before Philip called you, you were under the fig tree and I saw you."

⁴⁹ Nathanael answered, "Master, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ But Jesus replied, "You believe because I said: 'I saw you under the fig tree.' But you will see greater things than that."

⁵¹ Truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

The wedding at Cana

2 ¹ Three days later there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus was also invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When all the wine provided for the celebration had been served and they had run out of wine,

the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ Jesus replied, "Woman, your thoughts are not mine! My hour has not yet come."

⁵ However his mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby were six stone water jars meant for the ritual washing as practised by the Jews; each jar could hold twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then Jesus said, "Now draw some out and take it to the steward." So they did.

⁹ The steward tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing from where it had come; for only the servants who had drawn the water knew. So, he immediately called the bridegroom ¹⁰ to tell him, "Everyone serves the best wine first and when people have drunk enough, he serves

51. Gen 28, 10; Lk 3, 21; Mt 4, 11

3. 19, 26

5. Gen 41, 55

6. Mk 7, 3

◆ THE SIGNS OF JESUS

The Week of Discovery ends with the wedding at Cana. Indeed, Jesus was at the wedding and he brought his disciples to join in the singing and dancing and drinking. His presence and participation sanctified not only marriage but also festive celebrations and togetherness.

The disciples began to know Jesus, but someone else already understood and believed in him: Mary, his mother. How did it ever occur to her to ask him for a miracle? And did she know that Jesus would perform miracles? Mary did not ask for the conversion of sinners, or for bread for the hungry; rather, what she wanted was a miracle or something like it to free the groom from embarrassment.

Jesus answered her with a phrase which, directed to a stranger, would be a reproach, but said in a different tone to his mother, demonstrates a familiarity and a mutual understanding that goes beyond words. Apparently, Jesus had no thought of beginning his mission in that manner or at that moment, but his spirit recognized the Spirit speaking through his mother, and he granted this first *miraculous sign*.

It is worth noting that John relates only seven miracles of Jesus, and sometimes he calls them *works*, sometimes *signs*. They are works of the Son of God in which he manifests his power. They are signs, that is to say, visible things

adapted to us by which he enables us to understand his true work – that of bringing to life and renewing the world.

This is why John mentions some details of this event which were the figures of spiritual realities. Jesus participated in a *wedding*, and what was he trying to do, but to prepare for other weddings – of God with humanity? Jesus speaks of his hour that had not yet come, but in reality, his true hour will be that of his Passion and Resurrection.

John adds that Jesus made use of the water which the Jews set aside to purify themselves. The Jews were obsessed with avoiding "defilement", so their religion multiplied the *rites of purification*. But Jesus, by changing the blessed water into wine, signified that true religion should not be confused with the fear of sin: what is important is to receive from Jesus the Spirit which, like a heady wine, will make us break from established norms and the narrowness of our own knowledge or learning.

The water changed into wine: Jesus comes into our house to sanctify our daily life – its routine and its chores.

It was thus Jesus *manifested his glory* to those who were beginning to discover him. Mary had brought grace to John the Baptist (Lk 1:39); again she intervenes to hasten the beginnings of the Gospel. No more will she speak in the Gospel, and her last words are: *Do whatever he tells you*.

that which is ordinary. You instead have kept the best wine until the end."

¹¹This miraculous sign was the first, and Jesus performed it at Cana in Galilee. In this way he let his Glory appear and his disciples believed in him.

o ¹²After this, Jesus went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers and his disciples; and they stayed there for a few days.

Jesus clears the temple

+ ¹³As the Passover of the Jews was at hand, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the Temple court he found merchants selling oxen, sheep and doves, and money-changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the Temple court, together with the oxen and sheep. He knocked over the tables of the money-changers, scattering the coins. ¹⁶and ordered the people selling doves, "Take all this away and stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

¹⁷ His disciples recalled the words of Scripture: *Zeal for your House devours me as a fire.*

¹⁸The Jews then questioned Jesus, "Where are the miraculous signs which give you the right to do this?"

¹⁹And Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

²⁰The Jews then replied, "The building of this temple has already taken forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?"

²¹Actually, Jesus was referring to the temple of his body. ²²Only when he had risen from the dead did his disciples remember these words; then they believed both the Scripture and the words Jesus had spoken.

²³Jesus stayed in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival and many believed in his Name when they saw the miraculous signs he performed. ²⁴But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all of them. ²⁵He didn't need any evidence about anyone for he himself knew what there is in man.

11. 4, 54; 12, 37; 21, 14	1. 15; 11, 40; 12, 41	13. 2, 23	14. 6, 4; 11, 55; Mk 11, 15
16. Zac 14, 21; Lk 2, 49	17. Ps 69, 10	18. 6, 30; 20, 29	19. Lk 11, 29
20. Mk 14, 58; 15, 29; Acts 6, 14	21. 1 Cor 6, 19; Jn 12, 16	23. 4, 45; 7, 31; 11, 47	

In those first days after John's baptism, Jesus was still sharing with the group of his relatives and townmates whom the gospel calls "his brothers": see commentary on Mk 3:31.

o With the wedding at Cana, the first section of the Gospel we called the Week of Discovery ends. Another section begins in which Jesus defines himself in relation to the Jewish world and their hopes. John presents four scenes:

- *Jesus in the Temple*: The priests are materialistic, and Jesus judges them severely.
- *Jesus and Nicodemus*: Nicodemus expresses the concerns of the learned and believing Jewish society.
- *the Samaritan Woman*: This is the dialogue of Jesus with the townspeople who are believers in their own way.
- *Jesus heals the son of an official*: Jesus points out that the majority of those who come to him, seek him because of his miracles.

+ Jesus has not yet begun his preaching. He goes to the Temple of Jerusalem which is like the

heart of the Jewish nation and the symbol of their religion (Mk 11:12). But the Temple is also the place where corruption and lust for power have taken hold. In the Temple the people have to avail of the priests' services to offer their sacrifices. The priests' authority and power are derived from the Temple. The Temple is the place where the community's offerings and gifts are brought; and there the chief priests dispose of this treasure. Besides this, they also receive the taxes that the seller and money changers pay.

Zeal for your house devours me as a fire, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me: This is taken from Psalm 69. Actually, the hatred of the chief priests for Jesus will bring him to his death.

The apostles could not understand these words: for at that time nothing was more sacred to them than the Temple and the Scriptures. But later, they would know that the most ordinary word of Jesus has as much weight as the whole Scriptures. They would also understand that *Jesus is the true Temple*. Until then, people con-



Jesus and Nicodemus

3 Among the Pharisees there was a ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus.² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God to teach us, for no one can perform miraculous signs like yours unless God is with him."

³ Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again from above."

⁴ Nicodemus said, "How can there be rebirth for a grown man? Who could go back to his mother's womb and be born again?" ⁵ Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you: Unless one is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.⁷ Because of this, don't be surprised when I say: 'You must be born again from above.'

⁸ The wind blows where it pleases and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus asked again, "How can this be?" ¹⁰ And Jesus answered, "You are a teacher in Israel, and yet you don't know these things!

◆ ¹¹ Truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we tell about the things we have seen, but you don't accept our testimony. ¹² If you don't believe when I tell you earthly things,

2, 7, 46; 12, 42; 19, 39

3, Mt 18, 3; 1 Pet 1, 23

4, 1 Jn 5, 1; James 1, 17

6, Ezk 36, 25; Rom 6, 4; Eph 5, 26; Tit 3, 5

7, 1 Pet 1, 3; 2 Pet 1, 11

8, 6, 63; Gen 6, 3

12, 3, 22; 12, 49; 1 Cor 2, 14; Wis 9, 16

structed temples and looked for places where they could meet God and obtain his favours. Now, God has made himself present in Jesus: it is he who delivers God's riches to us.

■ A NEW BIRTH

Nicodemus was a religious person, concerned about knowing God and his ways, and he went to Jesus as to a teacher of religion. However, what he needed was not so much to receive instruction as to bring about a change within himself. That, too, is what we need. We must recognize our powerlessness – by ourselves, unaided – to pass through the barriers which block us from an authentic life. Like Nicodemus, despite all our accumulated experience and knowledge (or because of them) we are old people.

Jesus says we have to be born again and born from above. Nobody gives birth to himself, and, just as we received our life in the flesh from others, so too, we receive the life of the Son of God from the Spirit.

All say they live: something moves in them, thoughts come to them, and they make decisions . . . Yet, this might be nothing more than the life of the flesh, or life of an unawakened person.

The other life, that of the Spirit, is more mysterious because it takes place in the innermost depths of our being. We see the external appearance; we notice a person's face and behaviour, but we do not see God's working in him. However, the awakened believer who is habitually led by the Spirit gradually discovers changes in what

motivates his actions and his ambitions. He feels at ease with God and without fear. He experiences that it is not so much he himself who orients his life, as another who lives in him. Yet, he would not, in fact, be able to say exactly what happens within him.

Hence, Jesus compares the action of the Spirit with the passing of the wind which we feel, although we do not see or hold it. Let us also take note that in Jesus' language the word "breath" means "spirit" as much as "wind".

We have to be reborn of water and of the Spirit: this points to baptism. Let us not think that, merely by receiving the waters of baptism, one is fully established in the life of the Spirit; rather, let us realize that, normally, one is baptized in order to begin in the life of the Spirit: the words of the Gospel refer to adults converted to the Christian faith. The case of infant baptism is different. Baptism works within them. Yet, they should receive instructions about faith to lead them to personal conversion.

Like many in Israel, Nicodemus was a religious person and a believer. Then, why did he come by night? Possibly, he did not want to risk his position and reputation, or mix with the common people around Jesus. This would not be the attitude of those who have been born again: these have been liberated from many things that paralyze others. Such persons meet Jesus with great desire and joy in a Church of the poor.

◆ JESUS REVEALS THE PLAN OF GOD

John's Gospel is different from the other



what then, when I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ Yet no one has ever gone up to heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man.

¹⁴ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world; instead, through him the world is to be saved. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him will not be condemned. He who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the Name of the only Son of God.

¹⁹ This is how the Judgement is made: Light has come into the world and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

²⁰ For whoever does wrong hates the light and doesn't come to the light for fear that his deeds will be shown as evil. ²¹ But whoever lives according to the truth comes into the light so that it can be clearly seen that his works have been done in God."

John the Baptist's last testimony

o ²² After this, Jesus went into the territory of Judea with his disciples. He stayed there with them and baptized. ²³ John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim where water was plentiful; people came to him and

13. Dt 30, 12; Eph 4, 9	14. Num 21, 8	15. 8, 28; 12, 32	16. 18, 32; Gen 22, 16; Rom 5, 8;
8, 32; Mt 21, 37	17. 1 Jn 4, 9; 12, 47; 5, 22;	2 Cor 5, 19	19. 1, 5; 8, 12
Eph 5, 13	21. 1 Thes 5, 4	24. Mt 14, 3	20. 12, 48;

three. Often, after relating some words of Jesus, John adds an explanation of the faith, which he supports with declarations that Jesus had made on other occasions. That is what happens here.

How can this be? Nicodemus asked. To enter into the life of the Spirit, we need to know God's plan for us. Yet, no one can speak properly of such things except the Son of God. He has seen *heavenly things*, that is, the intimate life of God; he also speaks of *earthly things*, that is of the Kingdom that God brings to us. Many of Jesus' listeners will not accept what he says about the Reign of God: much less, will they pay attention to what he reveals about the mystery of God. Jesus reveals to us that which by ourselves we are unable to know. Thus, a Christian is not one who merely "believes in God"; we are Christians because we believe the *testimony* of Jesus (11) regarding God and his plan of salvation.

In this plan, there was something very difficult to accept: that the Son of Man would have to die on the cross and resurrect (*be lifted on high* means as much one as the other). Jesus reminds them of *the serpent in the desert*. This episode in the Bible (Numbers 21) pre-figured what would happen to Jesus. Of course, the Jews had not grasped the meaning of this message: in fact, they passed over all the predictions of the sufferings of their saviour without understanding them.

They had to change their ideas about something else, also. The Jews had been praying for God to come and expected him to condemn the world and to punish the bad. He, on the other hand, sent his own Son to the cross to *save the world*.

Other verses of the New Testament say that we should not love the world; this seems to contradict what we have just read: *God so loved the world*. The reason for this contradiction is that the word *world* has several meanings.

First, *the world* means all of creation, which is good since it is God's work. But the center of this divine work is man, who has come under the influence of Satan (8:34 & 44). Everything that the sinful man creates – riches, culture, social life – is influenced, disfigured and used for evil. Hence, *God sent His Son to save the world*.

And yet, even though Christ's resurrection initiated his invincible power over history, a strong current of evil continues, dragging along all who refuse to acknowledge the truth. This bad current is sometimes called *the world*. However, it would be more appropriate to say: the people who submit themselves to the Master of the world. The Scripture points to them in saying: *Don't love the world, or You are not of the world*.

o The Gospel admits that many disciples of John the Baptist did not recognize Jesus. They had been drawn by their teacher's example: he was intense and outspoken, hard on himself in food, drink and clothing. Somehow they had the hope, maybe because of John the Baptist's manner, that God's true justice would come and bring about a direct punishment of the wicked. Like militant followers of whatever good cause, John's disciples had this weakness: they were too focused on their own leaders and ways to consider anything else. To become Christ's dis-

were baptized.²⁴ (This happened before John was put in prison.)

²⁵ Now John's disciples had been questioned by a Jew about spiritual cleansing,²⁶ so they came to him and said, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, and about whom you spoke favourably, is now baptizing and all are going to him."

²⁷ John answered, "No one can take on anything if it has not been given him from heaven.²⁸ You yourselves are my witnesses that I said: 'I am not the Christ but I have been sent before him.'²⁹ Only the bridegroom has the bride; but the friend of the bridegroom stands by and listens, and rejoices to hear the bridegroom's voice. My joy is now full.³⁰ It is necessary that he increase but that I decrease.

³¹ He who comes from above is above all; he who comes from the earth belongs to the earth and his words, too, are earthly. The One who comes from heaven³² speaks of the things he has seen and heard; he bears witness to this but no one accepts his testimony.³³ Yet whoever receives his testimony, acknowledges the

truthfulness of God;³⁴ for God sent him and he speaks God's words and God gives him the Spirit without measure.

³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything into his hands.³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son lives with eternal life, but he who will not believe in the Son will never know life and always faces the justice of God."

Jesus and the Samaritan woman

+ 4 ¹ The Pharisees heard that Jesus was attracting and baptizing more disciples than John,² although Jesus himself did not baptize; but only his disciples.³ When Jesus became aware of what was being said, he left Judea and returned to Galilee.⁴ He had to cross Samaria.

⁵ He came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well is there. Tired from his journey, Jesus sat down by the well; it was about noon.⁷ Now a Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸ His

26. Lk 7, 18

27. 1 Cor 4, 7; Heb 5, 4

32.

3, 11

33. 7, 28; 1 Jn 5, 10

35. Mt 28, 18

36. Mt 3, 7; Rom 2, 8; Eph 2, 3

2. 1 Col 1, 17

4. Lk 9, 52

5. Gen 48, 22

ciples, they would have to give up their own prophets.

It is necessary that he increase but that I decrease, says the greatest of the prophets. Only Jesus comes from On High, and can fully satisfy the human heart. In him nothing of the good is lost, since he embodies all.

Always faces the justice of God (36). Those who do not recognize the Son of God remain in the situation humanity was in when expelled from Paradise. They cannot solve the contradictions in their life or in the world in which they live; and they cannot but mistrust God. To them is hidden the merciful Face who could give them peace.

+ RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

The Jews hated the Samaritans. Besides this, talking with any woman in a public place was looked upon with disapproval in Jewish culture at that time. Jesus, overcoming racial and social prejudices, began to talk with a Samaritan woman. In the person of this woman, he met the

common people of Palestine. The woman was from a different province and belonged to a rival cult, but both shared the same promises of God and both were waiting for a Saviour.

The first concern of the woman was to quench her thirst. The ancestors of the Jewish people walked with their flocks from one water source to another. The most famous Jews (like Jacob) had dug wells, and around these wells the desert began to live. This fact was like a parable: people are looking everywhere for something to quench their thirst; but, they are condemned to find nothing but stagnant waters. Those who make tanks to preserve water find that these become cracked (see Gen 26). Jesus brings the *living water*, which is God's gift to us, his children: the gift of the *Holy Spirit* (7:37).

When there is water in the desert, although it does not surface, it is noticeable because of the more verdant vegetation. The same happens with us when we truly live: our actions better, our decisions more free, our thoughts more directed towards the essential. But the living water from

disciples had just gone into town to buy some food.

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink?" (For Jews, in fact, have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus replied, "If you only knew the Gift of God! If you knew who it is that asks you for a drink, you yourself would have asked me and I would have given you living water."

¹¹The woman answered, "Sir, you have no bucket and this well is deep; where is your living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well after he drank from it himself, together with his sons and his cattle?"

¹³Jesus said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will be thirsty again; ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never be thirsty; for the water that I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵The woman said to him, "Give

me this water, that I may never be thirsty and never have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said, "Go, call your husband and come back here."

¹⁷The woman answered, "I have no husband." And Jesus replied, "You are right to say: 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. What you said is true."

¹⁹The woman then said to him, "I see you are a prophet; tell me this: ²⁰Our fathers used to come to this mountain to worship God; but you Jews, do you not claim that Jerusalem is the only place to worship God?"

²¹Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you shall worship the Father, but that will not be on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship without knowledge, while we Jews worship with knowledge, for salvation comes from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming and is even now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;

10. 7, 37; Rev 21, 6; 22, 17

12. 6, 31; 8, 53

13. Jer 2, 13; Is 58, 11

15. 6, 34

20. Dt 11, 29; 12, 5

22. Is 2, 3; Rom 9, 4

which all these fruits flow is not seen: this is eternal life, against which death can do nothing.

The second concern of the woman was to know: Where is truth to be found? Jesus tells her: *You have had five husbands . . .* This symbolizes the common destiny of the townspeople who have served many masters of "husbands" and in the end, do not have anyone whom they recognize as their Lord. And to begin with, what is the true religion?

The Samaritans had their Bible, somewhat different from that of the Jews and, in the town itself, a few kilometers from the Well of Sichar, was their Temple, which rivalled that of Jerusalem. Jesus maintains that the Jewish religion is the true one: *Salvation comes from the Jews*. In this he does not share the position of those who say: "It matters little what Church we belong to, since it is the same for all." Nevertheless, although one has the good fortune of following the true religion, he has to reach to the spiritual knowledge of God (23). The Spirit, whom we receive, helps us worship God according to the truth. The Father seeks such worshippers who enter into intimate personal contact with Him.

Spirit and truth (24). God does not need our

prayers, but looks for simplicity, beauty and nobility in our spirit. The Spirit of God cannot be communicated except to those who seek the truth and live according to truth in a world of deception.

In the final analysis, the Samaritan woman's account is a parable of our own lives. Each one of us is the Samaritan woman. What happened at the well of Jacob describes our own encounter with Jesus: the ways by which Jesus led the woman to recognize and love him are the ways by which Jesus, step-by-step, accomplishes our own conversion. In the end, the woman became Jesus' disciple, and through this very experience, she also became Jesus' apostle: "Many in that town believed in Jesus because of the woman" (v. 39). This Jesus experience is the source of the apostolate. To evangelize is to share this experience with others.

Four more months . . . (35) like the harvest, the people who follow Jesus are also maturing. *People who reap the harvest are paid for their work*: Jesus and his own are aware that they do not work in vain. *Others have worked*: Jesus refers to those who came before him, and, especially to John the Baptist.



for that is the kind of worship the Father wants. ²⁴God is spirit and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth."

²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah, that is the Christ, is coming; when he comes, he will tell us everything." ²⁶And Jesus said, "I who am talking to you, I am he."

²⁷At this point the disciples returned and were surprised that Jesus was speaking with a woman; however, no one said, "What do you want?" or: "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸So the woman left her water jar and ran to the town. There she said to the people, ²⁹"Come and see a man who told me everything I did! Could he not be the Christ?" ³⁰So they left the town and went to meet him.

³¹In the meantime the disciples urged Jesus, "Master, eat." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." ³³And the disciples wondered, "Has anyone brought him food?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to carry out his work."

³⁵You say that in four more months it will be the harvest; now, I say to you, raise your eyes and see the fields white and ready for harvesting. ³⁶People who reap the harvest are paid for their work, and the fruit is gathered for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

³⁷See the saying holds true: 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸I sent you

to reap where you didn't work or suffer; others have worked and you are now sharing in their labours."

³⁹In that town many Samaritans believed in him when they heard the woman who declared, "He told me everything I did." ⁴⁰So, when they came to him, they asked him to stay with them and Jesus stayed there two days. ⁴¹After that many more believed because of his own words ⁴²and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you told us; for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is the Saviour of the world."

⁴³When the two days were over, Jesus left for Galilee. ⁴⁴Jesus himself said that no prophet is recognized in his own country. ⁴⁵Yet the Galileans welcomed him when he arrived, because of all the things he had done in Jerusalem during the Festival and which they had seen. For they, too, had gone to the feast.

Jesus cures the son of an official

■ ⁴⁶Jesus went back to Cana of Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. At Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill, ⁴⁷and when he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and asked him to come and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

⁴⁸Jesus said, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe!" ⁴⁹The official said, "Sir, come down

24. 2 Cor 3, 17; Rom 12, 1; Phil 3, 3

36. Ps 126, 5

16, 1; 1 Cor 1, 22

4:28. "Went running." This detail was removed later from John's gospel for people thought it was not suitable referring to a man.

34. 6, 38; 17, 4

40. Lk 9, 52; Mt 8, 34

35. 19, 30; Lk 10, 2; Rev 14, 15

44. Lk 4, 24

49. Mt 12, 38;

■ See Luke 7:1.

Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. Jesus' reproach is directed, not to the official who will later show such great faith, but to the Jews and to us. While Jesus works miracles which confirm his mission, he also stresses that we should recognize him with only seeing and hearing him. Do lovers demand

miracles in order to trust one another? Do those who follow some leaders demand absolute proofs? If we are children of truth, we ought to recognize it when it is presented to us.

Jesus' second miracle in Cana concludes this second part of the Gospel in which Jesus defines himself in relation to Jewish society and its hopes.



before my child dies." ⁵⁰ And Jesus replied, "Go, your son is living."

The man had faith in the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way.

⁵¹ He was already going down the hilly road when his servants met him with this news, "Your son has recovered!" ⁵² So he asked them at what hour the child had begun to recover and they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday in the afternoon about one o'clock." ⁵³ And the father realized that it was the time when Jesus told him, "Your son is living." And he became a believer, he and all his family.

⁵⁴ Jesus performed this second miraculous sign when he returned from Judea to Galilee.

The paralytic at the pool of Bethzatha

5 ¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now, by the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem, there is a pool (called Bethzatha in Hebrew) surrounded by five galleries. ³ In these galleries lay a

multitude of sick people – blind, lame and paralyzed – ⁴ waiting for the water to move. For at times an angel of the Lord would have a swim into the pool and stir up the water; and the first person to enter after this movement of the water would be healed of whatever disease he had.

⁵ There was a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶ Jesus saw him and since he knew how long this man had been lying there, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" ⁷ And the sick man answered, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; so while I am still on the way, another steps down before me."

⁸ Jesus then said to him, "Rise, take up your mat and walk." ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his mat and walked.

Now that day happened to be the sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had just been healed, "It is the sabbath and the Law doesn't allow you to carry your mat." ¹¹ He answered them, "The one who healed me said to

50. Mk 7, 29

53. Acts 11, 14

2. 9, 7

9. Mk 2, 11; Lk 13, 14

10. Jer 17, 21

5.4. Many manuscript omit vv. 4 & 5.

Now begins a new section: Jesus proclaims the work for which he has come into this world. His Father has sent him to judge and to give life. But we must first believe in the Messenger of God. This is treated in Chapters 5 and 6.

◆ Why did Jesus go to the Pool of Bethzatha? It has been proved that the said pool was a pagan place dedicated to Aesculapius, the god of health. Rumors were flying that from time to time the sick were healed there. The pious Jews, scandalized that healings should occur in a pagan place, maintained that people were healed not by Aesculapius but by an angel of the Lord. Unscrupulous Jews went there to seek a cure even from pagan idols. Jesus, too, went there, but in search of the sinner he wished to save.

Note the sick man's first response. In this miraculous place, many hoped for a cure but few were healed. By himself alone – *I have no one* – man cannot be saved. He needs a Saviour. He needs Jesus.

Jesus disappears after the miracle. Some people might have said that he was at ease in a pagan temple, or think he healed the sick in the

name of their gods. Jesus will make himself known in the Temple of the true God, his Father.

The Jews attacked Jesus because he "worked" on the sabbath day. Let us examine Jesus' reply more closely: *My Father goes on working*. It is well that people observe a day of rest to pay homage to God; yet, God himself does not rest, nor is he absent from the world: he gives life to people. Being God-the-Son, Jesus should imitate God the Father instead of resting like people do. His enemies, on hearing him, were not mistaken about his claims: they wanted to kill him because he made himself *equal with God* (v. 18).

Don't sin again... Jesus reminds the sick man of his lack of faith that led him to the pagan sanctuary where he waited in vain for 38 years, just as in former times the Israelites had remained secluded 38 years in the oasis of Kadesh in the desert, without being able to enter the Promised Land. John noted this coincidence. He also understood that the cure in the pool represented baptism. Jesus' remark to the healed person is addressed to those who have been converted and baptized: *Don't sin again*.

me: Take up your mat and walk."¹² They asked him, "Who is the one who said to you: Take up your mat and walk?"¹³ But the sick man had no idea who it was who had cured him, for Jesus had slipped away among the crowd that filled the place.

¹⁴ Afterwards Jesus found him in the Temple court and told him, "Now you are well; don't sin again lest something worse happen to you."¹⁵ And the man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶ So the Jews persecuted Jesus because he performed healings like this on the sabbath.

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "My Father goes on working and so do I." ¹⁸ And the Jews wished all the harder to kill him, for Jesus not only broke the sabbath observance, but also made himself equal with God, calling him his own Father.

The work of the Son is to revive the dead

o ¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "Truly, I assure you, the Son cannot do anything by himself, but only what he sees the Father does. And whatever he does, the Son also does. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does; and he will show him even greater things than these, so that you will be amazed.

²¹ As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whom he wills. ²² In the same way the Father judges no one, for he has entrusted to the Son all judgement, ²³ and he wants all to honour the Son as they honour the Father. Whoever ignores the Son, ignores as well the Father who sent him.

²⁴ Truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; and there is no

14. Mt 9, 2

16. Mk 2, 27

17. 9, 4; Mk 3, 4

18. Lk 6, 5; 10, 33; 11, 53

20. 3, 35; 10, 17; 14, 12; 15, 9; 17, 23

21. 1 S 2, 6

22. Rom 4, 17; Eph 2, 5; Jn 11, 25

23. 3, 17; Acts 10, 42; Phil 2, 10; Lk 10, 16; 1 Jn 2, 23

After this account the Christian faith is presented again (see commentary on John 3:11).

It should be mentioned that in these "discourses" John the Evangelist likes to repeat key words of the discourses seven times. Here, for example, we find the word *sabbath*, *Jesus*, and *Moses* seven times each; and the *Father* 14 times. So we must understand that John wants to oppose the Jewish religion instituted by Moses whose major precept was the rest on the Sabbath, and that of the new times which Jesus came to inaugurate wherein he enables us to know the Father.

o THE SON AND THE FATHER. THE RESURRECTION

Jesus' opponents were surprised to see how he violated the law of the sacred rest: this, however, was only the *first intervention of Jesus* (7:21). Jesus intends to do much more than just reform the religion: he has come to renew the whole of creation.

The books of the Old Testament spoke of God as only one. But now Jesus shows us a new face of God: He is Father and he has sent his Son to complete his work. In all that he does, God endeavors to give us life, and the greatest of his works is the *Resurrection*.

"To resurrect" does not mean "to return to life" but to begin a new and transformed life. The dead will rise again, of course, but we can

also speak of the resurrection in the lives of those who become believers. A word of Jesus accepted in faith gives us life and later takes root in us and transforms us. Together, the Father and Son raise us to new life. God's love, which engenders life, reaches us through the voice of Christ (v. 25).

Jesus, then is not a man like us. Though human, he is also divine and reveals to us another face of God. Jesus wants to erase from our minds any image of God as a jealous or paternalistic God. The Gospel shows the Father giving all his authority to a man, to Christ. This resonates with modern psychology which teaches that a person is not fully adult until he liberates himself from parental authority. Our contemporary world rightly rejects a paternalistic God.

On numerous occasions, Jesus called himself *the Son of Man* (See the explanation in Mk 8:27). But here John says a *son of man* (v. 27): and that is a Jewish idiom which means a *human being*. By being human, Jesus saves humanity from within.

When Jesus claims to be the Son, he repeats these two affirmations in various ways:

- everything that my Father does, I do: all that the Father has, I have.
 - and: I cannot do anything by myself.
- In this way, Jesus is a model for the children

judgement for him because he has passed from death to life.

²⁵ Truly, the hour is coming and has indeed come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and, on hearing it, will live. ²⁶ For the Father has life in himself and he has given to the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has empowered him as well to carry out Judgement, for he is a son of man.

²⁸ Do not be surprised at this: the hour is coming when all those lying in tombs will hear my voice ²⁹ and come out; those who have done good shall rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

+ ³⁰ I can do nothing of myself, and I need to hear Another One to judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

³¹ If I bore witness to myself, my testimony would be worthless. ³² But

Another One is bearing witness to me and I know that his testimony of me is true. ³³ John also bore witness to the truth when you sent messengers to him, ³⁴ but I do not seek such human testimony; I recall this for you, so that you may be saved.

³⁵ John was a burning and shining lamp and, for a while, you were willing to enjoy his light. ³⁶ But I have greater evidence than that of John – the works which the Father entrusted to me to carry out. The very works I do prove that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ Thus he who bears witness to me is the Father who sent me. You have never heard his voice and have never seen his likeness; ³⁸ then, as long as you do not believe his messenger, his word is not in you.

³⁹ You search in the Scriptures and you think that in them you will find life; yet it is to me that Scripture refers. ⁴⁰ But you refuse to come to me,

25. 3, 11; 8, 51; 10, 27; 11, 25	26. Mk 5, 41; Lk 7, 14	27. Dn 7, 10
28. Rev 20, 13; 1 Thes 4, 16	31. 8, 13	33. 3, 26
36. 1 Jn 5, 9; Jn 2, 11; 10, 25	37. Mt 3, 17; Dn 4, 12	34. 10, 25; 15, 26; Mt 11, 7
		39. Acts 13, 27

of God. We also should commune with the Father so that he may teach us his works: there is no Christian life without prayer, that is, without a personal relationship with God.

+ THE TESTIMONY

To gain a direction in life, we need some understanding of the world and humankind. This understanding may come through reason and science, but more often we are influenced and guided by the testimony of others – by their words, attitudes and personal qualities.

It is thus that those in love discover one another, friends accept each other, a career is decided upon, a religious or political commitment is made. It is also thus that the Word of God is discovered. Therefore, Jesus speaks of the testimonies that accredit him:

- his works, that is, his miracles.
- John the Baptist's testimony in pointing him out as the Saviour.
- the words of the Bible that refer to him.

Some people say that since the Bible is the word of God they do not need anything more than that to guide them. But as God spoke through events and through prophets, he continues speaking to us through actual events and through spokespersons of the Spirit in the

Church. Jesus rebuked those who believed they possessed the truth just by having the Bible, but did not believe in him whom God had sent them (38).

God instructs us in his way when we listen to what others teach us: in daily life and within the Church we meet certain persons living according to the Spirit whereas others only pretend to be religious and upright persons.

But, how do we distinguish between what is true and what is false? How do we recognize those who speak of God's ways from personal experience? Jesus says that those who love the truth recognize those who speak the truth. Everyone values the testimony of an equal. To recognize the messengers of God, we must be the people who do not look for praise from one another, and thus are not enslaved by false values. Whoever seeks the truth and mercy, will recognize a communication of the *Glory of God* in the words and actions of God's more humble servants.

It pleases God when we recognize his witnesses. He desires everyone to honour the Son just as his Father does. By believing in his Son, we show ourselves worthy of his trust and thus we become God's children, being open to his life.



that you may live. ⁴¹I am not seeking the praise of men; ⁴²but I have known that love of God is not within you. ⁴³Even though I have come in my Father's name, you do not accept me; but if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴As long as you seek praise from one another instead of seeking the Glory coming from the only God, how can you believe?

⁴⁵Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father. Moses himself in whom you placed your hope, accuses you. ⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?

[o7] ¹⁹Moses gave you the Law, didn't he? But none of you keep the Law. Why, then, do you want to kill me?"

²⁰The people replied, "You have a demon; who wants to kill you?"

²¹Jesus said to them, "I performed a single deed, and you are all astounded by it. ²²But remember the circumcision ordered by Moses – actually it was not Moses but the ancestors who began this practice. You circumcise a man even on the sabbath, ²³and you would break the Law if you refused to do so because of the sabbath. How is it, then, that you are indignant with me because I healed the whole person on the sabbath? ²⁴Do not judge by appearances, but according to what is right."

The multiplication of the loaves
(Mk 6:34; Mt 14:13; Lk 9:10)

[#6] ¹After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, near Tiberias, ²and large crowds

followed him because of the miraculous signs they saw when he healed the sick. ³So he went up into the hills and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

⁵Then lifting up his eyes, Jesus saw the crowds that were coming to him and said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread so that these people may eat?" ⁶He said this to test Philip, for he himself knew what he was to do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Two hundred silver coins would not buy enough bread for each of them to have a piece."

⁸Then one of the disciples spoke to Jesus. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?"

¹⁰Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was plenty of grass there so the people, about five thousand men, sat down to rest. ¹¹Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them to those who were seated. He did the same with the fish and gave them as much as they wanted. ¹²And when they had eaten enough, he told his disciples, "Gather up the pieces left over, that nothing may be lost."

¹³So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with bread, that is with pieces of the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

¹⁴When the people saw this sign that Jesus had just given, they said, "This is really the Prophet, he who is to come into the world." ¹⁵Jesus realized that they would come and take

43. 12, 43; 1 Jn 2, 15	44. 1 Cor 4, 5	45. Dt 31, 26	46. Lk 24, 27	19. Rom 2, 17
20. 8, 48; 10, 20	22. Gen 17, 10; Rom 4, 11	23. Lk 13, 15; 14, 5	24. 8, 15	
2. Mk 6, 32	5. Mt 5, 1	9. 21, 9	14. Dt 18, 15	15. 18, 36; Mt 4, 11; Mk 6, 45; Mk 1, 35

o At the end of Chapter 5 we have placed the passage 7:19-24, which concludes the discourses but which, for some

unknown reason, was placed after Chapter 6.

■ See Mk 6:30.



him by force to make him king; so he fled to the hills by himself.

¹⁶When evening came, the disciples went down to the shore. ¹⁷After a while they got into a boat to make for Capernaum on the other side of the sea for it was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸But the sea was getting rough because a strong wind was blowing.

¹⁹They had rowed about three or four miles, when they saw Jesus walking on the sea, and he was drawing near to the boat. They were frightened, ²⁰but he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

²¹They wanted to take him into the boat, but immediately the boat was at the shore to which they were going.

◆ ²²Next day the people who had stayed on the other side realized that only one boat had been there and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples; rather, the disciples had gone away alone. ²³Bigger boats from Tiberias came near the place where all these people had eaten the bread. ²⁴So,

when they saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Master, when did you come here?"

²⁶Jesus answered, "Truly, I say to you, you look for me, not because of the signs you have seen, but because you ate bread and were satisfied. ²⁷Work then, not for perishable food, but for the lasting food which gives eternal life. This is the food that the Son of Man gives to you, for the Father's seal has been put on him."

**The bread of life;
to believe in the Son of God**

o ²⁸Then the Jews asked him, "What shall we do? What are the works that God wants us to do?"

²⁹And Jesus answered them, "The work God wants is this: that you believe in the One whom God has sent."

³⁰They then said, "Show us miraculous signs, that we may see and

17. Mk 6, 45

19. Mt 14, 27

27. Is 55, 2; Jn 4, 14

30. Lk 1, 29

6:15. Many manuscript put "withdrew" instead of "fled." Jesus.

This word did not seem to them suitable, referring to

◆ In the following pages John expands Jesus pronouncements in the synagogue of Capernaum. Surely Jesus himself did not develop so fully at that time the doctrine on the Eucharist (vv. 48-58). However, there is no doubt that Jesus expressed himself in a manner which scandalized his hearers. And, what did he say but precisely to affirm that we must go to him for he is the true bread from whom we receive eternal life?

Man strives for his food, and his first pre-occupation is to assure himself for the future, because if he does not eat, he will cease to live. Man does not have life in himself and has to constantly take from another what is necessary to maintain his life. But, in spite of everything, some day, life escapes him, because he has not encountered the *lasting food* (27).

In fact, man needs much more than bread: beyond eating and drinking, he seeks something that permits him no longer to experience hunger or thirst. We will find this on the day of the Resurrection, in the assembly of all the Saints, in Heaven, where there will be total and perfect peace and unity. That is precisely what the Work of the Son of Man is.

The discourse begins with a question from the Jews: Which are the works that God wants us to do? Jesus replies: The Work that God wants is that you believe. The Father does not demand "works" that is, the observance of a religious law, but rather, faith. In the previous chapter, Jesus declared that his work is to raise people up. Here he indicates our work: to believe in the Messenger of the Father.

The key word of the discourse is *bread*. That is why John repeats it seven times in each section of this chapter. And the expression *who has come down from heaven* appears seven times in the chapter.

o Here begins the first part of the discourse: Jesus becomes our bread when we believe in him.

In the past, when the Israelites wandered in the desert and lacked everything, God gave them a provisional meal, the *manna*. They had to give thanks to him for his gifts. But, if God is only our benefactor and we go to him seeking favours, we will end up concerned only about what God gives us; we will hardly thank him, and later, we will ask and complain again.

believe you. What sign do you perform? ³¹Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as Scripture says: *They were given bread from heaven to eat.*"

³²Jesus then said to them, "Truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven. My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³The bread God gives is the One who comes from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴And they said to him, "Give us this bread always."

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall never be hungry, and he who believes in me shall never be thirsty. ³⁶Nevertheless, as I said, you refuse to believe, even when you have seen. ³⁷Yet, all that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I shall not turn away. ³⁸For I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me.

³⁹And the will of him who sent me

is that I lose nothing of what he has given me, but instead that I raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰This is the will of the Father, that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall live with eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day."

⁴¹The Jews murmured because Jesus had said, "I am the bread which comes from heaven." ⁴²And they said, "This man is the son of Joseph, isn't he? We know his father and mother. How can he say that he has come from heaven?"

⁴³Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵It has been written in the Prophets: *They shall all be taught by God.* So whoever listens and learns from the Father comes to me.

⁴⁶For no one has seen the Father except the One who comes from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.

31. Ps 78, 24; Ezr 16, 4; Num 11, 7	32. 4, 15; Mt 6, 11	35. Pro 9, 1; Eccl 24, 29; Is 55, 1
38. Mt 11, 27	39. Acts 10, 9	40. 11, 24
45. Is 54, 13; Jer 31, 33; 1 Thes 4, 9	42. Mk 6, 3; Lk 4, 22	44. 11, 24; Mt 16, 17
	46. Jn 1, 18; 7, 29	

This was what happened with the Israelites who, after receiving the manna, rebelled against God and died in the desert. Material things, although they may come from heaven, do not make us better nor do they give us true life.

For this reason, God now proposes something new. The bread that comes down from heaven, is not something, but someone, and that is Christ. That true bread communicates eternal life to us, but to receive it, it is necessary to take a step, that is, to believe in Christ and to make a personal commitment to him.

All that the Father gives me will come to me (v. 37). Not all those who take pride in belonging to the true religion come to Christ, but only those whom the Father knows. Though the church embraces many peoples of all descriptions, only those to whom the Father has given this grace will find their way to the controversial and humble Christ. While acknowledging the value of the sacraments and good works, we should not forget what Jesus taught: none of our own efforts can substitute for the grace of being chosen by the Father who calls us to know his Son in truth.

This man is the son of Joseph (v. 42). Jesus' listeners were Jews who believed in God and in the Scriptures. To believe in the prophets who were honoured after their death was easy; but to recognize God's contemporary and controversial messengers, especially when the messenger of God was a simple carpenter was another thing. This is equally true today, for we must overcome doubts and listen to God's messengers who point out the mission of the Church in today's world. There are many who believe in the Bible or in Christ but refuse to listen to the Church, especially when it speaks through Christians and religious belonging to the world of the poor and of workers.

Do not murmur (v. 43). The Bible uses the verb "to murmur" in Exodus: the Israelites distrusted God and constantly criticized Moses' decisions (Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3).

+ THE COMMUNION - THE SACRAMENTS

The second part of the discourse: Jesus becomes our bread when we eat his body in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The body of Christ, bread of life

+ ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Though your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, they died. ⁵⁰ But here you have the bread which comes from heaven so that you may eat of it and not die.

⁵¹ I am the living bread which has come from heaven; whoever eats of this bread will live forever. The bread I shall give is my flesh and I will give it for the life of the world."

⁵² The Jews were arguing among themselves, "How can this man give us flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives with eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.

⁵⁵ My flesh is really food and my blood is drink. ⁵⁶ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, lives in me and

I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the Father, who is life, sent me and I have life from the Father, so he who eats me will have life from me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came from Heaven; unlike that of your ancestors, who ate and later died. He who eats this bread will live forever."

⁵⁹ Thus did Jesus speak in Capernaum when he taught them in the synagogue.

Will you also go away?

■ ⁶⁰ After hearing this, many of Jesus' followers said, "This sort of teaching is very hard! Who can accept it?"

⁶¹ Jesus was aware that his disciples were murmuring about this and so he said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² Then, how will you react when you see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the spirit

50. Num 14, 29 56. 15, 4 60. Lk 4, 22 61. 6, 41 63. 3, 11; 2 Cor 3, 6; Gal 6, 8; 1 Cor 15, 45

How can he give us flesh to eat? (v. 52). Thus spoke the Israelites who distrusted God in the desert (Num 11: 4 & 18). But John plays with the same words and gives them a different meaning here: why would a messenger from heaven give flesh to the world, when what we need is something spiritual? Jesus answers in verse 63: this *flesh to eat* may sound like food for bodily sustenance, but it is really the sharing of the life of the risen Christ transformed by the Spirit. For that reason it gives life (6:63).

Through materials means, the believer participates in a heavenly reality and enters into communion with the risen Christ. The Church defines *sacrament* as something material that symbolizes and brings about a spiritual reality. When we faithfully participate in a sacrament, we encounter the living Christ in person renewing our lives. In the Supper of the Lord, that is in the Mass, we really receive the body and blood of Christ in what appears to be only bread and wine. The risen Christ becomes for us the food of eternal life.

Jesus acts as living bread in us. When we eat ordinary bread our body digests and assimilates it, but when we eat *living bread* (the body of Christ), this bread actively changes us. Christ transforms us: gives his life to us and unites us with his life: *Whoever eats me, will have life in me.*

The Gospel makes clear that Jesus' promise was not understood, and was rejected. Let us

remember that at that time, the Jews were used to having "religious banquets" and they would eat the meat that had been offered as sacrifice in the Temple.

Why should we eat the body of Christ? We do this because we are *body and blood*, not angels, and as humans everything we receive or give must be transmitted through the body.

But regarding this means of Jesus' life being transmitted to us, we are not easily convinced. We often wonder at Jesus' words: *he who eats my flesh has life, he who does not...* We need to study the parables on the Kingdom of God more closely. The gift of God, whether it be his word or the Body of Christ, is a seed so small that it may be lost or may not bear fruit. It is fruitful only in those who believe and persevere.

The sacraments we receive help us mature in the life of God: they affect the very core of our being. Sometimes we feel discouraged about the many defects and prejudices we still have despite our reception of the sacraments. We do not understand that transformation is something deep and often not immediately evident.

■ This language is very hard. How could Jesus' listeners believe that he, the "son of Joseph", had come from God? And today how can we believe that we need the Eucharist? Jesus tells us why he came: The Son of God came down to us so that later he would *ascend to where he was before*. He came from God to



that gives life; the flesh cannot help. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴Yet among you there are some who do not believe."

From the beginning, Jesus knew who would betray him. ⁶⁵So he added, "As I have told you, no one can come to me unless it is given to him by the Father."

⁶⁶After this many disciples withdrew and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷Jesus asked the Twelve, "Will you also go away?" ⁶⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and now we know that you are the Holy One of God."

⁷⁰Jesus said to them, "I chose you, the Twelve, did I not? Yet one of you is a devil." ⁷¹Jesus spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. He, one of the Twelve, was to betray him.

Jesus goes up to Jerusalem

◆ ⁷After this Jesus went around Galilee; he would not go about in Judea because the Jews wanted to kill him. ²Now the Jewish feast of the Tents was at hand. ³So the brothers of Jesus said to him, "Don't stay here; go instead to Judea and let your disciples see the works you are doing. ⁴Anyone who wants to be known doesn't work secretly. Since you are able to do these things, show yourself to the world."

⁵His brothers spoke like this because they didn't believe in him. ⁶Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here."

⁷The world cannot hate you; but it hates me because I bear witness and I show that its deeds are evil. ⁸Go up to the feast! I am not going to this feast, because my time has not yet come."

⁹Jesus spoke like this and remained in Galilee. ¹⁰But after his brothers had gone to the festival, he

64. 13, 11 67. Lk 22, 28 68. Lk 9, 18 70. Mk 1, 24 6. 2, 4; 7, 30; 8, 20 7. 15, 18; 1, 19
6:64. Many manuscripts add: (Jesus knew) who were those who did not believe and (who...)

communicate to us the very life of God and to bring us to the bosom of God (Jn 14:12).

The truth is that by Christ's resurrection, our world has started its renewal. For when the Son of Man entered the Glory of his Father, he carried on his shoulders the whole of creation which he wanted to renew and consecrate. Clothed in our humanity the Son of God has ascended to where he was before: the first of our race has achieved full union with God.

Although, to all appearances life goes on as before, we should believe that the renewed world has been made present. The Spirit is at work within gigantic disturbances which continually agitate and shake the whole of humanity. Invincibly, Christ is consecrating this world. He enables humanity to arrive at maturity by means of innumerable crises and deaths that prepare for a resurrection.

Jesus' listeners could not understand (6:61) the mystery of the Son of God and his humiliations. Jesus wanted to dispossess himself of his divine glory by becoming man and dying like a slave (see Jn 1:14 and Phil 2:6), so that later the Father would enable him to ascend where he came from. It is likewise a test of our faith to believe that God continually works among us in our world. In spite of the unresponsiveness of people, God still loves us; the Church is so unworthy, yet God uses it to fulfill his plan;

history is so conflictive and destructive, yet it is preparing us for the fullness of the Kingdom.

The flesh cannot help (63). Jesus spoke of giving us his flesh, but this should not be understood as a continuation of the Jewish religion in which the meat of sacrificed animals was eaten. In Hebrew culture, *flesh and blood* denote "the world below" where humankind move and where one has no access to communication with God. The Eucharist is different. This is the body or flesh of the risen Christ transformed by the Spirit which acts in us spiritually and brings us into communion with God.

Lord, to whom shall we go? Many of Jesus' followers left, but in the name of those who remained Peter pledged his fidelity (cf also Mt 16:13).

◆ Jesus moves people to question his identity. It is better to question than to belong to a group which does not question because they think they already know. The brothers of Jesus were like that.

Show yourself to the world (3 & 4). These brothers of Jesus were the families and townspeople of Nazareth (see Mk 3:31). These people were to enter the Church after Jesus' resurrection and then they would believe themselves important merely because of their former association with Jesus; but at that time they were still



also went up, not publicly but in secret. ¹¹The Jews were looking for him at the festival and asked, "Where is he?" ¹²There was a lot of talk about him among the people. Some said, "He is a good man," but others replied, "No, he is misleading the people." ¹³Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly about him.

¹⁴When the festival was half over, Jesus went to the Temple and began to teach. ¹⁵The Jews marvelled and said, "How is it that he speaks with so much learning when he has had no teacher?"

¹⁶And Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but it comes from the One who sent me. ¹⁷Anyone who does the will of God shall know whether my teaching is from God or if I speak on my own authority.

¹⁸He who speaks on his own authority wishes to gain honour for himself. But he who wants to give glory

to him who sent him is truthful and there is no reason to doubt him."

v. 19-24 have been placed after chapter 5. See footnote there.

o ²⁵Some of the people of Jerusalem said, "Is this not the man they want to kill?" ²⁶And here he is speaking freely, and they don't say a word to him? Can it be that the rulers know that this is really the Christ? ²⁷Yet, we know where this man comes from; but when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from."

²⁸So Jesus announced in a loud voice in the Temple court where he was teaching, "You say that you know me and know where I come from! I have not come of myself; I was sent by the One who is true, and you don't know him. ²⁹I know him for I come from him and he sent me."

³⁰They would have arrested him, but no one laid hands on him because his time had not yet come. ³¹Many

13. 9, 22
29. 8, 55

15. Mk 6, 2; Acts 4, 13
30. Lk 4, 29

18. 8, 50; 5, 41

27. 9, 29; Mk 12, 35; Mt 5, 1; Mt 1, 5

very far from understanding his mission. They wanted Jesus to be known for his miracles; but Jesus chose, rather, to reveal himself to those who could enter into the mystery of death which leads to glory.

My time has not yet come. ... Let us note here two types of persons: one type live according to their plans, and the other type allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit. The former have *no time*; because they have no experience of the calling of God, they act impetuously, and when they feel like it. But those who are guided by the Spirit wait for signs indicating that this is God's time. Whatever is undertaken in God's time will bring glory to God.

THE JEWS

Like Jesus, John was a Jew. He was surrounded by Jews converted to the Christian faith. However, he consistently calls his unbelieving compatriots *Jews*. He does exactly what some do when they say "Catholics" or "Christians" to denote persons who make a show of being Catholic, but show little concern for interiorizing the Gospel.

John calls Jews those who feel secure about having the true religion but have hard hearts, closed to all that is noble and true. They confuse faith with fanaticism. They are incapable of listening to and dialoguing with those who do

not share their viewpoints, and they consider nothing as evil if they think it serves the interests of their group.

Those Jews adhered to an established social order and to a certain manner of understanding life and religion that was common in their time. It was social and religious formalities that were important to them; they were interested in God only in the measure to which they had made him the defender of these things (Mt 6:23, 29).

o SALVATION · SEEKING THE TRUTH

Who is Jesus? It is very important for us to know who Jesus is and from whence he comes because, unlike the founders of other religions, he offers us the unheard of gift of sharing in God's very life. But if Jesus does not come from God, of what value is this promise?

We need to discover for ourselves who Jesus is, because it is thus we will be saved.

As a person he attracts us, but his words shock us. When Jesus proclaims that the world is already saved, that we have already risen and are sons and daughters of God, we think that he uses figures of speech since the reality appears to be so different. But in time, with more experience and suffering, we modify our viewpoint and discover that the world and people are just as he describes them. We then acknowledge

people in the crowd, however, believed in him and said, "When the Christ comes, will he give more signs than this man does?"

³²The Pharisees heard all these rumors among the people; so the Pharisees and chief priests sent officers of the temple to arrest him. ³³Jesus then said, "I shall be with you a little longer; after that I shall go to him who sent me. ³⁴You will look for me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."

³⁵The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we shall not find him? Will he go abroad to the Jews dispersed among the Greek nations and teach the Greeks also? ³⁶What does he mean when he says: 'You will look for me and not find me', and: 'Where I am going you cannot come'?"

The promise of living water

+ ³⁷On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me; ³⁸and let him who believes in me drink, for the Scripture says: *Out of him shall flow rivers of living water.*"

³⁹Jesus was referring to the Spirit which those who believe in him were to receive; the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet entered into his Glory.

Dispute on the origin of Christ

⁴⁰Many who had been listening to these words began to say, "This is the Prophet." ⁴¹Others said, "This is the Christ." But some wondered, "Would the Christ come from Galilee? ⁴²Doesn't Scripture say that the Christ

34. Am 8, 11; Is 55, 6

35. 13, 36; 16, 16; Dt 4, 29; Acts 11, 20

38. 4, 10; 19, 31; Rev 21, 6;

22, 17; Is 55, 1; Eek 47, 1; Zac 13, 1

39. 15, 7; 16, 7; 20, 22; Acts 19, 2

40. 6, 14; Dt 18, 15

42. Ps 89, 3; Mt 5, 2

him as Saviour; but also in a different way, we are saved because we have acquired the capacity to see things as God does. Hence, when we wish to help others arrive at faith, it is better at times to refrain from discussions about religion. They are those who must first dig into themselves to discover the wellspring of life. One cannot advance in the knowledge of Christ without advancing in knowledge of oneself.

We know where he comes from (v. 27). So, these Jews thought they knew who God was and what his plans were; but in reality, they interpreted everything according to their own views and remained closed to the Truth. Standing before them, Jesus claimed to be the Envoy of God. On speaking like this he was not looking for a title to become credible, but wanted to emphasize his total dependence on the Father and his intimate knowledge of him.

You will look for me and not find me (v. 34). This is the same warning God gave through earlier prophets (Jer 13:16). Once again, Jesus applies to himself scriptural words and prerogatives reserved for God.

+ THE COMMUNICATION OF THE SPIRIT

Spirit had not yet been given. In Wisdom 1:7, however, we read, "the Spirit of God fills the universe." Actually God never ceased communicating himself. His Spirit slips into man's spirit whom he awakens, animates and impels. At all

times he has been active in the artists, thinkers and heroes, and he was also present in the spirit of people of upright heart.

But the Spirit is not poured out like water. The Spirit of God becomes one with the spirit of the one who receives him. As long as we do not know God in truth, the Spirit comes "over" us, as happened with the liberators of Israel who did not necessarily become better for having been the instrument of God (Jdg 11:27). Only after *Jesus had entered into his Glory*, could he give his Spirit to those who should unite with him.

Spirit had not been given. Many manuscripts read: *There was no Spirit.* This sounds strange to believers who consider the spirit to be a divine Person. Of course, the Spirit is as much person and as much God, as the Father and the Son are but the Spirit's manner of being God and person, and One is not the same. The Spirit is "communication of God dispensed" to all creatures through all times. He is somehow able to divide himself, dwelling in each creature with different gifts; then he brings them back to unity in God. Because of this, Scripture says sometimes: "the Spirit," at other times: "spirit" (1k 1:15; Acts 6:3), or even: "the spirits" (Rev 1:4; 3:1).

Out of him shall flow rivers of living water. Compare 4:10. *Bread and water:* the Body of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In 7:38 we read: *Out of him shall flow rivers of living water.*

is a descendant of David and from Bethlehem."⁴³ So the crowd was divided over him. ⁴⁴Some wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

⁴⁵The officers of the Temple went back to the chief priests who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him?"

⁴⁶The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man." ⁴⁷The Pharisees then said, "So you, too, have been led astray! ⁴⁸Have any of the rulers or any of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹Only these cursed people, who have no knowledge of the Law!"

⁵⁰Yet one of them, Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier, spoke out, ⁵¹"Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him and knowing the facts?" ⁵²They replied, "Do you, too, come from Galilee? Look it up and see for yourself that no prophet is to come from Galilee."

⁵³And they all went home.

The adulteress

8 ¹As for Jesus, he went to the Mount of Olives.

²At daybreak Jesus appeared in the Temple again. All the people came to

him, and he sat down and began to teach them.

³Then the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They made her stand in front of everyone. ⁴"Master," they said, "this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵Now the Law of Moses orders that such women be stoned to death; but you, what do you say?" ⁶They said this to test Jesus, so they could have some charge against him.

Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. ⁷And as they continued to ask him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the man among you who has no sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸And he bent down again, writing on the ground.

⁹As a result of these words, they went away, one by one, starting with the oldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

¹⁰Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "She replied, "No one." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go away and don't sin again."

46. Mt 13, 54

48. 12, 42; 1 Cor 1, 26

51. Dt 17, 4

2. Lk 21, 37; Mt 26, 55

3. Lk 7, 37

4. Dt 22, 22

6. Jer 17, 13

7. Dt 17, 7; Mt 7, 1

11. 5, 14; Ek 33, 11

■ The selection 8:1-11 is not found in the most ancient manuscripts of John's gospel. However, the style and vocabulary of this paragraph are very characteristic of John. Many think that this selection is from other sources. But it could also be from the gospel edited by John: it could have been later suppressed in many copies because the acceptance Jesus showed toward the adulterous woman could have been wrongly interpreted.

If Jesus showed such respect to the sinner and refused to condemn her as humans would, was it because he did not consider her fault grave? No, it was because God uses different means than people do to bring the sinner to repentance and to purify them through suffering.

There is a big difference between telling a

person his ideas or deeds are wrong or sinful, and condemning him. We usually condemn the person; we don't make room for change and mercy. In this gospel episode, Jesus is both demanding and merciful towards the woman.

It seems that certain pages in John's gospel have been shifted. We already remarked that the selection 7:19-24 is really a continuation of chapter 5.

Also, the discourse 8:12-29 seems to be a continuation of the miracle story related in Chapter 9. After healing the blind man and proving the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, Jesus declares: *I am the light*. Jesus' pronouncement: hence I have just told you that you will die in your sins (8:24), reminds us of the saying in 9:41.



I Am – The light of the world

◆ ¹²Jesus spoke to them again, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have light and life." ¹³The Pharisees replied, "Now you are speaking on your own behalf, your testimony is worthless."

¹⁴Then Jesus said, "Even though I bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I have come from and where I am going. But you do not know where I came from or where I am going."

¹⁵You judge by human standards; as for me, I don't judge anyone. ¹⁶But if I had to judge, my judgement would be valid for I am not alone: the Father who sent me is with me. ¹⁷In your Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid; ¹⁸so I am bearing witness to myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness to me."

¹⁹They asked him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You don't

know me or my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father as well."

²⁰Jesus said these things when he was teaching in the Temple area, in the place where they received their offerings. Yet no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

²¹Again Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and though you look for me, you will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come." ²²The Jews wondered, "Why does he say that we can't come where he is going? Will he kill himself?"

²³But Jesus said, "You are from below and I am from above; you are of this world and I am not of this world."

²⁴That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. And you shall die in your sins unless you believe that I am He."

²⁵They asked him, "Who are you?"; and Jesus said, "Just what I have told you from the beginning. ²⁶I have much to say about you and much

12. 14, 9; 9, 5; 12, 46; Mt 5, 14

13. 5, 31

17. Dt 17, 6; Num 35, 30

18. 5, 32

12. 14, 9; 9, 5; 12, 46; Mt 5, 14

20. Mk 12, 4

21. 7, 33; 13, 36

21. Am 8, 11

22. Pro 1, 22

23. 3, 31

24. Is 43, 11

◆ THE LIGHT

Jesus is the light for all people of all times. God guided the Hebrews in the desert by means of a luminous cloud. He guides us through his Son: whoever follows Jesus will not walk in darkness.

Light means many good things: the welcome light of dawn after a night of darkness; the electric lights which illumine our homes while darkness reigns outside; the street lights which shine for everyone, poor and rich alike; the light that triumphs over the dark forces of evil and ignorance. Christ is all that, and more for whoever follows him. He is the light by which we live with wholeness and integrity, and through whom we learn to attribute to material things and human activities their proper values.

By the light of Christ a person triumphs over all inner darkness. We are conscious of only a small part of our inner self; while at each moment we obey impulses not under our control which come from our nature. Good intentions animate us, and we have a clean heart (so we think), but we do not realize that actually we often obey the call "of flesh and blood," as the Bible puts it. But if we live in the light, the light

will gradually illumine our innermost being.

Part of the human condition aggravated by sin is the absence of light for seeking and discerning what is good. This "spiritual blindness" has to do with our moral judgements. We all have blind spots in our perception of things. Therefore, in serious matters, it is not wise to just follow our first impulse, because we can be mistaken and do wrong not so much out of bad intention, as out of blindness. We need to be continuously enlightened through prayer, listening to the word of God, studying the teaching of the Church, and accepting the good advice of our brothers and sisters. By these means Jesus enlightens our conscience.

I AM

In this discourse Jesus gives witness to his own divinity. He makes us understand that in him there is a mysterious secret regarding his origin. On this page we read the expression *I am* seven times. John wishes us to understand that this is the key word of the discourse. *I AM*. It was thus God designated himself, speaking to Moses. We know that the Jews called God, *Yahweh*, that is, *He who is*, *He who brings everything into existence*. But Jesus declares: "I am", thus claim-

to condemn; but the One who sent me is truthful and everything I learned from him, I proclaim to the world."

²⁷ They didn't understand that Jesus was speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of myself, but I speak just as the Father taught me. ²⁹ He who sent me is with me and has not left me alone; indeed, I always do what pleases him."

The children of truth

o ³⁰ As Jesus spoke like this, many believed in him. ³¹ Jesus went on to say to the Jews who believed in him: "You will be my true disciples if you keep my word. ³² Then you will know the truth and the truth will make you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are the descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves of anyone. What do

you mean by saying: You will be free?"

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave. ³⁵ But the slave doesn't stay in the house forever; the son stays forever. ³⁶ So, if the Son makes you free, you will be really free.

³⁷ I know that you are the descendants of Abraham; yet you want to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸ So, while I speak of what I have seen in the Father's presence, you do what you have learned from your father."

³⁹ They answered him, "Our father is Abraham." Then Jesus said, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do as Abraham did. ⁴⁰ You want to kill me because I am the one who tells you the truth – the truth that I have learned from God. That is not what Abraham did; ⁴¹ but you are doing the works of your father."

28. J 14; 12, 32

29. 16, 32

33. Lk 3, 8

34. Rom 6, 17; 1 Jn 3, 8

35. Gen 21, 20; Gal 4, 30; Rom 6, 18; 2 Cor 3, 17

37. Mt 21, 33

41. Is 63, 16; 64, 8

ing for himself the Name that should not be given to any creature, no matter how important or prominent the person might be. There are Christians (e.g. the Witnesses of Jehovah) who would make Christ less than he is. They argue that since God is only one, how can the fullness of divine life be shared among three persons. While they call Christ the Son of God, they deny that he is God born of God. But Jesus *IS* as much as the Father, and must not be confused with the Father, hence he says: *The Father sent me*, and also: *The testimony of two persons is worthy* (in the Jewish Law code).

You will die in your sin (21 & 24). Sin is not just doing something bad. Sin is, also, to enclose ourselves in our own petty problems and rely only on human wisdom, without opening ourselves to the horizons of God. The Bible divides people into two groups; *those from above*, who seek God's ways, and *those from below*, who seek limited human goals. Sin is to refuse to allow oneself to be *born again from above*, as Jesus told Nicodemus (3:3). These Jews did not believe in Jesus because his way of life and his message reflected a world of transcendent values – beyond this world – which did not attract them. Jesus would have wasted his time with them; the wisdom of God would be better revealed in his death on the cross (28).

o THE TRUTH - FREEDOM - SIN

Jesus spoke to the Jews who believed in him. Those Jews believed in Jesus according to their own view of him, very much like the Jews whom Paul would combat in Gal 3-4 did. From Jesus' discussions with those who claimed to have the true religion, we can surmise how Jesus would confront many who boast of being Christian or "Catholics", were he to pass among us today.

Jesus would not reproach us so much for our sins, as for our continuing to live *in sin*. Sins are evil deeds that at times may be excusable; often we repent of them as soon as we have committed them. To be in sin, on the other hand, is to live in falsehood; it is to persist stubbornly in a certain pride, an attachment to our own judgments. This attitude prevents us from entering into the ways of God, even though to all appearances we live an upright life and proclaim our faith.

Jesus is not a banner for any social group, whether known as Catholic, or by some other name, with which we go to fight other groups. He has come as a king of the kingdom of *truth*. Those who seek the truth are his, whatever their ideas may be. Rather, those *who live in truth* are his.

For those Jews, the world is divided into two groups: the *sons of Abraham*, that is them-

The Jews said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one Father, God." ⁴² Jesus replied, "If God were your Father you would love me, for I came forth from God, and I am here. And I didn't come by my own decision, but it was he himself who sent me." ⁴³ Why do you not understand my teaching? It is because you cannot bear my message.

⁴⁴ The father you spring from is the devil and you will carry out the evil wishes of your father, who has been a murderer from the beginning. He didn't uphold the truth for, in him, there is no truth; and now, when he speaks for himself, he lies. He is a liar and the father of lies.

⁴⁵ Now I tell the truth and you don't believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you could find something false in me? Then, if I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ He who is of God hears the words of God; you don't hear because you are not of God."

⁴⁸ The Jews retorted, "So we are right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed by a demon."

⁴⁹ Jesus said, "I am not possessed, and you try to shame me when I give

honour to my Father. ⁵⁰ I don't care about my own glory; there is One who cares for me and he will be the judge.

⁵¹ Truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never experience death." ⁵² The Jews replied, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died and the prophets as well, but you say: 'Whoever keeps my word will never experience death.' Who do you claim to be?" ⁵³ Do you claim to be greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets also died."

⁵⁴ Then Jesus said, "If I would praise myself, it would count for nothing. But he who gives glory to me is the Father, the very One you claim as your God, ⁵⁵ although you don't know him. I know him and if I were to say that I don't know him, I would be a liar like you. But, I know him and I keep his word.

⁵⁶ As for Abraham, your ancestor, he looked forward to the day when I would come; and he rejoiced when he saw it."

⁵⁷ The Jews then said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ And Jesus

44. Gen 3, 4; Wis 2, 24; Rom 5, 12; 1 Pet 5, 8; 1 Jn 3, 8
48. Sir 50, 26
50. 5, 41; 1 Pet 2, 23
51. 11, 25; 14, 23
47. 10, 26; 18, 37
55. Lk 10, 22
56. Gen 17, 17

selves, and the rest. They boasted of their ancestry and forgot that in God's eyes, each one is what he is.

Jesus comes to them as witness to the truth; and his presence alone obliges all to examine themselves. The truth Jesus speaks of is not a doctrine which his followers should impose by force. Propagandists with arguments and biblical quotations are not needed, but witnesses who speak of their experience. Jesus says: *The truth will make you free, and: the Son will make you free* (v. 32 & 36). Our truth consists in living in accordance with our vocation as children of God.

The believer who knows he is loved by God and consequently endeavors to be authentic, is already in the truth, even if he keeps several prejudices prevalent in his environment, or unconsciously is guided by some lies or illusions in his way of living.

Jesus also speaks of *freedom*. Truth and freedom go together. Many individuals and peoples

have not spared themselves in efforts to break their chains. But once liberated they quickly fall into other forms of subjugation, because the root of all slavery lies within everyone.

By doing evil, one becomes an accomplice of the Devil, and even without wanting to do so, falls into a trap. He will then be unable to resist the illusions and harmful influences by which the Father of Lies brings the world under his power (v 44).

As long as we continue to be unconcerned about our true condition and are either agitated or idle, we are no more than slaves, even though we may excel in wealth, knowledge or status. We thus add to the population of the world of *below*, which is unstable. Generations of slaves will follow like the waves of the sea: slaves are people who are *for a time* in the house (v. 34). But Christ enables us to enter yet another world, the *world above* in which the sons stay forever (v. 35). From the time we become children of God, everything we do bears fruit for eternity.

said "Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ They then picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

Jesus heals the man born blind

9 ¹ As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Master, if he was born blind because of sin, was it his sin or his parents?"

³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's power might be shown in him. ⁴ While it is day we must do the work of the One who sent me: for the night will come when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

⁶ As Jesus said this, he made paste with spittle and clay and rubbed it on the eyes of the blind man. ⁷ Then, he told him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam." (This name means *sent*). So he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸ His neighbours and all the people who used to see him begging, wondered. They said, "Is this not the

beggar who used to sit here?" ⁹ Some said, "It's he." Others said, "No, but he looks like him." But the man himself said, "I am the one." ¹⁰ Then they asked, "How is it that your eyes were opened?" ¹¹ And he answered, "The man called Jesus made a mud paste, put it on my eyes and said to me: 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went, and washed, and I could see." ¹² They asked, "Where is he?" and the man answered, "I don't know."

¹³ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made mud paste and opened the eyes of this blind man. ¹⁴ The people brought the man to the Pharisees ¹⁵ who asked him again, "How did you recover your sight?" And he said once more, "He put paste on my eyes, and I washed and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he works on the sabbath"; but others wondered, "How can a sinner perform such miraculous signs?" So they were divided ¹⁷ and they questioned the blind man again, "What do you think of this man who opened your eyes?" And he answered, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ After all this, the Jews refused to

2. Esh 18, 20; Lk 13, 2	4. 11, 9; 12, 35	5. 8, 12	6. 12, 46; Is 49, 6
7. Mk 8, 23; Ls 8, 6	13. Mt 12, 10; Lk 14, 1	17. Mt 16, 14	

+ TO BELIEVE IS TO SEE

Jesus is the light: the blind man sees the light of day. Jesus is the light, but people are divided about him. Some are open to the light, that is, to faith; others remain blind, that is to say, they keep their own ideas and "their own" belief and refuse to believe in the messenger of God.

One way of deepening our understanding of this chapter would be to observe the Jewish people's reactions to the miracle. Some open themselves to the light, that is, to the faith; while others prefer to follow their own lights. This Gospel story shows us the blind man who immediately understands the significance of the cure, the fearful and pragmatic father, and the Pharisees who do nothing but judge and are unaware that they condemn themselves as they judge.

The Gospel opens up to us another way of interpreting the miracle: the man who begins to see is the believer (cf especially v. 4 and 39-41).

Master, was it his sin or his parents? Jesus refuses to consider every disgrace as God's

punishment. The healing of the blind man was performed on the sabbath. So people wonder if God will side with the law forbidding work on that day, or with the man who performed such a good work. The Pharisees defend the Law, as is to be expected from people more capable of teaching and judging than of helping the distressed.

You don't know where the man comes from? Who live in such a way that they are able to receive the truth? It is quite understandable that the Pharisees cast out the blind man, because faith in Christ necessarily separates the believer from those who don't recognize the way God is working.

The blind man sees: he also discovers Christ and begins to believe; knowing Christ, he will acquire a taste of life and things different from the world's standards.

Many people think that faith is an illusion. They think faith is a cover-up of reality and that what is real is limited to only material things,



believe that the man had been blind and had recovered his sight; so they called his parents¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son? You say that he was born blind, how is it that he now sees?"²⁰ The parents answered, "He really is our son and he was born blind;²¹ but how it is that he now sees, we don't know, neither do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is old enough. Let him speak for himself."

²²The parents said this because they feared the Jews who had already agreed that whoever confessed Jesus to be the Christ was to be put out of the Jewish community.²³ Because of this his parents said, "He is old enough, ask him."

²⁴So a second time the Pharisees called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Tell us the truth; we know that this man is a sinner."²⁵ He replied, "I don't know whether he is a sinner or not; I only know that I was blind and now I see."²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"²⁷ He replied, "I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

²⁸Then they started to insult him. "Become his disciple yourself! We

are disciples of Moses."²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man we don't know where he comes from."

³⁰The man replied, "It is amazing that you don't know where the man comes from, and yet he opened my eyes!"

³¹We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone honours God and does his will, God listens to him.

³²Never, since the world began, has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person who was born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴They answered him, "You were born a sinner and now you teach us!" And they drove him away.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him away. He found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

³⁶He answered, "Who is he, that I may believe in him?"³⁷ Jesus said, "You have seen him and he is speaking to you."³⁸ I came into this world to carry out a judgement: Those who do not see shall see, and those who see shall become blind."⁴⁰ Some Pharisees stood by and asked him, "So we are blind?"⁴¹ And Jesus answered, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty. Now that you say: 'We see'; this is the proof of your sin."

22. 7, 13; 12, 42 31. Ps 66, 18; Is 1, 15; Pro 15, 29
Lk 18, 14; 1 Cor 1, 20 40. Mt 15, 14 41. 3, 36; 15, 22; Sir 18, 13; Rev 7, 17; Num 15, 30
9:38. Many manuscript add this verse: And the man replied, "Lord, I believe", and he knelt before him. And Jesus said, "I came ...

34. Ps 51, 5 39. 8, 12; 12, 47; Mt 13, 13;
41. 3, 36; 15, 22; Sir 18, 13; Rev 7, 17; Num 15, 30

that which is seen, touched, counted or measured.

Truth is different. The believer sees the same things that others see and know; but besides that, he captures something that escapes those who lack faith. A special sense is needed to see beyond the material world.

Christian faith cannot be identified with the belief in a God higher than us. Faith is an ability to know by the light of Christ everything that is true, either in the goals, or the means people use. The faithful one sees whatever other people see, but he perceives also something that is out of their reach. Often we hear invitations like

this: "We, invite all, without exception, of any opinions or belief." Of course, in many things, we are in solidarity with those who do not believe. But we should not think that to believe or not to believe is a matter of minor importance in the struggles of life.

With the coming of Christ, a sentence, or judgement is carried out (9:39). This means that humanity begins to be divided because all must take a position in respect to Him. Jesus judges people, or rather, we are those who judge our selves when we accept or reject him.

The healing of the man born blind is a parable, as well, of the process of liberation from



The good shepherd

10 ¹ Truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² But the shepherd of the sheep enters by the gate. ³ The keeper opens the gate to him and the sheep hear his voice; he calls each of his sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, rather they will run away from him because they don't recognize a stranger's voice."

⁶ Jesus used this comparison, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, I am the shepherd of the sheep. ⁸ All who came were thieves and robbers, and the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved; he will go in and out freely and find food.

¹⁰ The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the

sheep. ¹² Not so the hired man or any other person who is not the shepherd and to whom the sheep do not belong. He abandons the sheep as soon as he sees the wolf coming; then the wolf snatches and scatters the sheep. ¹³ He is only a hired man and he cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ as the Father knows me and I know the Father. Because of this I give my life for the sheep.

¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this fold. These I have to lead as well, and they shall listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock since there is one Shepherd.

¹⁷ The Father loves me because I lay down my life so as to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down freely. It is mine to lay down and to take up again: this mission I received from my Father."

¹⁹ Because of these words, the Jews were divided again. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?" ²¹ But others said, "A possessed man doesn't speak in this way. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

1. Mt 2, 12 3. Ps 95, 7 8. Jer 23, 1; Ezk 34, 2 9. Ps 23; Is 49, 9 11. Is 40, 11; Ezk 34, 15
 12. 37, 24; Zac 11, 17; Acts 20, 29; 1 Pet 5, 2 15. 1 Cor 8, 2; 13, 12; Gal 4, 9; 2 Tim 2, 19; Mt 11, 25
 16. 11, 52; 18, 37; 21, 15; Is 49, 6; Ezk 37, 24; 1 Pet 2, 25 17. Phil 2, 8; Jn 14, 31; 15, 10; Rev 5, 9
 10.7. Many manuscript read: "I am the gate of the sheep."

spiritual blindness. The man's healing leads to a higher form of illumination: his next encounter with Christ in faith. We usually come to a deeper faith and recognition of Christ through suffering, humiliation and painful searching.

■ COUNTRY WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Thanks to the parable of Jesus, we can imagine one of those sheepfolds in which the flocks of various shepherds are gathered together for the night under the vigilance of one caretaker. At dawn, each calls his sheep and leads them out.

The Bible foretold the day in which God would come to gather together the dispersed sheep of his people so that they would live in their land. Jesus is the *Shepherd* and he has

come to accomplish what was announced, but he will not do it in the expected way. The Jews thought that the Shepherd would revive their former prosperity: they should be a privileged nation among other nations.

But, Jesus says clearly that his people are not to be thought of as identical to the Jewish nation. Those who believe, and only they, are his. He will take from among the Jews those who are his; likewise, he will take sheep from other folds too (v. 16), that is, from among nations other than the Jewish nation. Therefore, he will lead them all and will guide this flock – which is not a nation with land boundaries – to where he knows. The only flock that is, the only Church, moves freely through history, not confined to any one nation or era of civilization.

Jesus claims to be the Son of God

²² The time came for the feast of the Dedication. It was winter ²³ and Jesus walked back and forth in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ The Jews then gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in doubt? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I have already told you but you do not believe. ²⁶ The works I do in my Father's name proclaim who I am, but you don't believe because, as I said, you are not my sheep.

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice and I know them, they follow me ²⁸ and I give them eternal life. They shall never perish and no one will ever steal them from me. ²⁹ What the Father has given me is stronger than everything and no one can snatch it from the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

³¹ The Jews then picked up stones to throw at him; ³² so Jesus said, "I have openly done many good works among you which the Father gave me to do. For which of these do you stone me?"

³³ The Jews answered, "We are not stoning you for doing a good work but

for insulting God; you are only a man and you make yourself God."

³⁴ Then Jesus replied, "Is this not written in your Law: *I said: you are gods?* ³⁵ So those who received this word of God were called gods and the Scripture is always true. ³⁶ Then what should be said of the one anointed and sent into the world by the Father? Am I insulting God when I say: 'I am the Son of God'?"

³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you don't put faith in me, believe me because of the works I do, and know that the Father is in me and I in the Father."

³⁹ Again they tried to arrest him, but Jesus escaped from their hands. ⁴⁰ He went away again to the other side of the Jordan, to the place where John had baptized, and there he stayed.

⁴¹ Many people came to him and said, "John showed no miraculous signs, but he spoke of this man and everything he said was true." ⁴² And many became believers in that place.

The resurrection of Lazarus

◆ 11 ¹ There was a sick man named Lazarus who was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister

22. 1 Mac 4, 36; Acers 3, 11; 5, 12	24. 8, 25	26. 1 Cor 2, 14; Jn 6, 37	29. 6, 39; 17, 2;
17, 12; 18, 9; Dt 52, 39; Rom 8, 33; 1 Pet 1, 15		32. 8, 59	33. Mk 14, 64
34. Ps 82, 6; 1 Cor 8, 5	36. Jer 1, 5	39. 8, 59	40. Mk 10, 1
			1. 12, 1; Lk 10, 38

The shepherds of the Jewish people thought they could achieve unity by promoting national pride, by maintaining the privileges of the "higher" castes, and by discrimination against non-Jews. But Jesus unites his people solely by attracting them to himself, by letting people experience who he is. All who are attracted by him, who *recognize his voice*, and believe his word are his.

People often cluster around great figures, whether they be leaders or saints. But when a people have neither frontiers, arms, language, nor laws to defend them against external and internal dissension, the presence of a Shepherd or leader is even more essential. Faith in Christ unites us far better than does fidelity to traditions of the past or solidarity with coreligionists. Christ's people is not a mass; it is not Humanity

with a capital H. It is composed of persons who have begun with Jesus an adventure of mutual trust and love. *I know them and they will hear my voice* (v. 14 & 16).

When the Bible speaks of the Shepherd, it usually refers to God himself, the only king of Israel, but sometimes it means the King-Messiah sent by God. Jesus spoke of only one shepherd. Though distinct from the Father, he is *one with him* (30).

In the Bible angels are sometimes called sons of God, and Jesus remarks that the rulers are called gods. Because of this, Jesus did not like to be proclaimed Son of God. He speaks forcefully in saying: *the Father is in me, and I in the Father: equal to equal* (38). But at the same time that he stresses his divine power (v. 15, 18, 29, 38), he also affirms his total depend-

Martha. ²(It was the same Mary who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair.) Their brother Lazarus was sick.

³So the sisters sent this message to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." ⁴On hearing this Jesus said, "This illness will not end in death; rather it is for God's glory and the Son of God will be glorified through it."

⁵It is a fact that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus; ⁶yet, after he heard of the illness of Lazarus, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Only then did he say to his disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." ⁸They replied, "Master, recently the Jews wanted to stone you. Are you going there again?"

⁹Jesus said to them, "Shall I not walk during the twelve hours of the day? Whoever walks in the daytime shall not stumble, for he sees with the light of the world. ¹⁰But if anyone walks by night, he will stumble for there is no light in him."

¹¹After that Jesus said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep,

but I am going to wake him." ¹²The disciples replied, "Lord, a sick man who sleeps will recover." ¹³But, Jesus had referred to Lazarus' death, and they thought that he had meant the repose of sleep. ¹⁴So Jesus said plainly, "Lazarus is dead ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad I was not there, for now you may believe." ¹⁶Then Thomas called the Twin said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸As Bethany is near Jerusalem, about two miles away, ¹⁹many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to offer consolation at their brother's death.

²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him while Mary remained sitting in the house. ²¹And she said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴Martha replied, "I know that he

4. 2, 11; 9, 33
12. Acts 7, 60

6. Dt 33, 3
16. Mk 10, 32

9. 7, 8; 9, 4
24. Dn 12, 1;

10. 8, 12; 12, 35
Acts 24, 15; Jn 5, 28; 6, 39

11. Mk 5, 39; Lk 8, 52

ence on the Father. In this we recognize God the Son.

◆This is the seventh and last miracle of Jesus recorded in John's gospel. Very intentionally, the first words are meant to present the sick man: Lazarus personifies the person wounded by sin, who is in process of dying unless Christ calls him to life.

Lazarus came back to life! Let us not be astounded that Lazarus had the good fortune to live for a few more years and the misfortune of having to die again. The purpose of this miracle was to announce the true resurrection which does not just prolong life but transforms our entire being. The resurrection is spiritual. It begins when faith moves a person to give up wrong ways of living and become open to receive God's life.

The Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead on the last day, as Martha mentioned (24). But they thought a divine force would come to shake the universe and open the tomb so the dead could come out. In reality, the resurrection of the dead comes about through someone, the

Son of God, who has in himself all the power needed to raise people to life and to transform creation. One who lives in submission to Christ, *has already passed from death to life* (5:24) and because of this, *will never die* (11:26).

It is on account of this that Jesus is called Lord seven times. Although all the persons concerned did in fact call Jesus, "the Master", John intentionally puts on their lips the word Lord. He wishes to teach us that this miracle of raising Lazarus to life anticipates the glorious resurrection of Jesus, the Lord.

The Jews wanted to kill Jesus (8), but it was legally difficult for them to take Jesus prisoner. They could do this only in the province of Jerusalem, where their religious communities and political organization were strong. As long as Jesus remained on the other side of the Jordan, he was secure. The resurrection of Lazarus hastened the time of Jesus' death and glorification.

The twelve hours (9). Jesus will complete the 12 hours of his journey, that is, of his mission, without fear of the risks involved. Those who,



will rise in the resurrection of the dead, at the last day." ²⁵But Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection; whoever believes in me, though he die, shall live. ²⁶Whoever is alive by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷Martha then answered, "Yes, Lord I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

²⁸After that Martha went and called her sister Mary, quietly, saying, "The Master is here and is calling for you." ²⁹As soon as Mary heard this, she rose and went to him. ³⁰Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

³¹The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her, also came. When they saw her get up and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep.

³²As for Mary, when she came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ³³"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews also who had come with her, he was

moved in the depths of his spirit and troubled. ³⁴Then he asked, "Where have you laid him?" They answered, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵And Jesus wept.

³⁶The Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "If he could open the eyes of the blind man, could he not have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸Jesus was deeply moved again and drew near to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across it. ³⁹Jesus ordered, "Take the stone away." Martha said to him, "Lord, by now he will smell, for this is the fourth day." ⁴⁰Jesus replied, "Have I not told you that if you believe, you will see the Glory of God?" ⁴¹So they removed the stone.

Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you hear me always; but my prayer was for the sake of these people, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When Jesus had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped in a cloth. So

26. 1 Jn 3, 14

27. Mt 16, 16

35. Lk 19, 41

40. 1, 14; 2, 11; 4, 23

41. 17, 1; Mt 14, 19; 1 K 18, 36

43. 5, 27

44. 19, 40; 20, 5

46. Lk 16, 31

11:25. Many manuscripts read: "I am the resurrection and the life."

like him, walk by day, that is, in accordance with the divine plan, will not stumble; Christ will be for them the light of the world.

I believe that you are the Christ (27). What more extraordinary profession of faith is there than Martha's! It is like Peter's (Mt 16:16) and in a short while, it will be Mary who will tell about the resurrection to the same apostles. Truly the Gospel is not male chauvinist, nor does it enthrone ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Father, I thank you... (v.41). This act of thanksgiving is the only one we read in John, aside from the long prayer in Chapter 17 which is full of praise for the Father. We read another such prayer in Luke 10:21. These recorded acts of thanksgiving may seem very few considering that thanksgiving is an essential attitude in a Christian, but Jesus expressed his act of thanksgiving in all he did. In his mortal existence, he dispossessed himself of his own will and power

so that the Father could use him for his greater glory (Jn 12: 27-28).

Untie him (v. 44). For burial the Jews bound their dead with linen. But this word "to untie" means something more. It was the expression used by the primitive Church in referring to forgiveness of sins. Like Lazarus, one who receives pardon returns to life.

• THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Caiaphas' words were realized but not in the sense he intended. Jesus was going to die to *gather into one the scattered children of God* (v. 52).

The worldwide effect of Christ's resurrection is "to gather into one the scattered children of God" (v. 52); or as Jesus himself put it "when I'm lifted up from earth I shall draw all to me" (Jn 12:32). That is to say, cross and resurrection are the source of communion and fraternity.



Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go."

The plot to kill Jesus

o ⁴⁵ Many of the Jews who had come with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw what he did; ⁴⁶ but some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called the Sanhedrin Council.

They said, "What are we to do? For this man keeps on giving miraculous signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, all the people will believe in him and, as a result of this, the Romans will come and sweep away our Holy Place and our nation."

⁴⁹ Then one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all nor do you see clearly what you need. ⁵⁰ It is better to have one man die for the people than to let the whole nation be destroyed."

⁵¹ In saying this Caiaphas did not speak for himself, but being High Priest that year, he foretold as a prophet that Jesus would die for the nation. ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the scat-

tered children of God. ⁵³ So, from that day on, they were determined to kill him.

⁵⁴ Because of this, Jesus no longer moved about freely among the Jews. He withdrew instead to the country near the wilderness and stayed with his disciples in a town called Ephraim

⁵⁵ The Passover of the Jews was at hand and people from everywhere were coming to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the Passover.

⁵⁶ They looked for Jesus and as they stood in the Temple, they talked with one another, "What do you think? Will he come to the festival?"

⁵⁷ Meanwhile the chief priests and the elders had given orders that anyone who knew where he was should let them know so that they could arrest him.

The supper at Bethany

(Mt 26:6; Mk 14:1)

+12 ¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where he had raised Lazarus, the dead man, to life. ² Now they gave a dinner for him and while Martha waited on them, Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus.

³ Then Mary took a pound of

47. Mt 26, 3	48. 15, 24; Acts 4, 16	52. 10, 16	54. 7, 1	55. 2, 12; 6, 4;
Num 9, 6; Acts 21, 24	1. Mk 14, 3	2. 11, 2; Lk 10, 40		

The Church reunites believers of all races and cultures: we call it "Catholic;" that is, universal. However, this Church is but a beginning and a sign of that which will be attained at the end of time when the whole of humanity will be reunited in Christ.

In our world, the oppression of rural and urban masses is perpetuated by preventing people from grouping together to discuss and understand their situation. This unconfessed violence opposes unity. Some current ideologies promote a struggle for liberation which attempts to unite people by targetting adversaries and continually deciding on whom to expel. But there, too, the seed of violence (for both murder and exclusion are violence) gives birth to the most oppressive societies.

Christians should be the first to notice we are living in an exceptional century in which for the first time, all peoples share the same history and

must accept a common destiny, either willingly or by force. This awareness enables them to see and to indicate the goals of human effort and they should not forget this in wasting all their energy in projects of aid for the poor.

+ Matthew and Mark also relate the incident at a supper when Mary showed her passionate love for Jesus. She loved him with all her strength, and her love, far from blinding her made her sense and respect the mysterious personality of Jesus.

Not all the apostles understood her gesture because they still had much to learn about loving Christ.

We often speak like Judas, of giving to the poor. Yet the Lord's command is not to give but to love. To love the poor is to reveal to them their call from God, and to help them grow as persons by overcoming their weaknesses and divisions and by fulfilling the mission God en-

costly perfume made from genuine nard and anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair. And the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴Judas, son of Simon Iscariot – the disciple who was to betray Jesus – remarked, ⁵"This perfume could have been sold for three hundred silver coins and turned over to the poor."

⁶Judas, indeed, had no concern for the poor; he was a thief and as he held the common purse, he used to help himself to the funds.

⁷But Jesus spoke up, "Leave her alone. Was she not keeping it for the day of my burial?" ⁸(The poor you always have with you, but you will not always have me.)"

⁹Many Jews heard that Jesus was there and they came, not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead.

¹⁰So the chief priests thought about killing Lazarus as well, ¹¹for many of the Jews were drifting away because of him and believing in Jesus.

The Messiah enters Jerusalem

(Mt 21:5; Mk 11:1)

¹²The next day many people who had come for the festival heard that Jesus was to enter Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. And they cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"

¹⁴Jesus found a donkey and sat upon it, as Scripture says: ¹⁵*Do not fear, city of Zion, see your king is coming sitting on the colt of a donkey.*

¹⁶The disciples were not aware of this at first, but, after Jesus was glorified, they remembered and realized that this had been written of him and that they themselves had taken part in this.

¹⁷The people who came with him bore witness and told how he had called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead. ¹⁸It was because of this miraculous sign which Jesus had given that so many people welcomed him. ¹⁹In the meantime the

3. Lk 7, 37	6. 13, 29; Lk 8, 3	7. 19, 40	8. Dt 15, 11	13. Ps 118, 25; 1 Mac 13, 51; Rev 7, 9
Ps 118, 25; Jn 1, 49	15. Zac 9, 9	16. 2, 22; 14, 26	19. 11, 47	20. 7, 35

trusted to them. The poor will be the ones to live the Gospel and witness to it in the world. If we are not among them we need conversion and true poverty to discover with them the Kingdom. How can we really love the poor unless we have passionate love for Jesus? When we do not, we prefer to speak of giving to the poor, whatever be the biblical reading on which we are commenting.

Six days before the Passover. Mark and Matthew give the impression that this supper happened two days before the Passover, not six (Mt 26:2). The evangelists also disagree regarding the date of the Passover. While John declares that Jesus died on the eve of the Passover (Jn 19:14), the other three say that the Last Supper took place on the same day that the Jews celebrated the Passover. According to a very ancient tradition which various Oriental churches still maintain, Jesus could have celebrated the Last Supper, not on Thursday but on Tuesday. Thus, his trial would have lasted two days: Wednesday and Thursday. (That seems much more probable than having all the sessions of the double trial of Jesus in the one morning of

Friday). And, of course, he would die on Friday, as all the texts affirm.

A possible explanation for these disagreements could be the following: The Passover is celebrated in accordance with the new moon which is not a fixed date, nor is it determined according to the same criteria by everyone. Hence, in certain years some religious groups celebrated it three days before the others. Jesus could have celebrated the Passover on the eve of Wednesday, while the majority of the people celebrated on the eve of Saturday.

■ Several foreigners (called Greeks because of their language) had been converted to the faith of the Jews. Though they did not observe the Jewish laws, they were accepted in the Temple of Jerusalem where they were reserved a yard separate from that of the Jews. The question from those Greeks offers Jesus the opportunity to announce that his kingdom will be extended through the whole earth when he will have been raised on the cross.

Unless the grain dies. Jesus will die and the universal Church will be born. Jesus allows his

Pharisees said to one another, "We are getting nowhere; the whole world has gone after him."

Unless the grain dies

■ ²⁰ There were some Greeks who had come up to Jerusalem to worship during the feast. ²¹ They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to Andrew and the two of them told Jesus.

²³ Then Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.

²⁵ Whoever loves his life destroys it, and whoever despises his life in this world keeps it for everlasting life.

²⁶ Whoever wants to serve me, let him follow me and wherever I am, there shall my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

◆ ²⁷ Now my soul is in distress. Shall I say: 'Father, save me from this hour'? But, I have come to this hour to face all this. ²⁸ Father, glorify your

Name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and I will glorify it again."

²⁹ People standing there heard something and said it was thunder; but, others said, "An angel was speaking to him." ³⁰ Then Jesus declared, "This voice did not come for my sake but for yours; ³¹ now sentence is being passed on this world; now the ruler of this world is to be cast down. ³² And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all to myself." ³³ With these words Jesus referred to the kind of death he was to die.

³⁴ The crowd answered him, "We have been told by the Law that the Messiah stands forever. How can you say that the Son of Man shall be lifted up? What kind of Son of Man is this?"

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "The light will be with you a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you. He who walks in the dark does not know where he goes. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light and become sons of light."

After Jesus spoke, he withdrew and kept himself hidden.

24. 13, 31; 17, 1; Is 53, 10; Mt 16, 21; 1 Cor 15, 36	25. Mk 8, 35; Lk 17, 33
26. 7, 34; 14, 3; 17, 24; Mt 16, 24	27. 16, 21; 18, 11; Mk 14, 34; Heb 5, 7
28. Mk 9, 27; Lk 3, 22	29. Acts 23, 9; Lk 22, 43
31. 14, 30; 16, 11; Lk 10, 18; Rev 12, 9	30. 3, 19; 9, 39
34. Ps 89, 4; 110, 4; Is 9, 7; Dn 7, 14	32. 3, 14; 8, 28
36. 11, 10; Eph 5, 8; 1 Thes 5, 5	33. 18, 32; 21, 19
	35. 7, 33; 8, 12; 9, 4; 12, 46; Jer 13, 16

lifeless body to be laid in the earth; on rising from the tomb, his same body, now glorified, will also embrace the believers united to him. The life that is now his, will be communicated to all the children of God.

Unless the grain dies. This is the law for all life that wants to be fruitful (Mk 8:34). The first believers were saying already: "The blood of the martyrs is a seed."

◆ John's gospel records on the same page both Jesus' Transfiguration (Mk 9:1) and his agony in Gethsemani (Mk 14:26).

Then a voice came (v. 28). While Jesus was in the midst of the noisy crowd something was heard: a message from heaven or simply noise? This event, insignificant perhaps for a historian, was like the fleeting presence of reality breaking

through the illusory scene in which most people are caught up. The fact that the people misunderstood his message and that later they would deliver him up to their rulers, has become of minor importance to Jesus. He looks beyond all that. Jesus knows that he cannot save the nation from historical failure, but he understands that his death will change the course of world events: he will conquer where the destiny of humankind is to be played out.

From the beginnings of our history, the ruler of this world, the Spirit of Evil, has obscured in humankind the capacity to recognize God. But God has directed the whole of creation towards a progressive growth in maturity until the birth of the New Man. Because of sin this birth comes about in a world characterized by suffering, indifference and slavery.



The unbelief of the Jews

o ³⁷ Even though Jesus had done so many miraculous signs among them, they didn't believe in him. ³⁸ Indeed the words of the prophet Isaiah had to be fulfilled, for he said: *Lord, who has believed what we proclaimed? To whom have the ways of God the Saviour been made known?*

³⁹ Why could they not believe? Isaiah also said: *"He let their eyes become blind and their hearts hard, so that they could neither see nor understand. They refuse to turn to me, lest I heal them."* ⁴¹ Isaiah said this when he saw His Glory, and his words refer to Him.

⁴² Many of them, however, believed in Jesus, even among the rulers, but they did not acknowledge him because of the Pharisees, lest they be put out of the Jewish community.

⁴³ They preferred to be approved by people rather than by God.

⁴⁴ Yet Jesus had said, and ever cried out, "He who believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me." ⁴⁵ And he who sees me, sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

⁴⁷ If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I am not the one to condemn him; for, I have come not to condemn the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ He who rejects me, and does not receive my word, already has a judge: the very word I have spoken will condemn him on the last day.

⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has instructed me in what to say and how to speak. ⁵⁰ I know that his commandment is eternal life, and I give my message as the Father instructed me.'

37. Dt 29, 1; Mt 11, 20

38. Is 53, 1; Rom 10, 16

40. Is 6, 9; Mt 13, 14; Acts 28, 26

41. 8, 56; Is 6, 1; 1 Cor 10, 4

42. 7, 31

43. 5, 44

44. 13, 20; Mt 10, 40

46. 14, 7

47. 3, 19; 8, 12; 9, 5

49. 5, 19; 6, 57; 7, 17

50. Dt 31, 26; 6, 40; 17, 2

The only way to salvation is to return to obedience, not "to God," but to the Father. And Christ had to open the way through his sacrifice: *he has come to this hour to face all this (27).*

We easily forget that the purpose of our life is to glorify God. We do not glorify God principally by constructing temples or by singing: "Glory to God!" but by personally accepting to make ourselves pleasing and living sacrifices to God. A bishop and martyr of the primitive Church, St. Irenaeus wrote: "God is glorified when man is fully alive: but for man to be fully alive is to see God."

A sacrifice is a surrender of something for the sake of something or someone else. Our sacrifice is to allow God to be our life, to make us like him and to prepare us to reflect his own Glory. This indeed requires sacrifice because God makes us pass through a death to attain this life. Through obedience to God's will, we are another and everlasting state. God is glorified when his children attain glory, that is to say, attain his own perfection and transformation through fire and the Holy Spirit.

o AN IRREPARABLE CHOICE

Jesus' life of preaching is coming to an end.

John later finds it difficult to understand how God's chosen people could remain so blind regarding their Messiah. John tries to search out the meaning of this refusal by using two texts from the prophets:

The first is a long poem dedicated to the Servant of Yahweh, a voluntary victim for the sake of his brethren (Is 53:1). It shows us the people do not willingly accept a humiliated Saviour.

The second text shows how the rejection of Christ could have been foreseen. Indeed, the ancient prophets were also ignored while they were living, thus fulfilling a mysterious plan of God.

John stresses the sin of the majority who were not committed to Christ, although within themselves they secretly respected him. Somehow the Jewish people suspected that Jesus came from God, but to believe in what he claimed was asked was another thing.

For us, too, to believe in the Gospel means to accept the Church Jesus founded. But not everyone realizes this. His word comes to us in the midst of many concerns; and usually we don't feel urged to believe it. When we disobey or neglect his word, we often think it is not grave. But actually, it is God and the word of Truth that



SECOND PART: JESUS COMPLETES HIS WORK

+13 'It was before the feast of the Passover. Jesus realized that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, and, as he had loved those who were his own in the world, he would love them with perfect love.

Jesus washes his disciples' feet

■ ² They were at supper; the devil had already put into the mind of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, to betray him ³ but Jesus knew that the Father had entrusted all things to him and, as he had come from God, he was going to God. ⁴ So he got up from table, removed his garment and taking a towel wrapped it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.

⁶ When he came to Simon Peter, Simon said to him, "Why, Lord, you

want to wash my feet!" ⁷ Jesus said, "What I am doing you cannot understand now, but afterwards you will understand it." ⁸ Peter replied, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you can have no part with me." ⁹ Then Simon Peter said, "Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!"

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "Whoever has taken a bath does not need to wash (except the feet), for he is clean all over. You are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹ Jesus knew who was to betray him; because of this he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² When Jesus had finished washing their feet, he put on his garment again, went back to the table and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call me Master and Lord, and you are right, for so

1. Ex 12, 12

2. Mt 26, 20

3. 2, 4; 10, 18;

16, 28; 17, 9; Lk 9, 51; Gal 2, 20

4. Mk 14, 17; Mt 11, 27; Lk 12, 37; 17, 7; Lk 7, 44

8. Mt 16, 22

10. 15, 3; Eph 5, 26

we reject. This is our unique opportunity; we can find no support in the Bible for the belief that we shall have successive lives and that we can, in the next life, make up for our failures in the present. The whole of eternity is decided today.

+ Here begins the second half of John's Gospel.

In the first half, through signs and discourses Jesus announced the work he was going to accomplish in the world and the glory that would be given him after he would be "raised on high." Now Jesus' hour has come, in which he will realize all that was announced.

The second half begins with the farewell discourses of Jesus at the Last Supper.

Just as in the previous chapters, each of Jesus' discourses begins with a miracle. The farewell discourses narrated in Chapters 14-17, have, as point of departure, the extraordinary act of the "washing of the feet." This gesture contains two teachings:

- the need to purify ourselves before participating in the Supper of the Lord.
- how the commitment of love is to be put into practice.

■ THE PENITENTIAL RITE

John does not allude to the Eucharist when he relates the Last Supper (Mk 14:12), but he develops the "washing of the feet".

He began to wash their feet. The poor among the Jews walked barefoot while the rest wore sandals. A traditional gesture of welcome among the Jews was to order a servant to wash the feet of the traveler (see Gen. 18:4). The apostles did not have servants, but that night, Jesus wanted to be their servant.

Jesus did not intend merely to make the apostles bodily clean and comfortable. His washing of their feet was a sacred act which symbolized purifying them in the same manner as baptism. The apostles were already in the grace of God: the word of Jesus which they received with faith had purified them (15:3). However, they needed more preparation before sharing the bread of life at the table of their Lord. All religions observe some preparatory or purification rites before offering sacred things to their members. For example, Jews observed purification rites before participating in the Passover meal.

Jesus was no less demanding: he himself

I am. ¹⁴If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also must wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have just given you an example that as I have done, you also may do.

¹⁶Truly, I say to you, the servant is not greater than his master, nor is the messenger greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷Understand this, and blessed are you if you put it into practice.

¹⁸I am not speaking of you all, because I know the ones I have chosen and the Scripture has to be fulfilled that says, *The one who shared my table has risen against me.* ¹⁹I tell you this now before it happens, so that, when it does happen, you may know that I am He.

²⁰Truly, I say to you, whoever welcomes the one I send, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the One who sent me."

²¹After saying this, Jesus was distressed in spirit and said plainly, "Truly, one of you will betray me."

²²The disciples then looked at one another, wondering who he meant.

²³One of the disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining near Jesus; ²⁴so Simon Peter signaled him to ask Jesus whom he meant.

²⁵And the disciple who was reclining near Jesus asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶Jesus answered, "I shall dip a piece of bread in the dish, and he to whom I give it, is the one."

So Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas Iscariot the son of Simon. ²⁷And as Judas took the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. And Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

²⁸None of the others reclining at table understood why Jesus said this to Judas. ²⁹As he had the common purse, they may have thought that Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast", or, "Give something to the poor." ³⁰Judas left as soon as he had eaten the bread. It was night.

³¹When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²So God will glorify him, and he will glorify him very soon.

◆³³My children, I am with you for only a little while; you will look for me, but, as I already told the Jews, so now I tell you: where I am going you cannot come. ³⁴Now I give you a new commandment: love one another.

14. Lk 22, 27; 1 Tim 5, 10; 1 Per 5, 5; 1 Jn 3, 16	16. Phil 2, 5; Eph 5, 2; Col 1, 13
17. Mt 10, 24; Lk 6, 40; Jn 15, 20	18. Ps 41, 10
21. Mk 14, 18	23. 19, 26; 20, 2; 21, 7
30. 12, 35; Lk 22, 53	31. 12, 23; 17, 1
34. 15, 12; Lk 10, 26; Gal 6, 2; 1 Jn 2, 7; 4, 11; 5, 1; Acts 4, 32	33. 7, 33
	25. 21, 20
	27. Lk 22, 3
	29. 12, 6
	32. 1, 14; 7, 39; Phil 2, 9

washed the feet of his apostles. He did not ask them to confess their sins; all he wanted was that they would humbly allow him, their Lord, to wash their feet.

This act reminds us at once of the sacraments of Baptism and Penance. There bonds of humility and mercy are forged both for the one who purifies and for those purified. Henceforth, the apostles will do what their Lord did before them, since he will send them in his name to forgive sins. But they are not to act as hierarchical officials or judges conceding pardon to sinners. They are to take the first step in humility and mercy, to likewise purify those who approach the Supper of the Lord.

The word Lord appears seven times in this chapter. With this in mind we understand that by washing the feet of his apostles Jesus

performed a significant act which shows us, in a most surprising way, who our Lord and God is, and how he acts.

◆ CHRISTIAN LOVE

I give you a new commandment. That is to say, a commandment appropriate for the advent of a new era. The Old Testament spoke of interior fidelity to God and love of neighbour, but this message remained hidden among the complexities of the Law. Besides, there are many ways of loving: even a fanatically religious person can claim to be loving God. In the New Testament Jesus says the love of God is the highest law. The example given by the Lord during his earthly life reminds us of the way to love.

Love which is like God's, aims at liberating our neighbour and enabling him to fully develop his

Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but afterwards you will." ³⁷ Peter said, "Why can't I follow you now? I am ready to give my life for you." ³⁸ Jesus answer, "To give your life for me! Truly, I tell you, the cock will not crow before you have denied me three times."

I'm going to the Father

o 14 ¹ Do not be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father's house there are many rooms and I go to prepare a place for you: did I not tell you this? ³ And as I go now to prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to me, that where I am, you also may be.

⁴ You know the way to where I am

going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going; how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said, "I am the way, (the truth and the life;) no one comes to the Father but through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know the Father also; indeed you know him and you have seen him."

⁸ Philip asked him, "Lord, show us the Father and that is enough." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "What! I have been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever sees me sees the Father; how can you say: 'Show us the Father?' ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?"

All that I say to you, I do not say of myself. The Father who dwells in me is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father in me; at least believe it on the evidence of these works that I do.

¹² Truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will do the same works that I do; he will even do greater than these, for I am going where the Father

36. 21, 28; Lk 22, 31	1. Dt 1, 29-33	2. 14, 27; 16, 33	3. 17, 24; Heb 6, 26; Phil 1, 23; 1 Thes 4, 17
6. Heb 10, 20; Mt 11, 27	7. 8, 19; 12, 46	8. Ex 33, 18	10. 10, 38; 17, 21
			12. Mt 21, 21

God-given gifts. Love according to the Lord helps the neighbour become what God wishes him to be, by passing through death to resurrection.

Moreover, while we go deeper into the mystery of divine love revealed to us through Jesus, our love becomes merged with the eternal love of God which, in the end, shall act alone through us. True love comes from God and makes us return to unity within God.

Time and again, Jesus points out the unique importance of Christian love. Later, his Apostles (e.g., 1 Jn. 4:7 ff.), and the Church would sum up his teaching on love. Love of God is shown through love of our neighbour, love of our neighbour depends on love of God. And what is it really to love God? The great saints and mystics of the Church tell us that love of God is not "to feel God", to feel devotion or affection for God. Christian love lies not in sentiment or feelings (though on some occasions we might feel affection or devotion, which is helpful), but to love God is to be determined to do what God wishes at each moment of our lives. And what God wishes of us regarding our neighbour is that we render loving service and forgiveness.

o THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

After the washing of the feet, John continues with Jesus' three farewell discourses to his apostles. Those who had lived intimately with him for several months, would soon need to discover another way of living with the risen and present, though invisible, Christ. "I was with you" says Jesus; henceforth, "I will be in you." The first of these discourses is found in Chapter 14.

Jesus' ascension to the Father, was not just an individual achievement, but opened for all of us a way to our House, not situated high above us, but in God. *There are many mansions*, that means that there is also a place for us: not just one mansion for everybody, but a place for each one, because Heaven is not like a performance which is the same for everyone in the audience. God's radiance will draw from each one the resonance only he can bring forth. Each one will be in his own mansion, being in communion with all.

Now, knowing what is the goal, we should walk towards this definitive communion. "I am the way," says Christ. He became man precisely so that we might see the Father in him. He fol-



is. ¹³ And everything you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ And everything you ask in calling upon my Name, I will do.

¹⁵ If you love me, you will keep my commandments; ¹⁶ and I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever, ¹⁷ that Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him for he is with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you. ¹⁹ A little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me because I live and you will also live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you.

²¹ Whoever keeps my commandments is the one who loves me. If he loves me, he will also be loved by my

Father; I too shall love him and show myself clearly to him."

²² Judas – not the Iscariot – asked Jesus, "Lord, how can it be that you will show yourself clearly to us and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him; and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ But if anyone does not love me, he will not keep my words. And these words that you hear are not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ I told you all this while I was still with you. ²⁶ From now on the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of all that I have told you.

²⁷ Peace be with you; I give you my peace. Not as the world gives peace do I give it to you. Do not be troubled;

13. 15, 16; 16, 24; Acts 3, 16

15. Dt 6, 4; Wis 6, 18

16. 14, 26; 15, 26; 16, 7

17. Rom 8, 26

19. 8, 21; 16, 16

23. Rev 3, 20; Pro 8, 17; 2 Cor 6, 16; Eph 3, 17

26. 14, 16; 15, 26; 16, 13

27. 2 Thes 3, 16; Rom 5, 1; Eph 2, 14; Phil 4, 7

lowed his way, so disconcerting for us, so that, meditating on his actions, we would progress towards the truth. Although in the beginning, we may not understand his thought well, with time, we will discover the Lord and understand that his way is ours. Passing through the cross and death, we will achieve our own *truth* and arrive at *life*.

I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and you in me. (v. 11 and 20). Christ makes us enter into the divine family. Thus, we no longer speak of approaching God as if he were far from us. We no longer feel as if God were a single person in front of us. We enter "into" the mysterious life of the divine Persons who share everything and who are the one and only God. Material things cannot penetrate each other; but in the world of the spirit such is possible. Christ is in the *Father* and the *Father* in *him*. They establish their dwelling within us.

In the introduction to the Gospel, John explained that all of God's actions in the world should be understood in the light of the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son. Now, he adds that the presence of God in us is due to another person, the Holy Spirit. Neither the Father alone whom no one has seen, nor the Son who made himself known, can enter into communion with men. However, they can do so by means of the Spirit, whom we should call:

God who is communicated. Hence, we call *spiritual life* everything that refers to our relationship with God.

Spiritual life includes three attitudes:

- to keep the words of Jesus: meditate on them, put them into practice and let them take root in our soul.
- then, instructed by the Spirit regarding what we should ask in Christ's name, let us ask, with all confidence, for those things which he himself desires.
- finally, let us do the same things he did. He did not multiply good works but completed that which his Father asked him to do, even when his obedience would seem to us a vain sacrifice.

I will give you another Helper (14:16). Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit whom he calls the *Paraclete*. This Greek word has several meanings. Here, we use *Helper*. The Spirit helps the believers and inspires their prayer so that it may be heard.

I will give you another Helper (or Interpreter). The Spirit enables us to understand and interpret Jesus' words throughout all time.

Lord, why do you speak of showing yourself only to us? (v. 22). Judas believed that Jesus meant he would summon them for secret meetings. That was not so: Jesus meant he would make himself known to them through interior



do not be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say: 'I am going away, but I am coming to you'. If you loved me, you would be glad that I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

²⁹ I have told you this now before it takes place, so that when it does happen you may believe, ³⁰ for I will no longer speak to you. Now the ruler of this world is at hand, although there is nothing in me that he can claim.

³¹ But see, the world must know that I love the Father and that I do what the Father has taught me to do. Come now, let us go.

The vine and the branches

+ 15 ¹ I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower. ² If any of my branches doesn't bear fruit, he breaks it off; and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, that it may bear even more fruit.

³ You are already made clean by the word I have spoken to you; ⁴ live in me as I live in you. The branch cannot

bear fruit by itself but has to remain part of the vine; so neither can you if you don't remain in me.

⁵ I am the vine and you are the branches. As long as you remain in me and I in you, you bear much fruit; but apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not remain in me is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; and the withered branches are thrown into the fire and burned.

⁷ If you remain in me and my words in you, you may ask whatever you want and it will be given to you. ⁸ My Father is glorified when you become my disciples, that is, when you bear much fruit.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; remain in my love. ¹⁰ You will remain in my love if you keep my commandments, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

¹¹ I have told you all this, that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. ¹² This is my com-

29. 13, 19; Phil 2, 7

30. 12, 31

31. Mk 14, 47

2. Jer 2, 21; Is 5, 1; Ps 80, 9

4. Sir 24, 17; Mt 3, 10; 15, 3; 13, 10; Acts 15, 9; Rom 11, 17

5. 1 Cor 12, 12

6. Ezk 15, 1

7. Mk 11, 24; 1 Jn 5, 14

8. Mt 5, 16; Phil 1, 11

10. 14, 15; 1 Jn 2, 5; 5, 3

11. 16, 20

14:30. Many manuscript read: There is little that I have to say to you.

teaching and by letting them experience peace.

The Father is greater than I (14:28). This does not contradict what John teaches throughout the whole Gospel about Jesus' divinity.

This is to be read together with 5:18; 10:30; 16:15, if we want to know something of the mystery of Christ, "true God" as spoken of in Tim 9:5; Tit 2:13; 1 Jn 5:20.

As early as the fourth century, Saint Hilary, the great bishop and defender of the faith, wrote: "The Father is greater because of being the one who gives. But as he gives the Son all that he himself is, the Son is not yet inferior to the Father."

Moreover, it is characteristic of the Son to deny himself so that he may give glory to the Father, until the Father gives him back "the Glory he had before" as said in 17:5 and 6:62. Because of this the apostles who have seen him as man among humans in the time of his humiliation should now rejoice.

The Spirit which the Father will send you (14:26). Compare with 15:26. The Holy Spirit proceeds as much from the Father as from the Son, being with them only one God.

+ In this second farewell discourse, Jesus invites us to remain steadfast, in the midst of the world. The discourse is divided into four parts:

- the parable of the vine: I have sent you to produce fruits.
- the world will hate you.
- the work of the Holy Spirit.
- In a little while you will see me again.

Firstly, the parable of the vine. Jesus uses an image from the Bible, but he changes the original meaning, as he did before when speaking of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1). The vine represents the people of Israel. Planted from selected stock, cared for by the Lord, it should have produced fruits of justice (Mk 12:1). But, this stage of history in which the kingdom of God was identified with the Jewish people ended with the coming of Jesus.

Now, *the true Vine* has taken root. Christ is the trunk from which the *branches* sprout, that is to say, all of us who live by Him. But he is also the entire plant, trunk and branches together: the Christians are really the body of Christ.

The vine was the people of Israel, and what

mandment: love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ There is no greater love than this, to give one's life for his friends; ¹⁴ and you are my friends if you do what I command you.

¹⁵ I shall not call you servants any more, because a servant does not know what his master is about. Instead I call you friends since I have made known to you everything I learned from my Father.

¹⁶ You did not choose me; it was I who chose you and sent you to go and bear much fruit, fruit that will last. For everything you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

¹⁷ So I tell you to love one another.

The hostile world

■ ¹⁸ If the world hates you, remember that the world hated me before you. ¹⁹ This would not be so if you belonged to the world, because the world loves its own. But you are not of the world since I have chosen you from the world; because of this the world hates you.

²⁰ Remember what I told you: the servant is not greater than his master: if they persecuted me, they will persecute you, too. Have they kept my teaching? Will they then keep yours? ²¹ All this they will do to you for the sake of my name because they do not know the One who sent me.

²² If I had not come to tell them they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Those who hate me hate my Father.

²⁴ If I had not done among them what no one else has ever done, they would have no sin. But after they have seen, they hate me and my Father. ²⁵ and the words written in their law become true: *They hated me without cause.*

The Spirit will come

◆ ²⁶ I will send you from the Father the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father. When this Helper comes, he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you, too, will be my witnesses for you have been with me from the beginning.

12. 13, 34; 1 Jn 1, 4 14. 1 Jn 3, 11 15. Ex 33, 11; Lk 12, 4 16. 6, 70; 13, 18 17. Rom 6, 20
19. Mt 10, 22; Mk 13, 13; Jn 17, 14; 1 Jn 3, 13 20. 13, 16; Lk 6, 40 22. Mt 5, 11; Acts 5, 40 24. 9, 41

mattered to them was the collective conduct of the community as one body. What mattered were not the individuals but Israel. Now, Jesus does not say: The Christian community is the vine, but: *I am the vine*. So each of us has to consider how he is joined with Jesus through faith, prayer, and keeping his word. Each one has to bear fruit. Jesus does not specify what these fruits should be: whether service, understanding or action for social justice or a life silently offered to God. Rather, he insists that these fruits should come from the Spirit and bear his proper seal. The success of the Church is not measured by its achievements, but by the progress of those who interiorize Christ's mystery and share in his cross and resurrection.

After making it clear that we depend totally on him, Jesus repeats his commandment of love. There is an order in the building of the Christian life.

If from the start we say: We should love our neighbour because this is the only commandment, we will achieve nothing; because each one understands love in his own way, while not having as yet interiorized the thinking of Christ. Christ asks us to first share his thinking: that is

what the expression *keep my commandments* mean. Thus we become his friends, knowing him as a person who loves us and acts in us. Later, we will produce the authentic fruit of love, whose source is Christ.

■ In spite of Jesus having returned to his Father to initiate a more effective and universal presence among humankind, Satan continues to act with power he has usurped. The hatred of those who belong to Satan is directed against the believers and the Church. Such persons are called in John's Gospel: *the world*.

Believers are destined to be hated by the world. It often happens that when a person begins to live in a more Christian and responsible way, he meets with opposition and hatred from his own family. No one knows what has aroused the hatred but the devil does, he who moves everything to discourage us.

Even in the Church, we find many who are of *the world and claim to be serving God* (16:2), when they persecute the true followers of Christ. "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you!" Jesus said this referring to those Christians who

16 ¹I tell you all this to keep you from stumbling and falling away ²when you are put out of the Jewish communities. The hour is coming when anyone who kills you will claim to be serving God; ³they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴Now I tell you all these things so that when the time comes you may remember that I told you.

I did not tell you this in the beginning because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to the One who sent me and none of you asks me where I am going, ⁶for you are overcome with grief because of what I said.

⁷Indeed believe me: It is better for you that I go away, because as long as I do not leave, the Helper will not come to you; but I am going away and then I will send him to you.

⁸When he comes, he will uncover the lie of the world and show clearly

what its sin has been, what the way of righteousness is, and how the Judgment has come.

⁹What has its sin been? They did not believe in me. ¹⁰What is the way of righteousness? The One you see no more has gone directly to the Father. ¹¹How has the Judgment come? The Ruler of this world has himself been condemned.

¹²I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth.

He will not give his own message but will speak only of what he hears, and he will tell you of the things to come. ¹⁴He will take what is mine and make it known to you; in doing this, he will glorify me. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine; because of this I have just told you, that the Spirit will take what is mine and make it known to you."

25. Ps 35, 19; 69, 4	26. 14, 26; Mt 10, 19; Acts 5, 32	2. 9, 22; Acts 26, 9	4. Mk 13, 23
6. 14, 1	9. 15, 22	12. Acts 1, 4	13. 12, 31; 14, 30; 1 Cor 3, 1

know how to win the praises of the rich and powerful and at the same time to gain positions of power within the Church. These are unable to recognize the Spirit of God who acts among the humble, and at times, persecute them with malice. Indeed they know neither *Christ* nor his *Father*.

When our hope does not come from God, trials discourage us; but when our hope comes from God, we are strengthened and remain steadfast. In the parable of the vine, Jesus said: "My father prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit."

◆ THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

In making us children of his Father, Jesus enables us to discover the intimate mystery of God. In God, there is communion among the three persons: the Father, the Son and their common Spirit.

We speak of their common Spirit, because Jesus said both: *The Father will give them another Helper* (24:16), and: *The Helper which I will send you* (15:26). Now, he says: *He will take what is mine and tell it to you: everything that the Father has is also mine* (16:15).

"The Spirit" is not a poetic figure: it is Some-

one. This has already been commented on (Jn 7:37; Jn 14:1).

Starting from the day of Pentecost, the Spirit began to act in the Church, thus showing that he was the Spirit of Christ. The unbelieving Jews thought that God was with them, but in reality his Spirit did not act among them. So it was clear that they had sinned (v. 9) *for not believing in Christ*.

What is the way of righteousness (v. 8). The righteous One is Christ and the righteous persons are those who believe in him without seeing him (v. 10).

The Acts of the Apostles records how the Spirit worked in the first disciples of Jesus. Before granting miraculous powers, the Spirit gave them joy, peace and mutual love, as well as inner certainty that Jesus had risen and was among them.

The Spirit guides missionaries; he gives them the power to perform miracles; he gives to believers the knowledge of God, new capacities for working, healing, serving and shaking up a sinful world. Throughout history, the Spirit will raise up people of faith, martyrs, prophets, and through them will transform the world. In this way, the Saviour, seemingly defeated, will be justified; and it will be evident that the loser is Satan, who already *has been condemned* (v. 11). The evil spirit, great director of the worldly show, is



The promise of a new presence

o ¹⁶ A little while and you will see me no more; and then a little while, and you will see me."

¹⁷ Some of the disciples wondered, "What does he mean by: 'A little while and you will not see me, and then a little while and you will see me'? And why did he say: 'I go to the Father'?" ¹⁸ And they said to one another, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand."

¹⁹ Jesus realized that they wanted to question him; so he said to them, "You are puzzled because I told you that in a little while you will see me no more, and then a little while later you will see me."

²⁰ Truly, I say to you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy.

²¹ A woman in childbirth is in distress because her time is at hand. But after the child is born, she no longer remembers her suffering because of such joy: a man is born into the world.

²² So you feel sorrowful now, but I will see you again; and your hearts

will rejoice in such a way that no one will take your joy from you. ²³ In that day you will not ask me anything. Truly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my Name, he will give you. ²⁴ So far you have not asked in my Name; so ask and receive that your joy may be full.

²⁵ I taught you all this in veiled language, but the time is coming when I shall no longer speak in veiled language, but will tell you plainly of the Father.

²⁶ In that day you will ask in my Name and it will not be for me to ask the Father for you, ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and you believe that I came from the Father. ²⁸ As I came from the Father and have come into the world, so I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

²⁹ The disciples said to him, "Now you are speaking plainly and not in veiled language!" ³⁰ Now we see that you know all things, even before we question you. Because of this we believe that you came from God."

³¹ Jesus answered them, "You say,

16. 7, 33; 14, 19 17. 17, 10 20. Lk 5, 35; Rev 11, 10 21. Is 26, 17; Rom 8, 22 22. Lk 6, 21
Is 66, 8; Jn 14, 19; 20, 20; Acts 2, 46; 2 Cor 4, 17 23. 14, 20 24. 15, 11; 1 Jn 1, 4 25. 16, 4/26. 16, 23

displaced and his influence limited. A new force, which is the Spirit, enters history and guides us towards the total truth.

o JESUS IN OUR MIDST

Jesus is in our midst, but to be aware of his presence requires faith. He himself said: "You will see me because you live and I also live." It is not important that we feel his presence but what matters is to persevere in his ways. In order to attain mature faith, it is necessary that we be deprived of the consolation of his presence for more or less prolonged periods: *a little while and you will not see me*.

For his disciples this was verified for the first time at the moment of his death; later they saw him risen from the dead. This will be verified for us at the end of time, when we discover the glorious Christ whom we have awaited in faith. No one should feel overconfident during those moments when Christ allows his presence to be felt, for example, after a conversion. When everything seems easy we should not look down on

those to whom the Lord does not seem to grant the same favours we might receive. *In a little while*, perhaps, the Lord will leave us in darkness.

After Jesus had risen from the dead, a real companionship would be established between him and his disciples: he would speak to them clearly of the Father; they would ask in his name.

I will tell you plainly . . . The ingenuous response of the apostles in v. 29 underlines in contrast what Jesus expressed in v. 25. Jesus did not mean that he would return in visible form to teach, not in parables but more clearly; Jesus referred rather to the spiritual knowledge of himself and his words that the disciples were to receive from the Spirit.

You will ask in my Name (v. 26). Through a spiritual knowledge of Jesus, the believers will know what they should ask of him and he will give it to them. In the same manner, they will know the things which God does not want to give, and because of that, they will neither desire nor ask for them.



that you believe! ³² The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.

³³ I have told you all this, so that in me you may have peace, even though you have trouble in the world. Courage! I have overcome the world."

Prayer of Jesus for the new holy people

+ 17 ¹After saying this, Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; give glory to your Son, that the Son may give glory to you, ² through the power you gave him over all mortals, to bring eternal life to all you have entrusted to him. ³For this is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and the One you sent, Jesus Christ.

⁴ I have glorified you on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ Now, Father, give me in your presence the same Glory I had with you before the world began.

⁶ I have made your name known to the people you gave me from the

world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they kept your word. ⁷ And now they know that all you have given me comes indeed from you. ⁸ I have given them the teaching I received from you, and they received it and know in truth that I came from you; and they believe that you have sent me.

⁹ I pray for them; I do not pray for the world but for those who belong to you and whom you have given to me – ¹⁰ indeed all I have is yours and all you have is mine – and now they are my glory. ¹¹ I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world whereas I am going to you. Holy Father, keep them in your Name, the Name that you have given me, so that they may be one, just as we are one.

¹² When I was with them, I kept them safe in your Name, and not one was lost except the one who was already lost, and in this the Scripture was fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you and I leave my message in the world that my joy may be complete in them.

¹⁴ I have given them your message

32. Zac 13, 7; Mt 26, 31; Lk 22, 31

1. 11, 41; 12, 23; 13, 1

5. 1, 1; 8, 58; Phil 2, 6

10. 1 Jn 2, 16

33. 14, 27; 2 Tim 3, 12

2. 5, 21; 6, 39; Mt 28, 18

6. Ex 3, 13; Ps 22, 23; Heb 2, 12

12. Ps 41, 9; 109, 4; Acts 1, 16

Rom 8, 37; 1 Thes 1, 6; 2 Thes 1, 4

3. Wis 15, 3; Jer 24, 7; 31, 31; Ezk 36, 25

9. 3, 16; 12, 31

+ ONE AND HOLY

Priestly Prayer is the name many give to that prayer in which Christ, before he died, offered to sacrifice his own life, as both priest and victim (v. 19). The word to *consecrate* applied to two things: the priest was consecrated, that is, was made worthy to offer the sacrifice, and also consecrated (made holy) the victim on sacrificing it.

Jesus put to an end the form of worship of the Old Testament which the Jews rendered to God for centuries. That people were *holy*, that is to say, their mission among all the nations was to serve the Holy God, whom they knew by a special privilege.

Jesus prays for his own so that they may become the new holy people, that is consecrated to God, this time, according to the truth (v. 17). He will pour over them the Spirit of Truth, who has been promised to Israel, and who will instruct us interiorly.

Keep in your Name (v. 11). In other words: keep in the radiance of your own sanctity, with which you embrace your Son. At that moment Christ prayed for his Church, to whom he entrusted his own mission. The principal duty of the Church is to know God. (The word to *know* is repeated seven times, which clearly shows that it expresses the essence of the discourse). Whatever the situation of the Church might be, its proper and indispensable mission will be to keep and proclaim the true knowledge of God and the commandment of his Son.

Jesus also wants each of his own to know God. This knowledge comes to us when we interiorize the word of God, persevere in prayer and join community celebrations. In this, we will have the help of the Holy Spirit, from whom come the gifts of knowledge and wisdom (Col 1:9). From knowledge will spring good works and love; this is the beginning of *eternal life* (v. 3) in which we will see God as he is (1 Jn 2:3).

and the world has hated them because they are not of the world; just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask you to remove them from the world but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They shall not be of the world, for I am not of the world.

¹⁷ Consecrate them in the truth – your word is truth – ¹⁸ for I have sent them into the world as you sent me into the world. ¹⁹ For their sake, I go to the sacrifice by which I am consecrated, so that they too may be consecrated in truth.

²⁰ I pray not only for these but also for those who through their word will believe in me. ²¹ May they all be one as you Father are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us; so the world may believe that you have sent me.

²² I have given them the Glory you have given me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in

me. Thus they shall reach perfection in unity and the world shall know that you have sent me and I have loved them just as you loved me.

²⁴ Father, since you have given them to me, I want them to be with me where I am and see the Glory you gave me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵ Righteous Father, the world has not known you but I know you, and these have known that you have sent me. ²⁶ As I revealed your Name to them, so will I continue to reveal it, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I also may be in them."

The arrest of Jesus

18 ¹ When Jesus had finished speaking, he went with his disciples to the other side of the Kidron

14. 15, 18 15. Mt 5, 13; 1 Cor 5, 10; Lk 23, 32
19. 1 Cor 1, 30; 5, 8; Heb 2, 11 23. 1 Cor 6, 17; Gal 2, 20; Eph 1, 4; 4, 3
26. Rom 8, 39 1. Mk 14, 43; Mk 14, 26; 2 S 15, 23

17. 2 Thes 3, 3; 1 Jn 5, 18 18. 1 Pet 1, 22
24. 12, 26; Gen 45, 13

Christ prayed that his Church might be one, that is to say, that it might be the sign of unity in a divided world. It is not enough that Christ is preached; it is also necessary for the world to see in its midst the Church, one and united.

Catholic Church, means, *universal*. In the Church no one is a stranger. One Church, through one same spirit, and through the visible unity of its members.

The history of the Church seems to run counter to the prayer of Christ. Jesus desired unity; the evangelists relate how he named Peter as visible head of the apostolic group and the entire Church. However, to maintain unity among people of different temperaments and various cultures requires much love and understanding.

From the beginning some began to reject the faith as taught by the apostles, and several groups or sects appeared.

For historical reasons, the countries of the Roman world were divided into two main empires: one of the Orient, with the patterns of Greek culture and that of the Occident (Europe), where the medieval culture developed after the invasions of the barbaric peoples and contact between the Christians of these two parts became very difficult. Because they lived the same faith with different traditions and religious practices they began to consider them-

selves as having different religions. That was how the Oriental churches, that is, the Orthodox, separated from the Roman Church.

Much later, the negligence of the hierarchy in not ending the abuses and disorders, was the occasion which brought the Protestants or Evangelicals to found new churches which they called reformed churches. This separation, however, had deeper political, social and economic roots. It was part of a cultural crisis which obliged Christians to revise their views regarding the Bible, philosophy and politics. According to whatever stand one took concerning these issues, a person joined the Protestants or stayed with the Catholic Church. In our times, these past difficulties are seen more clearly. Many Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants are attempting to unite as believers.

At the same time, however, new problems are observed within each Church. Today Christians disagree and are split, not only in their political options, but in their understanding of Christ and their views on how his message is best delivered in our time.

Ecumenism, that is, efforts to reconcile in truth and bring the Churches together, therefore, demands that we overcome the new dissensions threatening the internal unity of the Church. All of us have to work so that the unity of all Christians may be realized as Christ desires, and by the means he wants.

Valley, a garden was there which Jesus and his disciples entered.

² Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place since Jesus had often met there with his disciples. ³ He led soldiers of the Roman battalion and guards from the chief priests and Pharisees, who went there with lanterns, torches and weapons.

⁴ Jesus knew all that was going to happen to him; he stepped forward and asked, "Who are you looking for?" ⁵ They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus said, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, stood there with them.

⁶ When Jesus said, "I am he", they moved back and fell to the ground. ⁷ He then asked a second time, "Who are you looking for?" and they answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." ⁸ Jesus replied, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, let these others go." ⁹ Thus what Jesus had said came true: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

¹⁰ Simon Peter had a sword; he drew it and struck Malchus, the High Priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. ¹¹ But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"

¹² So the guards and the soldiers, with their commander, seized Jesus and bound him; ¹³ and they took him first to Annas. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the High Priest that year; ¹⁴ and it was Caiaphas who had told the Jews: "It is better that one man should die for the people."

¹⁵ Simon Peter with another disciple followed Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the High Priest, they let him enter the courtyard of the High Priest along with

Jesus, ¹⁶ but Peter had to stay outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the High Priest went out and spoke to the maidservant at the gate and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then, this servant on duty at the door said to Peter, "So you also are one of his disciples?" But he answered, "I am not."

¹⁸ Now the servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire and were standing and warming themselves because it was cold, and Peter also was with them warming himself.

¹⁹ The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in places where the Jews meet together, either at the assemblies in synagogues or in the Temple. I did not teach secretly." ²¹ Why then do you ask me? Ask those who heard me, they know what I said."

²² At this reply one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a blow on the face, saying, "Is that the way to answer the High Priest?" ²³ Jesus said to him, "If I have spoken wrongly, point it out; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

²⁴ Then Annas sent him, bound, to Caiaphas, the High Priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter stood there warming himself. They said to him, "Surely you also are one of his disciples." He denied it and answered, "I am not." ²⁶ But one of the High Priest's servants, a kinsman of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you with him in the garden?" ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at once the cock crew.

Jesus before Pilate

■ ²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the court of the Roman governor. It was now morn-



ing. The Jews didn't enter lest they be made unclean (by coming into the house of a pagan) and be unable to eat the Passover meal.²⁹ So Pilate went out and asked, "What charge do you bring against this man?"

They answered,³⁰ "If he were not a criminal, we would not be handing him over to you."³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your own law." But they replied, "We ourselves are not allowed to put anyone to death."

³²It was clear from this what kind of death Jesus was to die, according to what Jesus himself had foretold.

³³Pilate then entered the court again, called Jesus and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

³⁴Jesus replied, "Are you saying this

of your own accord, or did others say it to you?"

³⁵Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priest have handed you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶Jesus answered "My kingship does not come from this world. If I were king like those of this world, my guards would have fought to save me from being handed over to the Jews. But my kingship is not from here."

³⁷Pilate asked him, "So you are king?" And Jesus answered, "Just as you say, I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth hears my voice."³⁸ Pilate said, "What is truth?"

32. 3, 14; 12, 33 36. 6, 15; 12, 32; Lk 17, 20; 19, 12
 37. 3, 32; 8, 47; 10, 26; 1 Tim 6, 13

■ CHRIST THE KING

My Kingship does not come from this world. It is important to remember what was said regarding Lk 8:9. In the Gospel the same word means: *The Kingdom*, that is, the country that the king governs; the reign, that is the government of the king; the *Kingship*, that is, the dignity and power of the king.

In Jesus' response to Pilate the meaning to be given to the word is not kingdom, but rather *kingship* which is the power of the king.

In any case, it would be an error to understand Jesus' words as follows: "My Kingdom is in another world, therefore, the social and political problems of this world do not concern me," and think that Jesus came to give spiritual salvation, individually, to believing souls.

Likewise, it would be an error to understand the word: *You would not have any power over me unless it had been given you from above* as affirming that the authorities receive their power directly from God and that no one should take steps to replace them with others less corrupt, or less unjust, or more capable. See commentary on Rom 13:1.

Jesus with hands bound, behaves like a king before the governor, Pilate, who is captive of his office and of his own ambitions. Jesus is not a king like those of this world, because he does not exert the kind of power that people are used to obeying. Jesus, king of the Jews, has not come to revive the independent Jewish kingdom, but to establish the *Kingdom of Truth*, which God promised them for centuries.

Yet truth does not win with arms, but thanks

to the testimony of those who live according to the truth. Witnesses of the truth are often persecuted, but they themselves do not persecute others.

My kingship does not come from this world. Jesus is unlike other authorities who have gained their positions through force, or have won in an election. He has been sent and anointed by the Father.

Pilate on the other hand, had been appointed by the Emperor of Rome and owed his career as much to his own ambition as to several protectors. How could such a man have power over the Son of God and have him crucified for fear of the people, if it were not to fulfill a decree from on High? Indeed, not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father allowing it.

God would not permit human creatures to destroy the destiny of his Son. He cares for each one of us in such a way that even the injustice that is committed against us serves his plans for our good. And because our fate depends at the same time on the Father and on human authorities, we should believe that he takes advantage of their decisions to carry out his own purposes even when their power is of this world, that is to say, of a very questionable legitimacy.

Pilate condemned Jesus unwillingly. Having oppressed and shamelessly exploited the Jews he feared the denunciations that they might make to Caesar against him. The condemnation of Jesus, however, meant for him nothing more than the death of one more Jew: he did not bear the whole guilt, since that type of justice was the result of the Roman colonial system.

Caiaaphas, instead, the anointed High Priest

Pilate then went out to the Jews again and said, "I find no crime in this man."³⁹ Now, according to a custom, I must release a prisoner of yours at the Passover. With your agreement I will release for you the King of the Jews."⁴⁰ But, they insisted and cried out, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

19¹ Then Pilate had Jesus taken away and scourged.² The soldiers also twisted thorns into a crown and put it on his head. They threw a cloak of royal purple around his shoulders³ and began coming up to him and saluting him, "Hail, king of the Jews", and they struck him on the face.

⁴ Pilate went outside yet another time and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out and I want you to know that I find no crime in him."⁵ Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak and Pilate pointed to him saying, "Here is the man!"

⁶ On seeing him the chief priests and the guards cried out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate replied, "Take him yourselves and have him crucified, for I find no case against him."⁷ The Jews then said, "We have a Law, and according to the Law this man must die because he made himself Son of God."

⁸ When Pilate heard this he was more afraid.⁹ And coming back into the court he asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ Then Pilate said to him,

"You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you just as I have power to crucify you?"¹¹ Jesus replied, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is even more guilty."

¹² Because of this Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not a friend of Caesar. Anyone who makes himself king is defying Caesar."

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he had Jesus brought outside to the place called the Stone Floor – in Hebrew *Gabbatha* – and there he seated him in the judge's seat.¹⁴ It was the Preparation Day for the Passover, about noon. So Pilate said to the Jews, "Here is your king."¹⁵ But they cried out, "Away! Take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate replied, "Shall I crucify your king?" And the chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

¹⁶ Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified, and they took charge of him.

Jesus is crucified

¹⁷ Bearing his own cross, Jesus went out of the city to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew: *Golgotha*.¹⁸ There he was crucified and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus was in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice written and fastened to the cross that read: *Jesus the Nazorean, King of the Jews*.

38. Acts 24, 25; 26, 28 Mk 15, 6 39. 6, 39; 17, 12 40. Acts 3, 14 2. 1 Cor 1, 23; Lk 23, 11
3. Lk 50, 6 5. Lk 53, 4 7. Lev 24, 16; Jn 5, 18 11. Ps 82; Wis 6, 3; Rom 13, 1
17. Mk 15, 21; Gen 22, 6 18. Lk 53, 12

of God, could not condemn Jesus without slandering knowingly his deeds and his word. So he was more guilty (11).

We have no other king but Caesar (v. 15). Thus shouted the crowd impelled by the leaders, although they hated the Romans and their emperor. In fact, several years later the Jews

would have no other king but Caesar, and this king would destroy them.

Pilate wanted to save the life of his prisoner when he presented him in his disfigured condition. But instead he wounded the pride of the Jewish people: a Christ the King humiliated – this they could not accept.



²⁰ Many Jewish people saw this title because the place where Jesus was crucified was very close to the city. It was, moreover, written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests said to Pilate, "Do not write: 'The king of the Jews'; but: This man claimed to be king of the Jews." ²² Pilate answered them, "What I have written, I have written."

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one part for each of them. But as for the tunic it was woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots to decide who will get it." This fulfilled the words of Scripture: *They divided my clothing among themselves; they cast lots for my garment.* And this was what the soldiers did.

◆ THE MOTHER OF THE BELIEVERS

At the moment of man's fall, Eve was with Adam. Now, at the moment of restoration, that is of the second creation, another woman is with the Son of Man, the second Adam. Mary has neither spouse nor son who can receive her, and for the Jews, a woman who remains alone would be considered cursed. Jesus entrusts Mary to John, and also, John to Mary. John testifies having heard both phrases. Notice that he writes: Jesus said to *the* Mother, and not, to *his* mother. This is a new symbolic gesture of Jesus. Mary will be the Mother of believers.

Through this last deed of Jesus, the Church discovered something about the mystery of the Christian life. The believer is a member of a spiritual family. As a child needs a father and a mother to grow normally, so too, does the believer need Mary and the heavenly Father. This is an unchanging doctrine of the Church, which in no way attempts to make the creature equal with the Creator. The believer who has taken Mary in his home, like John, will never be a fanatic or a man of quibbling faith, or have the features hardened and at times, be embittered like orphans who were deprived of a mother's love. There is a form of humility, joy and interior peace, of simple wholesome devotion proper to those who, living in the Catholic Church, have known how to open their doors to Mary without throwing out Christ.

Jesus' last words

◆ ²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister Mary, who was the wife of Cleophas, and Mary of Magdala. ²⁶ When Jesus saw the Mother, and the disciple, he said to the Mother, "Woman, this is your son." ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple "There is your mother." And from that moment the disciple took her to his own home.

○ ²⁸ After that Jesus knew that all was now finished and he said, *I am thirsty* as it was written in Scripture ²⁹ A jar full of bitter wine stood there so, putting a sponge soaked in the wine on a hyssop stalk, they raised it to his lips. ³⁰ Jesus took the wine and said, "It is accomplished." Then he bowed his head and gave up the spirit.

The pierced Christ

+ ³¹ As it was Preparation Day, the

26. Ps 22, 18
30. 2 Tim 4, 7

25. Mk 15, 40
31. Dt 21, 22; Gal 3, 13

26. 13, 23; 20, 2; 21, 7
Ps 22, 15

28. 13, 1; Lk 12, 50; Ps 69, 21

○ *I am thirsty.* Jesus is tortured by thirst. But he also thirsts that the Kingdom of his Father may be realized in the world. He thirsts for selfless love from those who may share his deepest thoughts and are willing to follow him until Calvary.

It is accomplished. Jesus drank the cup of sorrow and humiliation to the last drop. The Father had placed it in his hands as the means for becoming the Saviour we need. The Work of the Son of God made flesh, which should be nothing less than a new creation of the world, is accomplished. The earthly existence of the Son of God comes to an end, and from the seed planted in the earth will come forth the New Man.

The preparatory times of the Jewish religion in which the Law occupied first place and the fear due to unforgiven sins was never lost, are accomplished. A stage of history has ended, in which the rest of humanity had been dragged by its fears, and acceptance of its deadly fate which was a form of its slavery to the Evil Spirit.

Now begins a new era in history, the era of the New Covenant of God with humanity. The Spirit will be communicated to the Church. John says *Jesus commended his spirit*, a word which also indicated that he was giving his Spirit to us.

+ THE SACRED HEART

In Jesus' death as in his life, there are many details that enable us to understand his sacrifice



Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the cross during the sabbath, as this sabbath was a very solemn day. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the condemned men broken, so they might take away the bodies.

³² The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who had been crucified with Jesus. ³³ When they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead; so they did not break his legs. ³⁴ One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a lance and immediately there came out blood and water.

³⁵ This is the testimony given by one who saw it; his testimony is true and Another knows that he speaks the truth. This man gives his witness so that you may believe as well. ³⁶ All this happened to fulfill the words of Scripture. *Not one of his bones shall be broken.* ³⁷ Another text says: *They shall look on him whom they have pierced.*

³⁸ After this, Joseph of Arimathea approached Pilate, for he was a dis-

ciple of Jesus, although secretly, for fear of the Jews. And he asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate agreed. So, he came and took away his body.

³⁹ Nicodemus, the man who earlier had come to Jesus by night, also came and brought a jar of myrrh mixed with aloes, about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices, following the burial custom of the Jews.

⁴¹ There was a garden in the place where Jesus had been crucified, and, in the garden, a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² As the tomb was very near, they buried Jesus there because they had no time left before the Jewish Preparation Day.

The Lord is risen

20 ¹ Now, on the first day after the sabbath, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark and she saw that the stone blocking the

34. 7, 37; 1 Jn 5, 6
38. Mk 15, 42

36. Ex 12, 46; Num 9, 12; Ps 34, 20
40. 11, 44; 12, 24

1. Acts 20, 7

37. Zac 12, 10; Rev 1, 7

better, if we see them in the light of the Old Testament.

In the piercing of Jesus' heart the words of the prophet Zecharias: *They shall look on him whom they pierced* (Zec 12:10), were literally verified. John also records a prescription of the Law regarding the Passover Lamb: *Not one of his bones shall be broken* (Ex 12:46). This happened at the death of Jesus, the true victim who took the place of the Passover Lamb.

Blood and water came out. The Jews believed that only through the blood of their victims could they obtain God's pardon. Speaking poetically, first John, then later the Church, said that from the open breast of Christ came forth the sacrament of Baptism and the Eucharist, *water and blood*. From the cross, forgiveness and new life have sprung forth for us.

The open heart of Jesus invites us to discover the powerful, hidden and mysterious love that inspired his life. The disciples of Jesus who had lived with him, would find that their remembrance and emotions would be diluted and disappear with time; but they would discover, on the other hand, that there had been no word, or

deed or even silence of Jesus which had not been an expression of his love for God. From his open heart on the cross originates our devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Let us not get distracted by intellectual ideas in an attempt to explain or interpret faith; rather, let us contemplate God's love and allow it to transform us, making us like unto him.

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate: because the disciples had no means of approaching the Roman governor. Joseph and Nicodemus were disciples in "secret." Because Jesus identified himself with the common people, it was difficult for those in better social positions to integrate themselves in his group. Here we have an example of the inevitable consequences of a preferential option for the poor.

There was a garden. The place for the executions was an abandoned quarry near the walls of Jerusalem. Tombs were dug along the sides while the bottom was filled and passed as gardens. A rock projected, about four meters high, from the middle of the area. This rock was called Calvary and it was on it that the crosses were raised.

■ On the second day after the burial, it ap-

tomb had been moved away.² So she ran to Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved. And she said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have laid him."

³Peter then set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. ⁴They ran together but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down and saw the linen cloths lying flat, but he did not enter.

⁶Then Simon Peter came following him and entered the tomb; he too, saw the linen cloths lying flat. ⁷The napkin, which had been put around his head was not lying flat like the other linen cloths but it stayed rolled up in its place. ⁸Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and believed. ⁹For as yet they did not know that the

Scriptures foretold his rising from the dead.

¹⁰After that the disciples went home again.

◆ ¹¹Mary stood weeping outside the tomb and as she wept, she bent down to look inside; ¹²and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, and the other at the feet. ¹³They said, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She answered, "Because they have taken my Lord and I don't know where they have put him."

¹⁴As she said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not recognize him. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and answered him, "If you have taken him

3. Lk 24, 12

9. Ps 16, 9; Lk 24, 26; Acts 2, 27; 1 Cor 15, 4

11. Mk 16, 9

peared that Christ was alive and had gone from the tomb. The resurrection took place on the first day of the week, which henceforth would be called the Day of the Lord that is, Sunday.

In Luke's gospel, after Jesus' resurrection he helps his disciples revive their faith and hope. Here, instead we see the believers silently contemplating the risen Lord. Christ appears to Mary who does not recognize him. When he stands in the midst of his disciples, he has to show his wounds to prove that it is he himself, he who had died. Jesus is among them, but his appearance is that of a stranger, and his spiritually transformed body, radiates the victory over sin and death.

Then Peter arrived. Several texts record that Peter was both a witness to the empty tomb and of Jesus risen from the dead (Lk 24:12 and 24:44; 1 Co 15:5). Our faith is supported primarily by the testimony of the apostles, and especially by the testimony of the head of the apostles.

He saw the linen cloths lying flat. The *linens* designate the sheet, about 4 meters long, spread under the body from the feet to the head and then, above the body from the head to the feet; they also refer to the bands that tied the two ends of the sheet. The dead person's face was wrapped with a separate cloth, the *napkin* which was tied under the chin and over the head.

The sheet and the bands were lying where the body had been but were flat for, the body inside them had dematerialized, leaving an

extraordinary impression on the sheet, which is still seen today in the venerated relic in Turin. The napkin, which was rolled in the other direction staved as it was.

Jesus had not returned to life with his earthly body. This had dematerialized, so when we speak of the risen body of Jesus, we refer to something we have never experienced on earth. Those who have had dreams and visions of Jesus have only seen images of him, but they have not seen him, except for only a few of the most eminent saints.

◆ Do not hold on to me, I have not yet ascended to my Father (v. 17). Before his death, Jesus did not disapprove of the passionate feelings and actions of Mary. But now this familiar gesture to take possession of her loved Master is no longer appropriate.

He is now the Risen One and though he lets himself be seen by his disciples for a few days, he is in the Glory of the Father. His disciples must relinquish the physical presence of Jesus with which they felt so much at ease. From now on the followers or the brothers and lovers of Jesus will embrace him in a secret and marvellous way when they are given gifts of prayer and faith. It is then that the contemplative spirit, who is represented by Mary, may enjoy by himself the whole of Christ (see Song 3:4)

I have not yet ascended to my Father. Jesus is revealing the great desire which filled his life. He came from God and must return to the

away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary". She turned and said to him, "Rabboni" – which means, *Master*. ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me; you see I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father, who is your Father, to my God, who is your God."

¹⁸So Mary of Magdala went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord, and this is what he said to me."

o ¹⁹On the evening of that day, the first day after the sabbath, the doors were locked where the disciples were, because of their fear of the Jews, but Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, "Peace be with you;" ²⁰then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples kept looking at the Lord and were full of joy.

²¹Again Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." ²²After saying this he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit; ²³for those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained."

²⁴Thomas, the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵The other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he replied, "Until I have seen in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶Eight days later, the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Despite the locked doors Jesus came in. He stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

17. 14, 28; 16, 7; Ps 22, 23; Mt 12, 49; 28, 10; Rom 8, 29; Heb 2, 11
19. 14, 18; Mk 16, 14; Lk 24, 36 20. 16, 22 22. 7, 39; Acts 1, 8; Gen 2, 7; Ezk 37, 9; 1 Cor 15, 45
23. Mt 16, 19; 18, 18 25. 1 Cor 9, 1; 1 Jn 1, 1 27. Mk 16, 14; Lk 24, 25; Mt 28, 18

Father. This is "the greatest love in the world". All the love that Jesus has for us is but a manifestation of that other love, because God the Father is the fountain and the goal of all love. See the commentary on Mt 19:16 in this regard.

It is not by chance that the word *Lord* is again repeated seven times, the last time by Thomas: "You are my Lord and my God". This expresses the faith of the Church.

The risen Jesus' apparitions to his disciples, besides fostering their hope and making them qualified witnesses of his resurrection were necessary for their spiritual formation. The disciples had to learn to recognize Jesus no longer through their senses but through faith. They had to learn to follow and love Jesus no longer physically present but present through the Spirit pouring faith and love into their hearts. Likewise, we have to learn to recognize and follow Jesus in the dim light of faith, in desolation as well as in consolation, thus we will be among those whom Jesus blesses: Happy are those who believe without seeing me (v. 29).

o Just as in the first creation God infused life into man, so, too, Jesus' breath communicates life to the new spiritual creation. Christ who died to take away the sin of the world, now leaves to his own, the power to forgive.

Thus the hope of the Biblical people has been

realized. God led them in such a way that they felt the universal presence of sin and so they offered animals in the Temple uninterruptedly to appease God. But that river of blood failed to destroy sin, and the priests themselves offered sacrifices for their own sins before praying to God for the others. Ceremonies and rites had no power to purify the heart or to give the Holy Spirit.

But now, in the person of Jesus risen from the dead, a new world has begun. Although humanity may continue to sin, already the first of its sons, the "eldest brother of them all" is sharing fully the holy life of God.

Those who strive for the spiritual life, suffer above all, because they are keenly aware of the universal presence of sin. Their deep sorrow is in not yet having attained total liberation from sin. Hence for them, the forgiveness of sin is recognized as the greatest gift given to the Church.

The capacity to forgive is the only power able to release the great tensions within humankind. Although it does not easily conquer hearts, it is an invaluable secret and the Church should consider it as its own particular treasure.

One who does not know how to forgive does not know how to love. On making us aware of sin and purifying us from it, the Church helps us demonstrate a more authentic love for the neighbour.



²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands; stretch out your hand and put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe."

²⁸ Thomas then said, "You are my Lord and my God". ²⁹ Jesus replied, "You believe because you see me, don't you? Happy are those who believe although they do not see."

Conclusion

³⁰ There were many other signs that Jesus gave in the presence of his disciples but they are not recorded in this book. ³¹ These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; believe and you will have life through his Name.

Appendix: the appearance of Jesus by the lake

+ 21 ¹ After this Jesus revealed himself to the disciples by the Lake of Tiberias. He appeared to them in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas who was called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples were

together; ³ and Simon Peter said to them, "I am going to fish." They replied, "We will come with you" and they went out and got into the boat. But they caught nothing that night.

⁴ When day had already broken, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus called them, "Children, have you anything to eat?" They answered, "Nothing." ⁶ Then he said to them, "Throw the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they had lowered the net, they were not able to pull it in because of the great number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" At these words, "It is the Lord", Simon Peter put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and jumped into the water.

⁸ The other disciples came in the boat dragging the net full of fish; they were not far from land, about a hundred meters.

⁹ When they landed, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them,

29. 4, 48; 1 Pet 1, 8

31. 3, 15; 1 Jn 5, 13; Acts 3, 16

1. Lk 5, 1

9. Mt 4, 11; Lk 24, 41

+ Jesus appears this time near Lake Tiberias. This delightful story is filled with divine presence as Christ stands on the lonely lake shore in the light of dawn. The apostles see a stranger, but John, the prophet, recognizes Christ.

The apostles pulled in a net full of 153 big fish. This number had a symbolic value; it expressed plenitude and universality. Such will be the apostolic work: all nations of the earth will be brought to Christ. The triple questioning of Peter by Jesus may be compared to the triple denial during Jesus' passion. Peter, too, being the shepherd of the shepherds, is a forgiven sinner. Jesus entrusts the whole Church to him: the same as in Mt 16:13. *Do you love me?* This is the first condition to be fulfilled by a shepherd in the Church.

This dialogue between Jesus and Peter expresses what being a Christian is all about. Jesus asks us every day if we love him in a special and exclusive way: *Do you love me more than these?* We answer "Yes", despite our miseries, as

Peter did; Jesus then, invites us to follow him anew, out of love (v. 22), and to share with him the responsibility of pasturing the people of God. There is no better way of following Jesus than by giving up our lives for his mission.

Jesus orders Peter to care for the Church and with this, orders us to obey. We obey freely and conscientiously not because the shepherds are always capable and infallible, but rather because they perform a necessary function of authority. We believe that historically, they are the successors of the apostles and for that reason, have received their mission from God.

The Gospel ends with a prediction of the different fates that will be Peter's and John's. Peter died a martyr's death in Rome in the year 66 or 67; John was still living in the year 90. He was the last of the witnesses of Christ and many thought he would not die until the Lord should come again; hence, the Gospel insists that Jesus had not made such a promise.

The last paragraph was placed there by those associated with John at the time of his death.



"Bring some of the fish you have just caught." "So Simon Peter climbed into the boat and pulled the net to shore. It was full of big fish – one hundred and fifty-three – but in spite of this, the net was not torn.

¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast," and not one of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" for they knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and he did the same with the fish.

¹⁴This was the third time that Jesus revealed himself to his disciples after rising from the dead.

¹⁵After they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." And Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" And Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Look after my sheep." ¹⁷And a third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was saddened because Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

Jesus then said, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Truly, I say to you, when you were young you put on your belt and walked where you liked. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will put a belt around you and lead you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹Jesus spoke like this to show the kind of death by which Peter was to glorify God. And he added, "Follow me."

²⁰Peter looked back and saw that the disciple Jesus loved, was following as well, the one who had reclined close to Jesus at the supper and had asked him, "Lord, who is to betray you?" ²¹On seeing him Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" ²²Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain until I come, does that concern you? Follow me."

²³Because of this the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus had not said to Peter, "He will not die", but "suppose I want him to remain until I come."

²⁴It is this disciple who testifies about the things he has recorded here and we know that his testimony is true. ²⁵But Jesus did many other things; if all were written down, I think that the world itself would not hold the books recording them.

13. Mt 14, 19

2 Pet 1, 14


15. Mt 16, 17; Lk 7, 42

20, 13, 25

16. Acts 20, 28; 1 Pet 5, 2

23. Mt 16, 28

18. Acts 21, 11; Mt 16, 22;



ACTS of the APOSTLES

Jesus taken up to heaven

1 ¹In the first part of my work, Theophilus, I wrote of all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he ascended to heaven.

But first he had instructed through the Holy Spirit the apostles he had chosen. ³After his passion, he presented himself to them, giving many signs that he was alive; over a period of forty days he appeared to them and

taught them concerning the Kingdom of God. ⁴Once while he was staying with them, he told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the fulfillment of the Father's promise about which I have spoken to you: ⁵John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days."

⁶When they had come together they asked him, "Is it now that you will restore the Kingdom of Israel?"

1. Lk 1, 1 2. Lk 24, 51; Lk 24, 19; 6, 13
6. Mal 3, 23; Sir 36; Mk 9, 12; Lk 18, 11

3. 10, 40

4. Lk 24, 42

5. 11, 16; 2, 33

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel tells us clearly that while Jesus proclaimed the coming of God's kingdom in his small country, he was even more concerned about forming those "apostles," that is, those sent by him, to spread the message throughout the world since they were to be the foundation of his Church.

What took place from the time of the apostles until our days? We would need many books to relate the lives of our fellow-believers in the course of the twenty centuries covering the existence of Christ's church. What is important in this history is not the mediocrity of most Christians: this is the human condition. What really interests us is knowing what were the experiences and deeds of the true believers, apostles and martyrs. The first book dealing with them is the *Acts of the Apostles*, written by Luke, the evangelist. Here, Luke tells us about the first stages of the Church in the years following the resurrection of Christ.

We are also interested in the book of Acts for another reason: in recent years, we have witnessed the collapse of many structures which had made the Church into an imposing institution, and we suspect that this enormous body will only recover its vital energy through the flourishing and the increase of authentic Christian communities: The book of Acts teaches us precisely how the early communities emerged: through the labor of the apostles and the working of the Holy Spirit.

Luke did not witness the beginnings since he was a pagan and was living outside Palestine in Antioch. But, after his conversion, he accompanied Paul in his missions, from the year 50 on. And so somehow there are two parts in Acts. In the first part, chapters 1-15, Luke gathered all that he could find out concerning the first twenty years of the Church. In the second part; chapters 15-28, Luke left us mainly the story of the activities of his master, Paul. The book was concluded in the year 62.



⁷ And he answered, "It is not for you to know the time or the moment which the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth."

⁹ As soon as Jesus said this, he was taken up before their eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ While they were still looking up to heaven, two men dressed in white stood beside them ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will return in the same way as you have seen him go there."

The disciples await the Holy Spirit

+ ¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olives, which

is a fifteen-minute walk away. ¹³ On entering the city they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. Present there were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All of these together gave themselves to constant prayer. With them were some women and also Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Matthias elected

■ ¹⁵ It was during this time that Peter stood up in the midst of the community – about one hundred and twenty in all – ¹⁶ and he said,

"Brothers, it was necessary that the Scriptures referring to Judas be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit had spoken through David about the one who would lead the crowd coming to arrest Jesus. ¹⁷ He was one of our num-

9. Lk 24, 50; Dn 7, 13; Lk 9, 34

10. Lk 24, 4

13. Mt 10, 2; Mk 3, 16; Lk 6, 13

14. Lk 8, 2; Mk 15, 40; 3, 31; 1 Cor 9, 5

17. Lk 22, 47

o Luke, the author of the Acts, dedicates his book to Theophilus, to whom he already dedicated his Gospel (Lk 1:1).

He who is acting and speaking in this first page is the Risen Christ. Jesus has passed through the gates of death and is already sharing the Glory of the Father, but for some days he wants to manifest himself to his disciples and give them his last instructions.

Jesus has fulfilled his mission among men. The time of the Spirit has come. Jesus will send him to the believers so they may carry on the evangelization of the world. The first task of the apostles will be to establish the Church. The death of Jesus had prevented him from founding this Church and, in dying, he had given this great project into the hands of his Father.

Jesus is no longer visibly among us and this is to our advantage, for we must assume our responsibilities. But the Christian community will discover, at first with surprise and then with joy, that the Spirit of God, Spirit of Jesus, is acting in their midst.

Is it now that you will restore the kingdom of Israel? The apostles still identify the reign of God with the liberation of the holy nation, Israel. In fact, God's purpose is much wider. The Gospel is to change human history, individuals, cultures, the whole of human reality. Only the

Father knows the times and the goals of this history about which people today are more and more concerned.

Jesus was taken up. It was in this way that Jesus willed to leave them, according to the culture of that time, when people thought Heaven was above the earth. But we know Heaven is neither above nor below. Jesus is in this spiritual centre – Jesus is the spiritual centre from where God directs human history.

+ The apostles cannot begin such a difficult mission before they have received the Holy Spirit. They have done everything that depended on them for this and cannot but put themselves into the hands of God and wait perseveringly in prayer for the time he has fixed.

Note the presence of Mary and also of these "brothers" of Jesus who had hardly believed in him but now take advantage of being his relatives and fellow citizens of Nazareth.

Mary, mother of Jesus, played a decisive role during those days when the apostles tried to reflect together on all they had seen and learned from Jesus, in order to clarify the message they had to give to the world. Mary, the only witness of the Annunciation and of the private life of Jesus, helped them perceive the mystery of his divine personality.



ber and had been called to share our common ministry.

¹⁸ (We know that he bought a field with the reward of his sin; yet he threw himself headlong to his death, his body burst open and all his bowels spilled out. ¹⁹ This event became known to all the people living in Jerusalem and they named that field *Akeldama* in their own language, which means Field of Blood).

²⁰ In the book of Psalms it is written: *Let his house become deserted and may no one live in it.* But it is also written: *May another take his office.*

²¹ Therefore we must choose someone from among those who were with us during all the time that the Lord Jesus moved about with us, ²² beginning with John's baptism until the day when Jesus was taken away from us. One of these has to become with us a witness to his resurrection."

²³ Then they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabbas, also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ They prayed: "You know, Lord, what is in the hearts of all. Show us, therefore, which of the two you have chosen ²⁵ to replace Judas in this apostolic ministry which he deserted to go to the place he deserved."

²⁶ Then they drew lots between the two and the choice fell on Matthias, who was added to the eleven apostles.

The coming of the Holy Spirit

◆ 2 ¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place, ² And suddenly out of the sky came a sound like a strong rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared ³ tongues as if of fire which parted and came to rest upon each one

18. Mt 27, 3

19. Mt 27, 8

20. Ps 109, 8

22. Lk 9, 51; 2 K 2, 9

25. 6, 4

2. 4, 31; Jn 3, 8

3. Num 11, 25

■ Nine days passed from the Ascension of Jesus to Pentecost. From this came the practice of extending a prayer for nine days, which is called a novena. The most important novena is the one in preparation for Pentecost, when we ask for the Holy Spirit.

The community has a leader who is Peter, and gathers around the team of the twelve who have been chosen and formed by Jesus.

Note what is required of the one chosen to take the place of Judas, that is to say, to be an apostle. He must first be a witness of Jesus' resurrection, so that he may be among men a witness of the mystery of death and life that God is working out in us. In the first community the apostles are the official witnesses of Jesus. From then on, it will not be enough for any believer to "believe in Christ in his own way"; everyone is required to have the faith of the apostles and of their successors.

Note also how a decision is made with the authority of Peter, with the responsibility of the entire community and with this *casting of lots* that is a way of making room for the working of the Spirit. This will remain as an example for the Church of all times. The successors of the apostles and the leaders of the communities cannot impose their authority from above without the agreement of the Church, but the community cannot choose her leaders without the agreement of the apostles.

◆ *Pentecost*: this means "the fiftieth day after the Passover, one of the most important Jewish feasts. Because of this numerous Jews living in foreign countries had at that time come to Jerusalem as pilgrims.

That same day the *baptism of fire* announced by John (Lk 3:16) takes place. God sends the Spirit of his Son and with this the Church is born. For the Church is not a human institution, or the work of a group of believers; it comes from God's initiative and God wills that individuals of every nation witness this achievement.

The *rushing wind* is a sign, because *spirit* means both *breath* and *wind* in the Hebrew culture. Inspired by the Spirit, Peter speaks up. He now knows the truth and believes, and this is why he can boldly proclaim it (1 Jn 15:26 and 16:3).

The achievement of Pentecost was as unique as was the Resurrection. Nevertheless it remains as the pattern of other interventions of God in history. On one hand the Spirit constantly brings about our apostolic renewals, religious awakenings, dynamic communities that become the new blood of the Church which is constantly growing old and is constantly being renewed.

The Spirit comes to give life to the Church. It also comes to confirm or affirm the believers. The baptism of fire that the apostles receive is



of them. ⁴All were filled with Holy Spirit and began to speak other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

⁵Staying in Jerusalem were religious Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered, all excited because each heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Beside themselves with amazement and wonder, they said, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Here are Parthians, Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and for-

eigners who accept Jewish beliefs, Cretians and Arabians; and all of us hear them proclaiming in our own language what God, the Saviour, does.

¹²They were amazed and greatly confused, and they kept asking one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³But others laughed and said, "These people are drunk."

Peter addresses the crowd

o ¹⁴Then Peter stood up, with the Eleven and, with a loud voice, addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all foreigners now staying in Jerusalem, listen to what I have to say. ¹⁵These people are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶Indeed what the prophet Joel spoke about has happened:

4. 10, 46; 19, 6; 1 Cor 12

6. Gen 11, 1

13. 1 Cor 14, 23

normally conferred on us through Confirmation (see commentary on 8:9).

Each one heard them speaking in his own language. This wonder contrasts with what happened in ancient times in the story of the Tower of Babel, when men, rebellious against God, ceased to understand each other's language. We understand that the Gospel gathers together the human family always divided into factions, sects or parties who do not speak the same language because each one follows his own dreams, or fears, or interests.

In the opportunity provided by Pentecost we have for the first time the gift of tongues. Peter, of course, preached in the language of the Jews and most of the audience understood him. But the Christians around Peter were given the gift of tongues and praised God in other languages. The Jews – pilgrims coming from so many nations – were able to recognize these languages and so they were amazed at hearing the "Galilean" believers. We know that the gift of tongues is one of the manifestations of the Spirit. With it one is compelled to praise God with words he himself does not understand. And he experiences a deep joy on seeing that God takes control of him and enters his innerself to make him his instrument (see 1 Cor 12 & 14).

o This is the first proclamation of Jesus' Resurrection. Peter interprets the signs that have just been given (wind, storm, tongues...). All this reveals something extraordinary that cannot be seen: Jesus has been raised and is now giving the Spirit.

I will pour out my Spirit on every mortal (17). Before Jesus' coming, the Spirit was given only to the prophets. But now he comes to the entire people of Christ, as foretold by Joel (3:1).

The sun will be darkened (20). The gift of Spirit announces the coming of a "Judgment," that is to say, an exceptional crisis in which only the believers will be saved (such crises may occur throughout history).

God had accredited Jesus of Nazareth (22). Peter clears the name of Jesus, condemned to death a few weeks before. Many people considered him as a prophet, but a defeated prophet, and Peter proclaims that God has granted him the most incredible thing that people could hope for: he has raised Jesus, fulfilling for him all the promises of Sacred History (v. 25-31): these promises will now extend to all believers.

This Jesus whom you crucified (36). This is a very bold accusation. Peter denounces the sin of the people who abandoned Jesus, the crime of the leaders who murdered him with the appearance of justice. Peter could be accused of meddling with politics, because the teaching of Jesus indicated a way of non-violent action that bothered all the violent, the self-interested and the vindictive, in fact, many of the politically involved.

What shall we do? ... Repent. In those days, to repent and to be converted meant to share the life of the infant Church which showed to the nation the way of salvation taught by Jesus. The Church did not appear as a new religion opposed to Judaism, but as a centre of more authentic life.



¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on every mortal. Your sons and daughters will speak through the Holy Spirit; your young men will see visions and your old men will have dreams.

¹⁸In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants, both men and women, and they will speak through him.

¹⁹ *I will perform miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below. ²⁰ The sun will be darkened and the moon will turn red as blood, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes.*

²¹ And then, whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.

²² Fellow Israelites, listen to what I shall tell you about Jesus of Nazareth. God accredited him and through him did powerful deeds and wonders and signs in your midst. ²³ You delivered him to sinners to be crucified and killed, and in this way the purpose of God from all times was fulfilled. ²⁴ But God raised him to life and released him from the pain of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in the power of death. ²⁵ David

spoke of him when he said: *I saw the Lord before me at all times; he is by my side, that I may not be shaken.* ²⁶ *Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; my body too will live in hope.* ²⁷ *Because you will not forsake me in the abode of the dead nor allow your Holy One to experience corruption.* ²⁸ *You have made known to me the paths of life, and your presence will fill me with joy.*

²⁹ Brothers, there is no doubt at all that the patriarch David died and was buried; his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ But he knew that God had sworn to him that one of his descendants would sit upon his throne and, ³¹ as he was a prophet, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah. So he said that *he would not be left in the region of the dead, nor would his body experience corruption.*

³² This Messiah is Jesus and we are all witnesses that God raised him to life. ³³ He has been exalted at God's right side and the Father has entrusted the Holy Spirit to him; this Spirit he has just poured upon us as you now see and hear.

³⁴David did not ascend into

17. 113.1

20. Am 5, 18; Acts 4, 12; Rom 10, 13; 1 Cor 1, 2

22. 6, 8; 7, 36; Ex 7, 3

23. 4, 28

25. Ps 16, 8

30. 2 S 7, 2; Ps 132, 11

32. 1, 8; 5, 32

32. Jn 7, 39; 16, 7

34. Ps 110, 1

Save yourselves from this crooked generation (4). This means that this entire generation was missing the unique opportunity they were given. For God asked them to take the most decisive step in Sacred History; even the Roman oppression could be overcome by a people able to put the Gospel into practice. And at the same time Jesus made them discover the love of God the Father for which the whole Bible had prepared them.

Some three thousand were added to their number. They already knew of Jesus, but were not committed to him. They were converted by the common action of the Holy Spirit and the apostles. A church in which signs of the action of the Spirit would not be seen could not say that Jesus lived in her midst.

+ Those who have been baptized feel strongly united by the new faith and long for a communal life. As they gather in private houses, the

communities are not too big and so they can know each other and share everything.

Luke tells us what they do and we must note the order of priorities:

- first the teaching of the apostles
- then comes christian fellowship, with more attention to the weak (chapter 4).
- only then may the *breaking of bread*, that is the Eucharist, be celebrated.
- finally common prayers of thanksgiving to prolong the Eucharist.

In several communities today life is lacking because the first point, which is the basis for all the rest is not established.

The Spirit of Jesus comes to us through the Word and the Eucharist: these are the sources of the Church's dynamism. But by *the word*, we do not mean the study of the Bible merely to know the Bible. The Bible helps us realize how God continues to speak to us through the actual



heaven, but he himself said: *The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right side³⁵ until I make your enemies a stool for your feet.*³⁶ Let Israel then know for sure that God has made Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ When they heard this, they were deeply troubled. And they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do, brothers?"

³⁸ Peter answered: "Each of you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ For the promise of God was made to you and your children, and to all the other nations whom the Lord our God has called."

⁴⁰ With many other words Peter gave the message and appealed to them saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So those who accepted his word were baptized; some three thousand were added to their number that day.

The first community

+ ⁴² They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of

sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ A holy fear came upon all the people for many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers lived together and shared all their belongings. ⁴⁵ They would sell their property and all they had, and distribute the proceeds to others according to their need. ⁴⁶ Each day they met together in the Temple area; they broke bread in their homes they shared their food with great joy and simplicity of heart; ⁴⁷ they praised God and won the people's favour. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Peter and John cure a lame man

3 ¹ Once when Peter and John were going up to the Temple at three in the afternoon, the hour for prayer, ² a man crippled from birth was being carried in. Every day they would bring him and put him at the temple gate called 'Beautiful'; there he begged from those who entered the Temple.

³ When he saw Peter and John on their way into the Temple, he asked

35. Lk 20, 41	38. 8, 16; 10, 48; 19, 5; 22, 16
Gal 1, 4	42. 4, 32; 5, 12; 20, 7; Lk 24, 35
1. 10, 10	3. 14, 8

achievements, either of our life, or of the community or of the world.

The expression *breaking of the bread* could mean whatever Jewish meal that began with a blessing. But very early the Christians kept this word to refer to the Eucharist which they celebrated remembering the last supper of the Lord (Acts 20:27; 1 Cor 10:16).

Joy and simplicity of heart gave witness to the change in their lives and the authenticity of their fraternal sharing. They were deeply reconciled persons.

It was not the naive joy that is easily found in Christian groups who have no thought for the problems of the world. Neither they nor their enemies could ignore that Jesus had met the problems of national reconciliation. They were enjoying the favour of the people who considered them to be concerned and responsible persons.

39. 13, 38	40. 13, 48; 13, 48; 21, 17; 46. 5, 12
47. 4, 21; 13, 48; 21, 20	

■ Sometimes we believe that Jesus cured all the sick: this is an error, since he had not healed this cripple who was in the Temple every day.

This new sign brings about another proclamation.

Why are you amazed at this? The miracle was done in the Name of Jesus, that is, in the Power over every creature that Jesus had received from the Father at the time of his resurrection. Jesus had been in our midst as the servant of the Lord (Is 42:1; 52:13), but, speaking of his Name was a way of stating his divinity (Mk 16:16; Phil 2:9).

I know that you acted out of ignorance. Yet, Peter demands that they admit their guilt. All of us must confess a similar guilt in the injustices and the crimes of our times.

He sends him to bless (v 26). This blessing comes to those who accept reconciliation with God when they see the love he revealed to us in



for alms. ⁴They both looked straight at him and Peter said, "Look at us." ⁵So he looked at them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶But Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean, walk!"

⁷Then he took the beggar by his right hand and helped him up. At once his feet and ankles became firm, ⁸and jumping up he stood on his feet and began to walk. And he went with them into the Temple walking and leaping and praising God.

⁹All the people saw him walking and praising God; ¹⁰they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, and they were all astonished and amazed at what had happened to him.

¹¹While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, struck with astonishment, came running to them in Solomon's Porch, as it was called. ¹²When Peter saw the people, he said to them,

"Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us as if it was by some power or holiness of our own that we made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus whom you handed over to death and denied before Pilate, when even Pilate had decided to release him. ¹⁴You rejected the Holy and Just One, and you insisted that a murderer be

granted freedom. ¹⁵You killed the Lord of life, but God raised him from the dead and we are witnesses to this. ¹⁶It is his Name, and faith in his Name that has healed this man whom you see and recognize. The faith which comes through Jesus has given him wholeness in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷Yet I know, brothers, that you acted out of ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸God has fulfilled in this way what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out ²⁰and the time of refreshment may come by the mercy of God, when he sends the Messiah appointed for you, Jesus. ²¹For he must remain in heaven until the time of the universal restoration which God spoke of long ago through his holy prophets.

²²Moses foretold this when he said: *The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall listen to him in all that he says to you.* ²³*Whoever does not listen to that prophet is to be cut off from among his people.*

²⁴In fact, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel onward, have announced the events of these days. ²⁵You are the children of the prophets and heirs of the covenant which God gave to your ancestors when he said to Abraham: *All the nations will be blessed through your descendant.* ²⁶If

7. 4, 10; 9, 34; 16, 18; 19, 13	10. Lk 5, 26; 7, 16	11. 5, 12; Jn 10, 23	12. 14, 15; 10, 16
14. Lk 23, 13	15. 5, 32; 10, 39	16. Jn 7, 23	17. 13, 27; 17, 30; 1 Tim 1, 14
18. Lk 24, 27	19. 2 Pet 3, 12	21. Mc 17, 11; 19, 28; Lk 1, 70	22. Dt 18, 15; Lk 9, 35
25. Gen 22, 18; Rom 9, 4; Eph 2, 12	26. 1 Pet 3, 9; Eek 18, 27		

Jesus. But the blessing is not for us alone, but rather, through us – the people of God – it reaches *all the families of the earth*.

He must remain in heaven (v 21). The coming of Jesus inaugurated the "last days" in which, on one hand, the Gospel reconciles men with God, but it also changes men's consciousness and speeds up the course of history, which in the

end, forces men to solve their problems together. Mankind is on its way to the coming of Christ and the restoration of the world, namely the Resurrection.

◆ The Jewish leaders judge Peter and John. The Holy Spirit judges the leaders of the Jews!

These leaders believe they have the truth be-



You are those who light up the day.



I can't stand,
I alone.

What powers bring me here?

My God: my people and my strength,
my greatest power

to deliver to the whole world a message:
Enough of war!

Soldiers, lay down your guns
for the dances of peace!



is first to you that God sends his Servant: he raised him to life to bless you provided that each of you turns from his evil ways."

Peter and John are arrested

◆¹ While Peter and John were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming that resurrection from the dead had been proved in the case of Jesus. ³ Since it was already evening, they arrested them and put them in custody until the following day. ⁴ But despite this, many of those who heard the Message believed and their number increased to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day, the Jewish leaders, elders and teachers of the Law assembled in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas, the High Priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly class were there. ⁷ They brought Peter and John before them and began to question them, "How did you do this? Where does this power come from?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke up, "Leaders of the people! Elders! ⁹ It is a fact that we are being examined today for a good deed done to a cripple. How was he healed? ¹⁰ You and all the people of Israel must know that this man stands before you cured through the Name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean. You had him crucified, but God raised him

from the dead. ¹¹ Jesus is *the stone rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone*.¹² There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other Name given to humankind all over the world by which we may be saved."

¹³ They were astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, considering that they were uneducated and untrained men. They recognized, also, that they had been with Jesus,¹⁴ but, as the man who had been cured stood beside them, they could make no reply.

¹⁵ So they ordered them to leave the council room while they consulted with one another. ¹⁶ They asked, "What shall we do with these men? Everyone who lives in Jerusalem knows that a miraculous sign has been given through them, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But lest this be spread further among the people, let us warn them not to tell or to teach anyone about the one whose name they call upon." ¹⁸ So they called them back and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's eyes for us to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹ Then the council threatened them once more and let them go. They could find no way of punishing them because of the people who glorified God for what had happened ²² for the man who had been miraculously healed was over forty years old.

1. 23, 6; Lk 20, 27

6. Lk 3, 2; Jn 18, 13

7. 3, 12; Lk 20, 2

8. Lk 12, 11; 21, 13

11. Ps 118, 22; Lk 20, 17

12. Rom 9, 33; 1 Per 2, 4; Mt 1, 21

13. Lk 10, 21; 1 Cor 1, 27

16. Jn 11, 47

19. 5, 29

22. Lk 19, 48; 2, 47; 3, 8; 10, 46

cause they are learned and they have authority. It is impossible for them to back down before ordinary men who refute their statements. Meanwhile Peter points out how strange it is to be arrested for having healed a sick man (v. 8).

These leaders were Sadducees and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead: Acts 23:6.

This text suggests that all of us can be the witnesses of Christ and of the truth, if we are deter-



The prayer of the community

o ²³ As soon as Peter and John were set free, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them.

²⁴ When they heard it, they raised their voices as one and called upon God, "Sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth, of the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ you have put these words in the mouth of David, our father and your servant, through the Holy Spirit: *Why did the pagan nations rage and the people conspire in folly? ²⁶ The kings of the earth were aligned and the princes gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.*

²⁷ For indeed in this very city Herod with Pontius Pilate, and the pagans together with the people of Israel conspired against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ Thus, indeed, they brought about whatever your powerful will had decided from all time to happen. ²⁹ But now, Lord, see their threats against us and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and to work

signs and wonders through the Name of Jesus your holy servant."

³¹ When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together shook, and they were all filled with Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

An attempt to share everything

+ ³² The whole community of believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed any of their possessions as his own; but rather they shared all things in common. ³³ With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and they were living in a time of grace.

³⁴ There was no needy person among them, for those who had acquired land or houses, sold them and brought the proceeds of the sale.

³⁵ And they laid it at the feet of the apostles who distributed it according to each one's need. ³⁶ This is what a certain Joseph did. He was a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning: 'The encouraging one.' ³⁷ He sold a field which he owned and handed the money to the apostles.

26. Ps 2, 1 30. 2, 22 31. 2, 1-4 32. 2, 42 34. Lk 18, 28 35. 2, 45 36. 9, 27; 11, 25

mined to be involved. Oftentimes, because we only rely on our own strength instead of counting on the Spirit of Christ, we remain silent before our co-workers or our leaders.

What we have seen and heard (20). It is John speaking: see 1 Jn 1:1.

o We can meditate on the way this church gathering develops: an event (the arrest) is shared by all; for them this confrontation with the authorities is something new. They connect what happened with the Word of God. In this case they refer to Psalm 2; then they begin common prayer: they ask for courage to continue to do God's works.

+ Once again, Luke here highlights the virtues of the first community and their effort to have everything in common.

Jesus had not asked for this; yet they were doing it, inspired by the desire of every true believer to suppress all boundaries between brothers, especially those created by money. How-

ever, placing everything in common requires not only a spirit of detachment, but also a sense of responsibility and organization. The believers in Jerusalem lived at a time when work and foresight were not very important, and they soon spent what they had, without being concerned about working, and eventually they became the "poor of Jerusalem." Paul was to organize collections in other churches in order to assist them (Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25; 2 Cor 8).

■ As children many of us were taught about, the wonders God had done in the past, as if God had only acted in those days. The Jews of that time thought exactly the same way. The Bible spoke of Moses' time when those who rebelled against God's prophet were killed by divine intervention (Nm 12:1; 16:1; 17:16). But, God is at work in the Christian community and the ordinary believers of Jerusalem are suddenly discovering that Peter, the fisherman, is not inferior to Moses. See Acts 13:11; 1 Cor 11:30.



The fraud of Ananias and Sapphira

5 ¹ Another man named Ananias, in agreement with his wife Sapphira, likewise sold a piece of land, ² but he put aside some of the proceeds for himself, and the rest he turned over to the apostles.

³ Then Peter said to him, "Ananias, how is it that you let Satan fill your heart and why do you intend to deceive the Holy Spirit after having set aside some of the proceeds of your land for yourself? ⁴ Who obliged you to sell it? And after it was sold, could you not have kept all the money? How could you think of such a thing? You have deceived not men but God."

⁵ Upon hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died. Great fear came upon all who heard of it; ⁶ the young men stood up, wrapped his body and carried it out for burial.

⁷ About three hours later Ananias's wife came but she was not aware of what had happened. ⁸ Peter challenged her, "Tell me whether you sold that piece of land for this price?" She said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹ Peter

replied, "How could you two agree to put the Holy spirit to the test? Those who buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out as well."

¹⁰ With that, she fell dead at his feet. The young men came in, found her dead and carried her out for burial beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of it.

◆ ¹² Many miraculous signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. The believers used to meet of one accord in Solomon's Porch. ¹³ None of the others dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ So an ever increasing number of believers, both men and women, were added to the Lord. ¹⁵ The people carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and on mats, so that when Peter passed by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those who were troubled by unclean spirits, and all of them were healed.

2. Jos 7, 1 3. Lk 22, 3 11. 9, 31; 11, 26

The couple's sin does not consist in having kept part of their goods. Nobody was forcing them to sell and to give the money to the community. But they wanted to deceive the apostles and give the impression they were donating everything, when in fact they were not.

We must be very careful when we speak of God's punishment. For a Christian, the only punishment is to be forever separated from God. Death itself does not mean that God wants to punish us. Yet, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira serve as a warning and a sign for the others.

Here the word church appears. Its exact meaning is "the assembly gathered by God," and before Jesus, the Jews used it to mean the new people that God was going to form in the messianic age. The believers continue to be proud of being Jewish, of being the people of God; nevertheless, little by little, the Holy Spirit separates them from the old Israel. They are already aware that they are the new

12. Jn 10, 23 15. 19, 11 16. Lk 16, 19

people gathered by God. The Church still means only the Christian community of Jerusalem. As other communities arise – other churches – "the Church" begins to refer to the entire people of God.

◆ *Many believers were added to the Lord (v 14). All the Jews had faith since they believed in God who spoke through the prophets. But it is one thing to believe in the prophets of the past after the religious authorities had acknowledged them and placed their warnings in all the books of the Bible. It is quite a different thing to recognize the prophets of our generation when the authorities and the majority of the people do not accept them. Believing in Jesus as the prophet that God had sent them and whom they had rejected, demanded a much higher degree of faith. And to accept him as Lord was the essence of Christian faith, a faith which mysteriously unites us to the living Jesus.*

+ *Could this confrontation of the apostles with the rulers of the people be similar to what*



The apostles arrested again

+ ¹⁷The High Priest and all his supporters, that is the party of the Sadducees, became very jealous of the apostles; ¹⁸so they arrested them and had them thrown into the public jail. ¹⁹But an angel of the Lord opened the door of the prison during the night and said to them, ²⁰"Go and stand in the Temple court and give the people the message of life." ²¹Accordingly they entered the Temple at dawn and resumed their teaching.

When the High Priest and his supporters arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin, the full Council of the elders of Israel. They sent word to the jail to have the prisoners brought in. ²²But when the Temple guards arrived at the jail, they did not find them inside, so they returned with the news, ²³"We found the prison securely locked and the prison guards at their post outside the gate, but when we opened the gate, we found no one inside."

²⁴Upon hearing these words, the captain of the Temple guard and the high priests were baffled, wondering where all of this would end. ²⁵Just

then someone arrived with the report, "Look, those men whom you put in prison are standing in the Temple, teaching the people." ²⁶Then the captain went off with the guards and brought them back, but without any show of force, for fear of being stoned by the people.

²⁷So they brought them in and the Council and the High Priest began to question them, ²⁸"We gave you strict orders not to preach such a Saviour; but you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend charging us with the killing of this man."

²⁹To this Peter and the apostles replied, "Better for us to obey God rather than men!

³⁰The God of our ancestors raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a wooden post. ³¹God set him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³²We are witnesses to all these things, as well as the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

o ³³When the Council heard this, they became very angry and wanted to kill them. ³⁴But one of them, a

20. 3, 15; 11, 18
32. 15, 28

21. 4, 2

28. 4, 18

30. 10, 39; 13, 29; Gal 3, 13; Dt 21, 23

happens today in many countries when the Church denounces the violations of human rights?

There are many Christians who say: it is not the same since the apostles in their time were persecuted for proclaiming Jesus; whereas now, only Christians involved in politics are punished. This, however, is not evident.

In Jesus' days, the Jewish people were both dominated and divided. Jesus spoke as a totally free man, teaching a way of freedom which, today, we would call non-violent action. And the authorities did away with him to defend the security of their nation (Jn 12:48) and their own politics. For the disciples of Jesus, to convert meant to acknowledge their complicity with those who put Jesus to death and to take the path indicated by him. Since they were living among oppressors and resentful people, this was a very dangerous road (Lk 21:12-16).

In fact, when the priests judge Peter and John, they only demand that they break away

from this man (Jesus) whom they had legally killed. To them, Christian preaching was as political as the Church is today for many people when it speaks about justice.

Proclaiming Jesus means preaching universal reconciliation (Eph 2:14) which is achieved at all levels of human life, including economy and politics. The Church would not be following Christ, nor would it proclaim Jesus as the only Saviour (5:31) if it refused to be concerned because of those who condemn entire nations to die slowly through lack of food, education and health. This accusation, however, would not be Christian preaching if it did not convince us to believe in the saving plan of God.

o Gamaliel, mentioned in 5:34, was one of the most famous teachers of the Law. The people following him were, in the Jewish religion, the most concerned about sincerity of faith and a religion of the heart. He was Paul's teacher (see Acts 22:3).

Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law highly respected by the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin. He ordered the men to be taken outside for a few minutes³⁵ and then he spoke to the assembly.

"Fellow Israelites, consider well what you intend to do to these men.

³⁶For some time ago Theudas came forward, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed and all his followers were dispersed or disappeared. ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared at the time of the census and persuaded many people to follow him. But he too perished and his whole following was scattered.

³⁸So, in this present case, I advise you to have nothing to do with these men. Leave them alone. If their project or activity is from men, it will destroy itself. ³⁹If, on the other hand, it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it and you may indeed find yourselves fighting against God."

The Council let themselves be persuaded. ⁴⁰They called in the apostles and had them whipped, and ordered them not to speak again of Jesus Saviour. Then they set them free.

⁴¹The apostles went out from the Council rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of the Name. ⁴²Day after day, both in the Temple and in people's homes, they continued to teach and to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah.

The choosing of the seven

◆ 6 ¹In those days, as the number of the disciples grew, the so-called *Hellenists* complained against the so-called *Hebrews*, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²So the Twelve summoned the whole body of disciples together and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God to serve at tables. ³So, brothers, choose from among yourselves seven respected men full of Spirit and wisdom, that we may appoint them to this task. ⁴As for us, we shall give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.

⁵The whole community agreed and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and Holy Spirit; Philip. Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenus and Nicolaus of Antioch who was a proselyte. ⁶They presented these men

39. Lk 20, 4 41. 21, 13; 1 Pet 4, 13 1. 9, 29 3. Ex 18, 17 4. 2, 42; 20, 24; 21, 19

If their project is from God (v 39). Jesus had said something similar (Mt 15:13). This, however, does not seem so obvious to us: do we not see many lasting false doctrines? Perhaps, those which last for centuries may owe their duration to the fact that, despite the errors and the great evils they bring, they have some genuine teaching necessary for some groups of people, or some nations, teaching which the church of Jesus has not known how to communicate to them, or has been unable to do so to this day.

◆ We must not think that Jesus had indicated to his apostles the way to organize the church in detail. But a conflict took place between two social groups: the Jews, called *Hebrews* who had not left their land and the *Hellenist* Jews who had been raised in Greek countries. It seemed that these *Hellenists* followed the *Essene* party who did not accept the legitimacy of the High Priests and who refrained from

participating in the Temple rituals. The clash of ideas between "Hebrews" and "Hellenists" causes reciprocal mistrust and it is felt necessary to give some autonomy to the *Hellenists*. Since the apostles identify more readily with the *Hebrews*, the others will have their own people responsible for certain functions.

The community chooses seven men and the apostles give them a share in their authority, because any mission has its roots in Christ through the apostles.

The candidates who are presented must be full of faith and Holy Spirit, because the material services of the Church are to be closely related with the community and spiritual life. It is a pity when the material goods of the church are entrusted to men able to manage money, but devoid of the spirit of the Gospel. Through them, the Church is plagued with a money-grabbing spirit and the concerns of a business institution.



to the apostles who first prayed over them and then laid hands upon them.

⁷The Word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly and even many priests accepted the faith.

The story of Stephen

+ ⁸Stephen full of grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹Some persons then came forward, who belonged to the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. ¹⁰They argued with Stephen but they could not match the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. ¹¹As they were unable to face the truth, they bribed some men to say, "We heard him speak against Moses and against God."

¹²So they stirred up the people, the elders and the teachers of the Law; they took him by surprise, seized him and brought him before the Council. ¹³Then they produced false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against our Holy Place and the Law. ¹⁴We even heard him say that Jesus the Nazarean will destroy our Holy Place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵And all who sat in the Council fixed their eyes on him, and his face appeared to them like the face of an angel.

7 ¹So the High Priest asked him: "Is it true?" He answered, "Brothers and fathers, listen to me.

² The glorious God appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, be-

fore he went to live in Haran. And he said to him: ³'Leave your land and your relatives and go to the land which I will show you.' ⁴So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God made him move to this land in which you now dwell. ⁵And there he did not give him anything that was his own, not even the smallest portion of land to put his foot on, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his descendants, though he had no child. ⁶So God spoke: 'Your descendants shall live in a strange land, they shall be enslaved and maltreated for four hundred years. ⁷So I shall call the nation which they serve as slaves to render an account for it. They will come out and worship me in this place.'

⁸He made with him the covenant of circumcision. And so, on the birth of his son Isaac, Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac did the same to Jacob, and Jacob to the twelve patriarchs.

⁹The patriarchs envied Joseph so they sold him into Egypt. But God was with him. ¹⁰He rescued him from all his afflictions, granted him wisdom and made him please Pharaoh king of Egypt who appointed him governor of Egypt and the whole of his household. ¹¹Then there was famine in all the land of Egypt and Canaan; it was a great misery and our fathers did not have anything to eat. ¹²Upon knowing that there was wheat in Egypt, Jacob sent our fathers there the first time. ¹³On the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Pharaoh came to know the family of Joseph. ¹⁴Joseph commanded that his father Jacob be brought to him with the whole of his family of seventy-five persons. ¹⁵Jacob then went down to Egypt where he and our fathers died. ¹⁶They were brought to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor at Shechem.

¹⁷As the time of promise drew near, which God had made to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸until another king who did not know Joseph came to Egypt. ¹⁹Dealing cunningly with our race, he forced our fathers to abandon their newborn infants to die. ²⁰At that time Moses was born and God looked kindly on him. For three months he was nursed in the home of his father; ²¹and when they abandoned him,

6. Num 27, 18 7. 2, 41 13. Lk 21, 15
8. Gen 17, 10 9. Gen 37 10. Gen 45

3. Gen 11, 12 6. Gen 15, 13
17. Ex 1, 4

And so the face of the Church is distorted.

Were these seven men the first deacons? Luke only says that they served, and "deacon" means to be a servant.

+ Philip will be mentioned in Acts 8:5 and 21:8. Stephen is the only one remembered here.

Being a Hellenist (see previous paragraph)



Pharaoh's daughter took him and raised him up as her own son. ²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was mighty in words and deeds. ²³ And when he was forty years old, he wanted to visit his brothers, the Israelites. ²⁴ When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and killed the Egyptian. ²⁵ He thought his brothers would understand that God was sending him to them as a liberator, but they did not understand. ²⁶ On the following day, he came to them as they were fighting and tried to reconcile them, saying: 'You are brothers, why do you hurt each other?' ²⁷ At that moment, the one who was injuring his companion rebuffed him saying: 'Who appointed you as our leader and judge?' ²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled and went to live as a stranger in the land of Midian where he had two sons.

³⁰ After forty years an angel appeared to him in the desert of Mount Sinai in the flame of a burning bush. ³¹ Moses was astonished at the vision. And as he approached to look at it, he heard the voice of the Lord: ³² 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses was filled with fear and did not dare look at it. ³³ But the Lord said to him: 'Take off your sandals for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴ I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt and heard them weeping, and I have come down to free them. And now, come, I am sending you to Egypt.'

³⁵ This Moses whom they refused saying: 'Who appointed you leader and judge?', God sent as leader and liberator with the assistance of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out, performing signs and wonders in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the desert for forty years. ³⁷ This Moses is the one who said to the Israelites: 'God will give you a prophet like me from among your brothers.' ³⁸ This is the one who in the Assembly in the desert became the mediator between the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and our fathers; and he received the words of life that he might communicate them to us.

³⁹ But him our fathers refused to obey, they

rejected him and turned their hearts to Egypt, saying to Aaron: ⁴⁰ 'Give us gods to lead us since we do not know what has happened to that Moses who brought us out of Egypt.' ⁴¹ So in those days, they fashioned a calf, offered sacrifices to their idol and rejoiced in the work of their hands. So ⁴² God departed from them and let them worship the stars of heaven, as it is written in the Book of the Prophets: 'People of Israel, did you offer burnt offerings and sacrifices for forty years in the desert?' ⁴³ You rather carried the tent of Moloch and the star of the god Rehan, images you made to worship, for this I will banish you farther than Babylon.'

⁴⁴ Our fathers had the Tent of Meeting in the desert, for God had directed Moses to build it according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵ Our fathers received it and brought it under the command of Joshua into the lands of the pagans that they conquered and whom God expelled before them. They kept it until the days of David ⁴⁶ who found favor with God and asked him to let him build a house for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ However, it was Solomon who built that temple.

⁴⁸ In reality, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by the hands of men as the Prophet says: ⁴⁹ *Heavens are my throne and earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, how could you give me a dwelling place?* ⁵⁰ *Was it not I who made all these things?*

⁵¹ But you are a stubborn people, you hardened your hearts and closed your ears. You have always resisted the Holy Spirit just as your fathers did. ⁵² Was there a prophet whom your fathers did not persecute? They killed those who announced the coming of the Just One whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³ you who received the Law through the angels but did not fulfil it."

23. Ex 2	31. Ex 3	37. Dt 18, 18	38. Gal 3, 19; Heb 2, 2; Ex 19	40. Ex 32
42. Am 5, 25	44. Ex 25, 9; Heb 8, 5	45. 2 Sam 7, 12	46. 17, 24; 19, 26; Mk 14, 58;	
Heb 9, 11	49. Is 66, 1	51. Jer 9, 26		

Stephen did not share the blind faith of the Jewish people in their Temple and its rituals. He understood that the Church had to become free from the moulds of the past and to move away from the Jews if they refused to believe.

Stephen's long discourse recalls how God's people persecuted the prophets before persecuting Jesus. It also shows that the Jewish reli-

gion properly understood tended not to give so much importance to worship and to the Jerusalem Temple.

Stephen dies as Christ did. He becomes the first martyr (*martyr means witness*). He is a witness to Christ because he proclaims him. Yet, he is even more so because he does as Christ did, he forgives his murderers.



⁵⁴When they heard this reproach, they were enraged and they gnashed their teeth against Stephen. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus at God's right hand, ⁵⁶so he declared: "I see the heavens open and the Son of Man at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷But they shouted and covered their ears with their hands and rushed together upon him. ⁵⁸They brought him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed saying: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰Then he knelt down and said in a loud voice: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he died.

◆ 8 ¹Paul was there, giving approval to his murder. This was the beginning of a great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem. All, except the apostles, were scattered among the villages of Judea and

Samaria. ²Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³Saul meanwhile was trying to destroy the church; he entered house after house and dragged off men and women and had them put in jail.

Philip proclaims the word in Samaria

o ⁴At the same time those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to a town of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ. ⁶All the people paid attention to what Philip said and they came to hear and see the miraculous signs which he did. ⁷For in cases of possession, the unclean spirits came out shrieking loudly. Many people who were paralysed or crippled, were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that town.

Simon the magician

+ ⁹A certain man named Simon had come to this town, practising magic. He held the Samaritans spellbound; and passed himself off as a very

53. Gal 3, 19; Heb 2, 2

56. Dn 7, 13

57. Heb 13, 12

58. Dt 17, 7

59. Lk 23, 46; Ps 31, 6

3. 22, 4; 1 Cor 15, 9; Gal 1, 13; Phil 3, 6

5. 6, 5; 21, 8

◆ The Resurrection is going to manifest itself in him too. Instead of Stephen who has died, the Church will have a new apostle in Saul, mentioned here, who, after his conversion will come to be "St Paul." And so God heard the prayer of Stephen for his murderers.

The illegal execution of Stephen unleashes the persecution against the Christian Hellenists. The apostles and the people of the Hebrew group were not disturbed because they were considered loyal to the Jewish religion and traditions.

Concerning Saul's attitude, see what he himself will say later in Gal 1:13.

o The persecuted Christians proclaim their faith and they start Christian communities in Samaria.

Evangelization brings happiness: God revealed himself, and through his Spirit he heals bodies and hearts. God becomes present. What a marvelous and moving thing! Joy, rather than fear and sectarianism, will always surround authentic Christians.

+ Who is the most important person in this passage? Simon? No: it is the Holy Spirit.

Philip is one of the seven. He baptizes but he cannot communicate the gifts of the Spirit.

Baptism and the laying on of hands are the two stages of Christian initiation and they refer to two different aspects of life in the church: Baptism is the renewal of the individual through faith. On the other hand, the laying on of hands expresses the transmission of the Spirit in an uninterrupted way beginning with the first men who received it at Pentecost.

This laying on of hands (which has become "confirmation" in today's Church) means the gift of dynamism and enlightenment of Christians. It should be kept – as it was in the beginning – for mature people, able to take an active part in the Church and who have already experienced the life of faith.

Simon, a magician, quack or hypnotist, gave Peter the opportunity to condemn a false understanding of spiritual gifts. Simon thought the apostles were more powerful magicians than he



important person. ¹⁰All the people, from the last to the greatest, put their trust in him, saying, "This is the Power of God, the Great One." ¹¹And they followed him because he had held them under the spell of his magic for a long time. ¹²But when they came to believe Philip who announced to them the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ as Saviour, both men and women were baptized.

¹³Simon himself believed and was baptized, and would not depart from Philip. He was astonished when he saw the miraculous signs and wonders that happened.

¹⁴Now, when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵They went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶for he had not as yet come down upon any of them since they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷So Peter and John laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying of the

apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹saying, "Give me also this power, so that anyone upon whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰Peter replied, "May you and your money perish for thinking that the Gift of God could be bought with money! ²¹You cannot share in this since you do not understand the things of God. ²²Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that you may be forgiven such a wrong way of thinking; ²³I see you are poisoned with bitterness and in the grip of sin." ²⁴Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that none of these things you spoke of will happen to me."

²⁵Peter and John gave their testimony and spoke the word of the Lord. And they went back to Jerusalem, bringing the Good News to many Samaritan villages along the way.

Philip baptizes the Ethiopian

■ ²⁶An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go southwards towards the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert road." ²⁷So he set

was and he wanted to buy the power of working certain miracles. Peter's refusal reminds us that the Spirit acts freely to do the works that best serve the glory of God and the extension of his reign. In any case, these things cannot be bought.

The manifestations of the Spirit are not always like the ones mentioned in Acts (see Acts 19:6 and 1 Cor 12). This is because God adapts his gifts to the needs of the church.

Communities of simple and poor people are those that receive more gifts of healing for the sick: because they lack normal resources, God becomes present. Prayer groups receive the gift of tongues, which is one of the gifts that strengthens piety. The gift of prophecy manifests itself in various ways according to the context. Where faith leans heavily on the certainty of divine justice and the fear of God, we see predictions and revelations of the secrets of the heart. On the contrary, among those with a more rational and intellectual formation, the

prophet is often characterized by the gift of speaking with assurance and the ability to give a definitive interpretation in which the community or the individuals recognize the voice of God.

The Spirit continues to be at work in many believers who, perhaps, neither speak in tongues nor work healings, but they act under the inspiration of the Spirit and they produce the 'fruits of the Spirit' (Gal 5:22-24), and are thus authentic witnesses of Jesus.

Baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus (v 16). See the note on 19:5 on that subject.

■ Note how the Holy Spirit leads Philip towards a man who was neither a Jew nor a Samaritan, the first man of another race to receive the Gospel.

The Ethiopian who is baptized is simply a man who 'fears the Lord.' This is the way they referred to people of other races who had been attracted to the religion of the Jews and to faith in one God. Without following all the Jewish customs, they read the Bible and liked to take part



out and it happened that an Ethiopian was passing along that way. He was an official in charge of the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians; he had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem²⁸ and was now on the way home. He was sitting in his carriage and reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ The Spirit said to Philip, "Go and catch up with that carriage." ³⁰ So Philip ran up and he heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah; and he asked, "Do you really understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian replied, ³¹ "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" He then invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³² This was the passage of Scripture he was reading:

He was led like a sheep to be slaughtered; like a lamb that is dumb before the shearer, he did not open his mouth. ³³ He was humbled and deprived of his rights. Who can speak of his descendants? For he was uprooted from the earth.

³⁴The official asked Philip, "Tell me, please, does the prophet speak of himself or of someone else?"

³⁵Then Philip began to tell him the Good News of Jesus using this text of Scripture as his starting point. ³⁶As

they travelled down the road they came to a place where there was some water. Then the Ethiopian official said, "Look, here is water; what is to keep me from being baptized?"³⁷ And Philip answered, "You may be baptized if you believe with all your heart." And the man replied, "I believe; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

³⁸ Then he ordered the carriage to stop; both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. The Ethiopian saw him no more, but he continued on his way full of joy.

⁴⁰ Philip found himself at Azotus, and he went about announcing the Good News in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Saul meets Jesus

9 ¹Meanwhile Saul only thought of violence and death for the disciples of the Lord. ²He went to the High Priest and asked him for letters to the Synagogue of Damascus that would authorize him to arrest and bring to Jerusalem anyone he might find, man or woman, belonging to the Way.

32. Is 53, 7; 1 Pet 2, 24 35. Lk 24, 27 36. 10, 47 39. 1 K 18, 12 40. 10, 1 2. 22, 5; 29, 21; 16, 17; 18, 29

in the Jewish ceremonies.

The conversation with Philip begins on the basis of a text from Isaiah 53:7. This poem, called *Servant of the Lord*, speaks of a just man unjustly condemned who, through his sufferings, atones for the sins of all mankind. In this text the apostles saw one of the passages which best announced Christ: see commentary on Mk 14:24 and 1 Pt 2:24-25. Isaiah's poem concludes with a veiled reference to the resurrection of the "Servant of the Lord." It is marvelous to see how Philip can give a testimony of the Resurrection of Jesus with such conviction that the Ethiopian believes in him.

◆ This is a decisive event in the beginning of the Church. Christ comes in person to win over the most fierce persecutor of the Christians.

The conversion of Saul, who will become

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is also found in Acts 22 and 26.

It would be wrong to present Paul as an evildoer who finally finds the right path. As shown in Acts 22:3-4; Gal 1, 14 and Phil 3:4-11, Paul from his youth, had felt the need to dedicate himself to the service of God. This is why he had gone to Jerusalem to study the Law, that is religion, with the best teachers of his days? His interest in the things of God had made him forget to look for a wife: he had not married. This young man, dependable and responsible, the Jews had entrusted the difficult task of eliminating the new and suspicious doctrine of the Christians from their communities. Paul is in charge of the repression of Christ's followers and he does this in a very harsh way for the good of his religion.

Why do you persecute me? Who is this Lord

³As he travelled along and was approaching Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?" ⁵And he asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice replied, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ⁶Now get up and go into the city; there you will be told what you are to do."

⁷The men who were travelling with him stood there speechless: they had heard the voice, but could see no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground and opening his eyes, he could not see. ⁹He was blind and he did not eat or drink for three days.

¹⁰There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord called in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Here I am, Lord!" ¹¹Then the Lord said to him, "Go at once to Straight Street and ask, at the house of Judas, for a man of Tarsus named Saul. You will find him praying, ¹²for he has just seen in a vision that a man named Ananias has come in and placed his hands upon him, to restore his sight."

¹³Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, ¹⁴and now he is here with authority from the High Priest to arrest all who call upon your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go! this man is my chosen instrument to bring my name to the pagan nations and their kings, and the people of Israel as well. ¹⁶I myself will show him how much he will have to suffer for my name."

¹⁷So Ananias left. When he entered the house he laid his hands upon Saul and said, "Saul, my brother, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me to you so that you may receive your sight and be filled with Holy Spirit." ¹⁸Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he could see. He got up and was baptized; ¹⁹then he took food and was strengthened.

⁶For several days Saul stayed with the disciples at Damascus ²⁰and he soon began to proclaim in the Synagogue that Jesus was the Son of God. ²¹All who heard were astonished and

4. 1 Cor 9, 1; 15, 8
18. Tob 11, 13

5. Gal 1, 12
21. Gal 1, 23

6. Lk 10, 16

14. Rom 10, 12; 1 Cor 1, 2

15. Jer 1, 10

who calls me a persecutor when my only ambition is to serve God? Until that time Paul felt good, like the Pharisee of the parable (Lk 18:9), and he thanked God for having made him a responsible, dependable and active believer. But now, faced with the light of Christ, he discovers that his merits and services are of no use to God; his faith is mainly human fanaticism; his assurance as a believer is disguised pride. Paul sees himself as a sinner, violent and rebellious; but at the same time, he understands that God has welcomed him, chosen him and forgiven him: *this man will be my chosen instrument* (15).

Paul is no longer the Pharisee of the parable, rather he has put himself in the place of the publican. 'My God, have mercy on me, a sinner!' This is the characteristic conversion of a militant Christian.

Thus, however active we may be, we will be unable to present ourselves as witnesses to Christ, if we do not admit to being forgiven sinners. This is why there is such a Christian

concern for universal reconciliation.

From then on, Saul (who will take the name Paul) is going to be a chosen instrument of Christ to spread the Church to other countries. Until then, the Church which was led by and made up of Jews, had not gone beyond the Jewish people. Paul was a Jew too, but he had been educated outside his country. He enjoyed the culture of the Greeks as much as that of his own race. Because of that and because of his exceptional personality, he was to be the apostle to the Greeks.

The Church must constantly renew itself and it is renewed through the conversion of adults. Christian communities, even when they want to be open to people who are not involved with them (for example, workers, or at times, young people), are usually unable to be really open. Thus, the Lord calls some people from those different walks of life who, once they have received the faith of the Church, will be able to evangelize those of their own milieu and to preserve their



said, "Is this not the one who cast out in Jerusalem all those calling upon his Name? Did he not come here to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

²²But Saul grew more and more powerful, and he confounded all the Jews living in Damascus when he proved that Jesus was the Messiah.

²³After a fairly long time, the Jews conspired together to kill him. ²⁴But Saul became aware of their plan: Day and night they kept watch at the city gate in order to kill him. ²⁵So his disciples took him one night and let him down from the top of the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶When Saul arrived back in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples there, but they were afraid of him because they could not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and he explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on his way and how the Lord had spoken to him, and he explained also how Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

²⁸Then Saul began to live with them. He moved freely about Jerusalem and preached openly in the name

of the Lord. ²⁹He also spoke to the Hellenists and argued with them, but they wanted to kill him. ³⁰When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹Meanwhile, the Church had peace and was built up throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria. The believers walked with eyes turned to the Lord and were filled with comfort from the Holy Spirit.

Peter visits the churches

+ ³²As Peter travelled around, he went to visit the saints who lived in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed, and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!" And the man got up at once. ³⁵All the people living in Lydda and Sharon saw him and believed in the Lord.

³⁶There was a disciple in Joppa named Tabitha, which means Dorcas or Gazelle. She was always doing good works and helping the poor. ³⁷At that time she fell sick and died. After having washed her body, they laid her in the upstairs room.

22. 18, 28

23. 22, 3; Gal 1, 21

34. 3, 6; Mk 2, 11

freedom with regard to traditional groups.

In crucial times in history, Christ called new men which his Church needed: Francis of Assisi, and closer to us, John XXIII.

"The Way": this is what Christianity was called; the word expressed the fact that it is not only a matter of religious teachings, but rather a new way of life enlightened by hope.

• For three years Paul preaches his faith and relates his own experience in the province of Damascus, also called Arabia (see Gal 1:16 and 2 Cor 11:32).

Paul is already following his own way. But he does not separate himself from the church as his journey to Jerusalem shows, since he goes there to meet the apostles. Yet, he preserves his independence as he waits for the promptings of the Spirit.

+ Peter appears in his role of "inspector" of the churches (the word bishop means inspector).

It is said here that he visits the saints. In the years prior to Christ, the word "saints," namely consecrated to God, was especially used to designate the new people of God beginning with the coming of the Messiah (see Daniel 7:27). Christians are the new people of God since they are the Church (see 5:11), they are also the saints.

The raising of Tabitha resembles what Jesus had done. It is an echo of the Resurrection of Christ, as the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11) or the widow's son had been (Lk 8:11).

God wished to grant these signs to strengthen the faith in Jesus' resurrection. Besides the people who had been the witnesses of His Resurrection, it was necessary that in various places, the communities could see for themselves that God "resurrects the dead" (see Heb. 11:19). Similar resurrections were seen in the Church even in this century.

■ This is a new intervention of the Holy Spirit so that the Church would come out of the Jewish



³⁸As Lydda is near Joppa, the disciples, on hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay."

³⁹So Peter went with them. On his arrival they took him upstairs to the room. All the widows crowded around him in tears, showing him the clothes which Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰Peter made them all leave the room and then he knelt down and prayed. Turning to the dead body he said, "Tabitha, stand up." She opened her eyes, looked at Peter and sat up. ⁴¹Peter gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the saints and widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴²This became known throughout all of Joppa and many people believed in the Lord because of it. ⁴³As for Peter, he remained for some time in Joppa at the house of Simon, a tanner of leather.

The baptism of Cornelius

10 ¹There was in Caesarea a man called Cornelius, captain of what was called the Italian Battalion. ²He was a religious and God-fearing man together with his

whole household. He gave generously to the people and constantly prayed to God.

³One afternoon, at about three he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming towards him and calling him, "Cornelius!" ⁴He stared at the vision in terror and said, "What is it, sir?" And the angel answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a remembrance of you before God. ⁵Now send some men to Joppa and summon a certain Simon also known as Peter; ⁶he is the guest of Simon, a tanner, who lives beside the sea."

⁷As soon as the angel who spoke to him departed, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those attached to his service, ⁸and after having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹The next day, while they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up to the roof at about noon to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wished to eat, but, while they were preparing food, he fell into a trance. ¹¹The heavens were opened to him and he saw an object that looked like a large sheet coming down and

38. Lk 8, 41

41. Mk 5, 41

1. 8, 40; 23, 33

2. 16, 14; 13, 16; Lk 7, 4

4. Sir 35, 6

environment and the Gospel would come to other people. Cornelius (like the Ethiopian of 8.27) is a *God-fearing man*, that is to say, a foreigner who believes in the one God of the Jews, without being a member of the Jewish community.

The heavens were open to him. He may have seen a tent coming down – an image of God's dwelling place in the world – which contained creatures considered unclean.

The Jewish religion included a whole series of prohibitions for believers. It distinguished between *clean* animals, namely these which could be eaten and *unclean* ones which could not. The same regulations applied to people; Jews could not mix with non-Jews. Thus, Peter's vision in which he is invited to eat unclean animals, means that he must not hesitate to go and stay in the house of Cornelius, the Roman.

We do not know if Peter would have hesitated to baptise a non-Jew (and uncircumcised) as

Cornelius was. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit forced his hand.

At last a man of another race is baptised! In many places today as well, the Church is threatened to be reduced to a closed social group, and perhaps, antiquated. Popes and bishops invite us to go forward and to dialogue with all people. Yet, it would seem that only the intervention of an angel could convince us to go to other people.

He sent his people (v 36). Peter presents Jesus. His life was that of an authentic prophet, who comes to continue the work of previous prophets, spokesmen of God's word. But, in Jesus, God was offering the *good news of peace*, that is, God was reconciling men with himself, once and for all. We are easily reminded of one of Paul's central points: see Rom 5.1-11; 2 Cor 5.11-21 and Eph 2.14-16.

Judge of the living and the dead (v 42). This expression refers to religious concepts of the time, making a distinction between the judg-

lowered to the ground by its four corners.¹² In it were all kinds of four-legged animals of the earth, reptiles and birds.

¹³ Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"¹⁴ But Peter replied, "Certainly not, Lord! I have never eaten any common or unclean creature."¹⁵ And again a second time the voice spoke, "What God has made clean, you must not call common."

¹⁶ This happened three times and then the sheet was taken up again into the sky.

¹⁷ While Peter was still puzzling over the meaning of the vision he had seen, the messengers of Cornelius arrived at the gate asking for the house of Simon.¹⁸ They called out to inquire whether Simon, also known as Peter, was a guest there.¹⁹ At that moment, as Peter continued pondering on the vision, the Spirit spoke to him, "There are men looking for you;²⁰ get up and go downstairs and follow them without hesitation, for I have sent them."

²¹ So Peter went and said to the men, "I am the one you are looking for. What brings you here?" They answered, ²² "He who sent us is Captain Cornelius. He is an upright and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jewish people. For he has been instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, so that he could listen to what you have to say."²³ So Peter invited them in and put them up for the night.

The next day he went off with them and some of the brothers from

Joppa accompanied him.²⁴ The following day, he arrived in Caesarea where Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ As Peter was about to enter, Cornelius went to him and fell on his knees and bowed low.²⁶ But Peter lifted him up saying, "Stand up, for I too am a man."

²⁷ After talking with him, Peter entered and found many people assembled there.²⁸ Then he said to them, "You know that it is forbidden for Jews to associate with anyone of another nation or to enter his house. But God has made it clear to me that no one should call any person common or consider him unclean;²⁹ because of this I came at once when I was sent for. Now, I should like to know why you sent for me."

³⁰ Cornelius then answered, "Just three days ago at this time, about three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house when a man in shining clothes stood before me³¹ and said to me: 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and your alms have been remembered by him.'³² Send, therefore, someone to Joppa and ask for Simon, also known as Peter, who is guest at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.'³³ So I sent for you at once and you have been kind enough to come. Now we are all here in God's presence, waiting to hear all that the Lord has commanded you to say."

³⁴ Peter then spoke to them, "Truly I realize that God does not show partiality,³⁵ but in all nations he lis-

26. 14, 14; Rev 19, 10

28. Gal 2, 12

30. Lk 24, 4

34. Dt 10, 17; Rom 2, 11

ment of those who would witness Christ's return at the end of the world (the living) and those who had died before (the dead). See the same in 1 Thes 4:17.

One receives forgiveness through his Name. Through his Name, that is to say, through his own power and effectiveness. This confirms Jesus' divine authority.

◆ The reaction of the Jerusalem Christians shows us what a revolution the baptism of Cornelius meant.

Through this first warning to Peter, we discover the continuous pressure which the "old Christians" are going to put on their priests and bishops throughout history.

These Jerusalem believers are not acting in



tens to everyone who fears God and does good, whatever his nation may be. ³⁶And this is the message he has sent to the children of Israel, the good news of peace he has proclaimed through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all. ³⁷No doubt you have heard of the event that occurred throughout the whole country of the Jews, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism John preached. ³⁸You know how God anointed Jesus the Nazarean with Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good works and healing all who were under the devil's power, because God was with him: ³⁹we are witnesses of all that he did throughout the countryside of the Jews and in Jerusalem itself.

⁴⁰Finally they put him to death by hanging him on a wooden cross. But God raised him to life on the third day and let him be seen, ⁴¹not by all the people, but by the witnesses that were chosen beforehand by God, — by us who ate and drank with him after his resurrection from death. ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to bear witness that he is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets say of him, that everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his Name."

⁴⁴Peter was still speaking when the Holy Spirit came upon all who listened to the Word. ⁴⁵And the believers of Jewish origin who had come with Peter were amazed, "Why! God gives and pours the Holy Spirit on foreigners also!" ⁴⁶For indeed this happened: they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

⁴⁷Then Peter declared, "Can we refuse to baptize with water people who have already received the Holy Spirit?" ⁴⁸So he had them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. After that they asked him to remain with them for some days.

Peter justifies his conduct

◆11 ¹News came to the apostles and the brothers in Judea that pagans had received the Word of God. ²So, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the Jewish believers began to argue with him, ³"You went to the home of uncircumcised people and ate with them!"

⁴And Peter began to give them the facts as they had happened, ⁵"I was at prayer in the city of Joppa when, in a trance, I saw a vision. Something like a large sheet came down from the sky and drew near to me, landing on the ground by its four corners. ⁶As I stared at it, I saw four-legged creatures of the earth, wild beasts and reptiles, and birds of the sky. ⁷Then I heard a voice saying to me: 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat!' ⁸I replied, 'Certainly not, Lord! No common or unclean creature has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹A second time the voice from the heavens spoke: ¹⁰This happened three times, and then it was all drawn up into the sky. ¹¹At that moment three men, who had been sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were staying. ¹²The Spirit instructed me to go with them without hesitation; so these six brothers came along with me and we entered into the man's house. ¹³He told

35. Eph 6, 9; 1 Per 1, 17

36. 13, 26; Is 52, 7;

Rom 10, 15

38. 13, 24; Lk 4, 14; Is 61, 1

40. 5, 30

43. 13, 39; 15, 9; Lk 24, 47

44. 8, 16; 19, 5

45. Rom 5, 5; 8, 36

1. 8, 14; 15, 7

3. Gal 2, 12

bad faith and they accept Peter's explanations. Yet, the leaders of the Church will need courage to prefer the stirrings of the Holy Spirit to conservative prejudices. Often, Christian militants

themselves regret the narrow self-centeredness of their companions, the closed minds of the group rejecting one individual or another, prejudices which are hard to root out.



us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and telling him: Send someone to Joppa and fetch Simon, also known as Peter. ¹⁴He will bring you a message by which you and all your household will be saved."

¹⁵I had begun to address them when suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them, just as it had come upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷If, then, God had given them the same gift that he had given us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to resist God?"

¹⁸When they heard this they set their minds at rest and praised God saying, "Then God has granted life-giving repentance to the pagan nations as well."

The foundation of the Church at Antioch

o ¹⁹Those who had been scattered because of the persecution over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message but only to the Jews. ²⁰But there were some natives of Cyprus and Cyrene among them who, on coming into Antioch, spoke also to the Greeks, giving them the good news of the Lord Jesus. ²¹The hand of the Lord was with them so that a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

²²News of this reached the ears of the Church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he arrived and saw the manifest signs of God's favour, he rejoiced and urged them all to remain firmly faithful to the Lord; ²⁴for he himself was a good man filled with Holy Spirit and faith. Thus large crowds came to know the Lord.

²⁵Barnabas went off to Tarsus to look for Saul ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they had meetings with the Church and instructed many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called *Christians*.

■ ²⁷At that time some prophets went down from Jerusalem to Antioch ²⁸and one of them, named Agabus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, foretold that a great famine would spread over the whole world. This actually happened in the days of the Emperor Claudius. ²⁹So each of the disciples decided, within his means, to set something aside and to send relief to the brothers (a.s.) who were living in Judea. ³⁰They did this and sent their donations to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

James put to death; Peter's miraculous escape

+12 ¹About that time King Herod decided to persecute some members of the Church. ²He

16. 1, 5; Jn 14, 26	17. 15, 8	21. 1k 1, 66	22. 4, 36	25. 9, 27	28. 21, 10
29. Gal 2, 10; Rom 15, 26; 2 Cor 8, 9	30. 14, 25		2. Mk 10, 35		

o Antioch, located 500 kilometers north of Jerusalem, was the main city of the Roman province of Syria, a Greek-speaking pagan country, with an important Jewish community. We do not know who first brought the Christian faith to the pagans, or how it was done. For the first time, there was a Church in which Jews believing in Christ and converts of pagan origin were mingling: the future of the Church was there.

The Jerusalem community behaves as having authority over the new churches; the case of

Antioch touches everybody since, for the Palestinian Jews, accepting pagans was quite a novelty. Did not the law of Moses forbid living with "uncircumcised" people?

■ There is a mention of prophets. Among the gifts which the Holy Spirit granted to converts: the gift of "prophecy" was one of the most outstanding. On various occasions, the "prophet" would receive from God an insight into future events in the community, or concerning one of its members. They would also give homilies "iri



had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword,³ and when he saw how it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

This happened during the festival of the Unleavened Bread.⁴ Herod had him seized and thrown into prison, with four squads, each of four soldiers, to guard him. He wanted to bring him to trial before the people after the Passover feast,⁵ but while Peter was kept in prison, the whole Church prayed earnestly for him.

⁶On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound by a double chain, while guards kept watch at the gate of the prison.

⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood there and a light shone in the prison cell. The angel tapped Peter on the side and woke him saying, "Get up quickly!" At once the chains fell from Peter's wrists. The angel said, "Put on your belt and your sandals." Peter did so, ⁸and the angel added, "Now, put on your cloak and follow me."

⁹Peter followed him out; yet he did not realize that what was happening with the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision.¹⁰ They passed the first guard and then the second and they came to the iron door leading out to the city, which opened of itself for them. They went out and made their way down a narrow alley, when suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹Then Peter recovered his senses and said, "Now I know that the Lord has sent his angel and has rescued me from Herod's clutches and from all that the Jews had in store for me."

¹²Peter then found his bearings and came to the house of Mary, the mother of John also known as Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.¹³ When he knocked at the outside door, a maid named Rhoda came to answer it.¹⁴ On recognizing the voice of Peter she was so overcome with joy that, instead of opening the door, she ran in to announce that Peter was at the door.¹⁵ They said to her, "You are crazy!" And as she insisted, they said, "It must be his angel."

¹⁶Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking and, when they finally opened the door, they were amazed to see him.¹⁷ He motioned to them with his hand to be quiet and told them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. And he said to them, "Report this to James and to the brothers." Then he left and went to another place.

¹⁸At daybreak there was a great commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.¹⁹ Herod began a search for him and not finding him, had the guards questioned and executed. After that, he came down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

3. Lk 22, 1

6, 5, 19; 16, 25

17, 15, 13; 21, 18; 1 Cor 15, 7

19, 16, 27; 27, 42

the Spirit" and everyone would recognize the hand of God in the conviction and the wisdom with which they spoke, discovering a word relevant to the present in a biblical passage.

The first gesture of fraternal assistance among Christians of different countries is underlined. In this paragraph the *elders* or "presbyters" (it is the same word) are mentioned. The leaders of the Christian community were so called, following the Jewish custom.

+ This second persecution reaches the entire

Christian community of Jerusalem (see in 8:1). James (the greater) was one of the *pillars of the Church* together with Peter and John (Gal 2:9).

Peter's second release (see the first in 5:19) stresses the powerful intercession of the Church on behalf of its leader and the will of Christ to preserve his church from the reach of the power of evil (see Mt 16:18).

Report this to James. This James is the "brother of the Lord": he was already accepted as responsible for the Church in Jerusalem.



Herod's death

²⁰ At that time Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. By general agreement they appeared before him and, after having won over Blastus, the king's treasurer, they asked for peace, for their country was supplied with food from the territory of Herod. ²¹ On the appointed day Herod, clothed in royal robes, sat on his throne and addressed them. ²² So the assembled crowd shouted back, "A god is speaking, not a man!"

²³ The angel of the Lord immediately struck Herod for he did not return the honour to God, and he died eaten by worms.

²⁴ Meanwhile the word of God was increasing and spreading. ²⁵ Barnabas and Saul carried out their mission and then came back from Jerusalem, taking with them John also called Mark.

Paul sent by the Church

13 ¹ There were at Antioch – in the Church which was there – prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Symeon known as Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod, and Saul. ² On one oc-

casion while they were celebrating the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart and send them to do the work for which I have called them." ³ So, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Paul's first mission

◆ ⁴ These then, sent by the Holy Spirit, went down to the port of Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ Upon their arrival in Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogue; John was with them as an assistant.

⁶ They travelled over the whole island as far as Paphos where they met a certain magician named Bar-Jesus, a Jewish false prophet ⁷ who lived with the governor Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He had summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the Word of God. ⁸ But they were opposed by the Elymas (that is, the magician) who tried to turn the governor from the faith.

⁹ Then Saul, also known as Paul, full of Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "You son of the devil,

22. 14, 15; 2 Mac 9, 12	23. 2 K 19, 35; 2 Mac 9, 5	24. 19, 20	25. 11, 29	4. 11, 20
5. 12, 12; 12, 25	6. 8, 9	10. Hos 14, 10		

■ This is the beginning of Paul's missions; for the time being he is sent as Barnabas' assistant.

It is very difficult to know how the Church organized itself in the beginning. It did not have the same kind of hierarchy with the three orders that we have now: bishops, presbyters (or priests) and deacons: this started only at the end of the first century. In most cases, the communities elected the *presbyters* or elders, from the most trusted men, and because they were appointed and accepted by the neighboring communities, they were empowered to baptise, celebrate the Eucharist and anoint the sick. This institution of the presbyters (see 14:23 and 11:30) simply copied the form of administration of the Jewish communities by their elders.

However, wherever there were *prophets* accepted as such (this was the case in Antioch), they enjoyed greater authority, somewhat like the apostles (1 Cor 12:28 and Eph 2:20).

Paul and Barnabas are not considered as

apostles yet, but they are prophets. As for the *teachers*: they are those who have the ability to teach doctrine and morality based on Scripture, to their brothers.

Luke gives the details of the beginning of this mission. It emerges from the initiative of the Holy Spirit, but it responds to the life of fervor of the community of Antioch. Note also that the community accepts to have two of its five leaders leave, and that Saul and Barnabas are ready to face the risks of this adventure.

The *laying on of hands* invokes the grace of God for these two missionaries.

◆ This first mission begins in a very traditional way. Jews could travel throughout the Roman empire: in any important city they would find Jewish brothers, involved in trade and always gathered in communities, in "synagogues." From Antioch, Barnabas and Saul travel by sea to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas' homeland.



full of all kinds of deceit and enemy of all that is right! Will you never stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹Now the Lord's hand is upon you; you will become blind and for a time you will not see the light of day." At once a misty darkness came upon him, and he groped about for someone to lead him by the hand.

¹²The governor saw what had happened; he believed, and was deeply impressed by the teaching about the Lord.

Paul in the capital of Pisidia

¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions set sail and came to Perga in Pamphylia. There John left them and returned to Jerusalem ¹⁴while they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath day they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the leading men of the synagogue sent this message to them, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the assembly, please speak up."

¹⁶So Paul arose, motioned to them for silence and began, "Fellow Israelites and also all you who fear God,

listen. ¹⁷The God of our people Israel, chose our ancestors and after he had made them increase during their stay in Egypt, he led them out by powerful deeds. ¹⁸For forty years he fed them in the desert and, ¹⁹after he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. ²⁰All this took four hundred and fifty years. ²¹After that, he gave them Judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king and God gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, and he was king for forty years. ²²After that time, God removed him and raised up David as king, to whom he bore witness saying: *I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all I want him to do.*

²³It is from the descendants of David that God has now raised up the promised saviour of Israel, Jesus. ²⁴Before he appeared, John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for all the people of Israel. ²⁵As John was ending his career, he said: 'I am not what you think I am, for after me another one is coming whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.'

²⁶Brothers, children and descen-

Saul's prophetic talents are manifested in his meeting with Sergius Paulus who, upon converting, had gladly granted Saul the use of his own surname. From then on, he will use the name Paul in an effort to be more like the Romans and the Greeks to whom he would proclaim Christ.

Paul and his companions. Once the mission has begun, Paul becomes the obvious leader. They did not stay in Cyprus; they left there groups of believers who had been hastily instructed.

When they arrive on the continent, at the inhospitable area of Perga, John Mark leaves them. Paul's daring plans may have scared him. They go through the mountain range of modern Turkey and reach the heart of the province of Pisidia - Antioch (which must not be confused with the other Antioch).

Luke gives all the details of the events at Anti-

och in Pisidia, because they were typical of the situations Paul was going to face in various parts of the Roman empire.

Paul speaks at the Sabbath gathering in the "synagogue" (house of prayer of the Jews). The worship involves psalms and biblical readings (obviously, from the Old Testament). Then, one or several of the leaders make comments. Since Paul is a visitor, out of deference, they ask him to speak.

Paul's discourse, in which he relates Israel's history, may seem boring to us, like Peter's (chapter 2) and Stephen's (chapter 7). This was the Jewish way of preaching and presenting an argument. They would present the history of their people, stressing a series of facts which would give them a clue to understand the whole. Similarly, Paul and the apostles revealed the authentic meaning of sacred history: they showed that God's promises to Israel were

11. Dt 28, 29	13. 15, 38	15. Lk 24, 44	17. Ex 6	19. Dt 7, 1	22. Ps 89,
20. 1 S 13, 14	24. Mal 3, 1	25. Lk 3, 15; Jn 1, 19			



dants of Abraham and you also who fear God, we have been sent to give you this message of salvation.²⁷ It is a fact that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize it. And although the warnings of the prophets were read every sabbath, they did not understand them. But they fulfilled them by condemning Jesus.²⁸ Even though they found no charge against him that deserved death, they asked Pilate to have him executed.²⁹ And after they had carried out all that had been written concerning him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

³⁰ But God raised him from the dead,³¹ and for many days thereafter he showed himself to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They have now become his witnesses before the people.³² We ourselves announce to you this Good News: All that God promised our ancestors,³³ he has fulfilled for us by raising Jesus, according to what is written in the second psalm: *You are my Son, today I have begotten you.*³⁴ On raising him from the dead so that he would never know the decay of death, God fulfilled his promise: *I will give you the holy blessings, the sure ones, that I kept for David.*

³⁵ Moreover, in another place it is said: *You will not allow your holy one to undergo corruption.*³⁶ Now David underwent corruption, for he died and was laid beside his ancestors after having served God's purpose in his own time.³⁷ But the one God raised up – Jesus – did not undergo corruption.³⁸ Through him, fellow Israelites, you have forgiveness of sins and of everything from which you could not be cleansed and freed by the law of Moses: this is our good news.³⁹ Whoever believes in him is freed of all this.

⁴⁰ Now watch out lest what was said by the prophet happens to you: *Take care, you cynics; be amazed and disappear! For I am about to do something in your days which you would never believe even if you had been told.*

⁴² As Paul and Barnabas withdrew, they were invited to speak again on the same subject the following sabbath.⁴³ After that, when the assembly broke up, many Jews and devout God-fearing people followed them and to these they spoke, urging them to hold fast to the grace of God.

⁴⁴ The following sabbath almost the entire city gathered to listen to Paul who spoke a fairly long time

29. 3, 13	33. 2, 39; Ps 2, 7; Heb 1, 5; 5, 5	34. Is 55, 3	35. Ps 16, 10	38. Rom 3, 21
39. Rom 1, 16	41. Heb 1, 5	43. 11, 23; 14, 22		

fulfilled in Christ's resurrection.

We must always look for the continuity between what God did in past times and what happens now, and relate the events of life with the events of the Gospel. Christian life does not consist in rituals, but above all in orienting our lives and our actions in such a way that sacred history continues through us.

The audience reacts in various ways. Those who are listening are not only Jews, but there are also those "who fear the Lord," or "proselytes" whom we have already met in the Ethiopian (8:30) and Cornelius: these are considered to be second class believers by the Jews.

From the first words, Paul greets them the same way as the Jews. Then, in his preaching, he does not emphasize the observance of the

Law, which only the Jews could fulfil and which made them feel superior to others: instead, Paul declares that the Law is surpassed (v 38). Paul stresses rather the promises of God addressed to all people. Those who "fear God" are delighted by a Gospel which makes them God's children, just as are the Jews.

They all invite Paul to speak on the same theme the following Saturday. At that time Paul makes an important decision: Instead of restricting himself to the Jews during the week, he prefers to go to those who "fear God," people whom he wins over because he is not racist at all. These people, in turn, bring more people to the gathering on the following Sabbath: there, pagans who had never been involved with the Jews mix with them.

Then a crisis occurs. The assembly divides

about the Lord.⁴⁵ But the presence of such a crowd made the Jews jealous. So they began to oppose with insults whatever Paul said.

⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out firmly, saying, "It was necessary that God's word be first proclaimed to you, but since you now reject it and condemn yourselves to lose eternal life, we turn to non-Jewish people.⁴⁷For thus we were commanded by the Lord: *I have set you as a light to the pagan nations, so that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*"

⁴⁸Those who were not Jews rejoiced when they heard this and gave praise for the message, and all those destined for everlasting life believed in it.⁴⁹Thus the Word spread throughout the whole region.

⁵⁰Some of the Jews, however, incited God-fearing women of the upper class and the leading men of the city as well, and stirred up an intense persecution against Paul and Barnabas. Finally they had them expelled from their region.⁵¹The apostles shook the dust from their feet in protest against this people and went to Iconium,⁵² leaving the disciples filled with joy and Holy Spirit.

Iconium evangelized

+ 14 ¹In Iconium Paul and Barnabas likewise went into the Jewish synagogue and preached in such a manner that a great number of Jews and Greeks became believers.²But the Jews who would not believe stirred up the pagan people and poisoned their minds against the brothers.³In spite of this Paul and Barnabas spent a considerable time there. They spoke fearlessly of the Lord, who confirmed the message of the grace of God with the miraculous signs and wonders he gave them power to do.

⁴There, too, all the town was stirred by the Teaching. They were divided, some siding with the Jews and some with the apostles.⁵A move was made by pagans and Jews, together with their leaders, to harm the apostles and to stone them.⁶But Paul and Barnabas learned of this and fled to the Lycaonian towns of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding countryside,⁷where they continued preaching the Good News.

Lystra and Derbe

■ Paul and Barnabas spent a fairly long time at Lystra.⁸There was a

45. 17, 5; 18, 6; 28, 17 47. 1s 49, 6 48. 10, 20 51. Lk 10, 11 3. Mk 16, 20; 1 Thes 1, 5

into two factions. The Jews who are the most close-minded and proud are afraid when they see themselves surrounded by those "unclean" pagans: they oppose Paul and they even try to throw him out any way they can. Rich and pious women intervene. From that moment, a Christian community, separate from the Jews, is formed.

Who does not realize that in today's Church, there are still "proselytes," namely, men of good will, who are waiting for the preaching of a gospel really open to everyone and who do not find a place in our assemblies?

Those destined for everlasting life became believers (48). This expression does not condemn those who did not believe. It simply teaches us that no one becomes a believer, except through the grace of God, who has destined us to this life with God, in truth and already now, a life which flows into eternal life (Jn 17:3).

+ What happened in Antioch in Pisidia happens here as well: Paul and Barnabas speak fearlessly. This is one of the characteristics of the genuine apostle, moved by the Holy Spirit. This assurance has a powerful influence on the conversion of the audience, but it is not a natural gift of men. Paul will indicate that God gives it to preachers who place their trust in God, especially when they feel the weakest and the least prepared. (See 1 Thes 2:2 and 2 Cor 12:10).

Paul's hearers were religious people who were following their own customs and ways of honoring their gods. They had priests, rites and sacrifices. But Paul invites them to experience something different, which is faith, and this faith is a gift of God.

■ The sick man believes in Paul's preaching; he believes that the risen Jesus is truly alive and that he can heal him. At Paul's word he stands

crippled man in Lystra who had never been able to stand or walk. ⁹One day, as he was listening to the preaching, Paul looked intently at him and saw that he had the faith to be saved. ¹⁰So he spoke to him in a loud voice, "In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to stand up on your feet!" and the man stood up and began to walk around.

"When the people saw what Paul had done, they cried out in the language of Lycaonia, 'The gods have come to us in human likeness!'"

¹²They named Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. ¹³Even the priests of the Temple of Zeus, which stood outside the town, brought oxen and garlands to the gate to offer sacrifice to them.

¹⁴When Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their garments to show their indignation, and rushed into the crowd, shouting. ¹⁵"Friends, why are you doing this? We are human beings like you and we are now telling you to turn away from these useless things to the living God who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶In past generations he al-

lowed each nation to go its own way, ¹⁷though he never stopped making himself known; for he is continually doing good, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, providing you with food and filling your hearts with gladness."

¹⁸Even these words could hardly keep the crowd from offering sacrifice to them.

¹⁹They were there teaching some time. But some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium to argue with Paul and Barnabas. They persuaded the people to reject them, saying that all this was untrue. Finally they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town, leaving him for dead. ²⁰But when his disciples gathered around him, he stood up and returned to the town. And the next day he left for Derbe with Barnabas.

Return to Antioch

o ²¹ After proclaiming the gospel in that town and making many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and on to Antioch. ²² They were strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain firmly

14. ME 26.65

15. 1 Thes 1. 9: Ex 20. 11

16. 17.27

17. ler 5. 24

19. 7. 38: 2 Cor 11. 25

22. 11, 23; 13, 43; 1 Thes 3, 3

up. This cure externally reveals what took place inwardly: the man stood up, ready to do what the Gospel requires; he is ready to change his life, having being freed from the human traditions which were obstacles in his way.

The others are amazed at the miracle: but they did not, in fact, understand it. They want to express their happiness and their gratitude in an unusual way: by offering sacrifices to God or to the gods. They neither heard God's call nor did they respond by changing their lives.

- Derbe marks the end of the mission. Paul and Barnabas go back the same way they came. They visit all the communities established on the continent. Then, they will sail for Antioch without returning to the island of Cyprus.

In those days the Church did not have parishes, clergy, institutions, or books. The apostle had to organize the Church in such a way that it could continue. There will be a book, the Jewish

bible, namely, the Old Testament. But, the prophets inspired by God, will draw new teachings from this book, by discovering a sign of Christ in the past. From time to time the communities will be visited by apostles or prophets coming from other churches.

There will be gatherings around the celebration of the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor 11); besides the Eucharist, everyone will share with others their own spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor chapters 12-14). Just as the Jewish communities had leaders called "elders" or presbyters, Christians also lay their hands on leaders, "presbyters," who will lead and preside over the Eucharist. (See commentary on 13:1).

And so we understand that a mission does not reach its goal if it does not succeed in forming adult communities, with their own leaders and with the active participation of their members.

- + We see the first internal conflict in the



faithful, for they said, "We must go through many trials to enter the Kingdom of God." ²³In each church they appointed elders and, after praying and fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had placed their faith.

²⁴Then they travelled through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia.

²⁵They preached the Word in Perga and went down to Attalia. ²⁶From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had first been commended to God's favour for the task they had now completed.

²⁷On their arrival they gathered the Church together and told them all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Non-Jews. ²⁸They spent a fairly long time there with the disciples.

The council at Jerusalem

+15 ¹Some persons who had come from Judea to Antioch were teaching the brothers in this way, "Unless you keep the law of Moses, you cannot be saved."

²Because of this there was trouble, and Paul had fierce arguments with them. For Paul told the people to remain as they were when

they became believers. Finally those who had come from Jerusalem suggested that Paul and Barnabas and some others go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

³They were sent on their way by the Church. As they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria they reported how the Non-Jews had turned to God and there was great joy among all the brothers and sisters.

⁴On their arrival in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church, the apostles and the elders, to whom they told all that God had done through them. ⁵Some believers, however, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said that non-Jewish men must be circumcised and instructed to keep the law of Moses. ⁶So the apostles and elders met together to consider this matter.

⁷As the discussions became heated, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know what God did among us in the early days, so that non-Jews could hear from me the Good News and believe. ⁸God, who can read hearts, put himself on their side by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us. ⁹He made no dis-

23. 13, 2 1. Gal 5, 3; Gen 17, 9 2. Gal 2, 1 4. 14, 27 5. 11, 2 7. 10, 11; Gal 2, 9

Church. Paul himself relates it in Gal 1:1-10

It was an important discussion. It was a matter of knowing if a pagan was saved only by believing in Jesus and being baptised, or if he first had to observe the religious laws and customs of the Jews for whom circumcision was fundamental.

In fact, these commandments and rituals were only a provisional form of religion, a stage which had been preparing for Christ. Thus, when Paul and Barnabas were preaching to the pagans, they did not mention the Jewish rites. But, some believers of Jewish origin thought it was necessary to preserve everything because it came from God.

Paul goes to Jerusalem accompanied by some believers of pagan origin, with Titus, in particular, who was one of his assistants. In the discussion, the argument which most impressed the conservative Jews was to find out

that they were in the presence of real believers acting under the power of the Holy Spirit despite the fact they had not been circumcised (what a shame!) and that they were not concerned with the law of Moses or Jewish worship.

The solving of the conflict clarifies the communal aspect of the Church. The "elders," in charge of the mother-Church in Jerusalem meet with the apostles who are the supreme authority in the Church. Simon Peter addresses them, referring to the experience he had in the case of Cornelius (chapter 11) and he opens the way of total freedom with regard to the Jewish religion.

This way of freedom must also prevail in our days. Every day there are more adults and young people who have a culture foreign to the one which gave the language of the Church, to the form of their Sunday gatherings, to the answers given to people's concerns. Will we impose moulds with which the world of workers and

inction between us and them, and cleansed their hearts through faith.

¹⁰So, why do you want to put God to the test? Why do you lay on the disciples a burden that neither our ancestors nor we ourselves were able to carry? ¹¹We believe, indeed, that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are."

¹²The whole assembly kept silent as they listened to Paul and Barnabas tell of all the miraculous signs and wonders that God had done through them among the non-Jews.

■ ¹³After they had finished, James spoke up, "Listen to me, brothers. ¹⁴Symeon has just explained how God first showed his care by taking a people for himself from non-Jewish nations. ¹⁵And the words of the prophets agree with this, for Scripture says,

¹⁶After this I will return and rebuild the booth of David which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins and set it up again. ¹⁷Then the rest of humanity will look for the Lord, and all the nations will be consecrated to my Name. So, says the Lord, who does today ¹⁸what he decided from the beginning.

¹⁹Because of this, I think that we should not make difficulties for those non-Jews who are turning to God.

²⁰Let us just tell them not to eat food that is unclean from having been offered to idols; to keep themselves from prohibited marriages; and not to eat the flesh of animals that have been strangled, or any blood. ²¹For from the earliest times Moses has been taught in every place, and every sabbath his laws are recalled."

The council's letters

²²Then the apostles and elders together with the whole Church decided to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. These were Judas, known as Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers. ²³They took with them the following letter:

Greetings from the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the brothers of non-Jewish birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. ²⁴We have heard that some persons from among us have worried you with their discussions and troubled your peace of mind. They were not appointed by us. ²⁵But now, it has seemed right to us in an assembly, to choose representatives and to send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶who have dedicated their lives to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷We

9. 11, 18	10. Gal 2, 16; Mt 11, 29	11. 11, 18	13. 12, 17; 21. 18	14. Zac 2, 15;
1 Pet 2, 10; Eph 4, 14	16. Am 9, 11	20. 1 Cor 8, 10; Rev 12, 20; Lev 15, 6; 17, 10; Gen 9, 3		
22. 1 Thes 1, 1; 1 Pet 5, 12	26. 20, 24; 21, 13			

young people do not identify? Peter provides the answer.

■ Here, Luke seems to combine two different meetings into a single account, and this is rather confusing. First, there was the meeting we just read about. There the question of principles was resolved: the Greek converts did not have to observe the Old Testament laws which were considered to be provisional and only for Jewish people. After Peter's intervention, the decree we read about in 15:29 is adopted: the Greeks are only required not to eat meat offered to idols (see 1 Cor 8-10) and to treat others according to the Gospel (Rom 12).

But after that, there were difficulties in the

churches of Syria-Palestine, whose bishop was James. For these churches, he decreed what we read here in 15:20-21 and also 21:25: that is to say, that both Jews and Greeks will sacrifice some of their rights. Greeks will abstain from eating meat with blood, out of respect for their Jewish brothers who despised such practices (Rom 14). But James did not say it in the Jerusalem assembly, nor was it decreed then as it seems when reading 20-21, contradicting the decree adopted on this occasion.

Let us underline the following expressions in the story: *The apostles, the elders and the entire community* ...we with the Holy Spirit: the decision of the community in union with their apostles carries the guarantee of the Holy Spirit.



send you then Judas and Silas who themselves will give you these instructions by word of mouth.

²⁸We, with the Holy Spirit, have decided not to put any other burden on you except what is necessary: ²⁹not to eat meat that has been offered to idols, and not to do to anyone what you would not want another to do to you. Keep these rules and be guided by the Holy Spirit. Farewell."

³⁰After saying goodbye, the messengers went to Antioch, where they assembled the community and handed them the letter. ³¹When they read the news, all were delighted with the encouragement it gave them. ³²Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, spoke at length to encourage and strengthen them. ³³After they had spent some time there, the messengers were sent off in peace by the brothers; Silas, however, preferred to stay with them and only Judas went off. ³⁵So Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others the word of God.

Paul's second mission

◆ ³⁶After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the

brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, to see how they are getting on." ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take with them John also called Mark, ³⁸but Paul did not think it right to take him since he had not stayed with them to the end of their mission in Pamphylia, but had turned back and left them. ³⁹Such a sharp disagreement resulted that the two finally separated. Barnabas took Mark along with him and sailed for Cyprus. ⁴⁰Paul, on his part, chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers and sisters to the grace of the Lord.

⁴¹He travelled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

Paul recruits Timothy

+ 16 ¹Paul travelled on to Derbe and then to Lystra. A disciple named Timothy lived there, whose mother was a believer of Jewish origin and whose father was a Greek. ²As the brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. ³So he took him and, because of the Jews of that place who all knew that his father was a Greek, he circumcised him.

⁴As they travelled from town to

[37, 12, 12 40, 14, 26 1. Phil 2, 19; 1 Cor 4, 17; 1 Thes 3, 11 2. 2 Tim 3, 11 3. 1 Cor 9, 20]

Concerning the same theme of sharing among Christians, see Rom 14.

◆ This is the year 50. It has been thirteen years since Paul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus and now another stage of his life is starting. He acts as the leader in charge. The apostles and the church in Jerusalem had officially recognized the mission that Christ had given him on the day of his conversion: he will be the apostle to the pagan nations which form the Roman world (Gal 2:7-9; Eph 3:8-9).

The sudden breakup of Paul and his friend Barnabas should not surprise us: faith does not destroy one's personality. But, time and thanksgiving tend to lessen conflicts. Some years later, Paul who is imprisoned, will be helped by Mark (Phlm 24), and much later, imprisoned again, Paul will ask Mark to come and help him (2 Tim 4:11).

+ For Paul, it is not enough to have established Elders in every community, but he also wants to have assistants who are to visit and strengthen the existing communities and form new ones, as Paul himself does. Timothy becomes the first of these. The apostle takes into account the good testimony which believers give of him and when it is a matter of looking for leaders for the Church, he will always demand that they have a good reputation (see Tim 3:7 and Titus 1:6).

A detail shows us how Paul was able to give in. He does not want pagans to be circumcised: this ritual has no value for a Christian. Yet, since Timothy is Jewish, Paul circumcises him according to the Jewish rite so that he would not have any problems with believers of Jewish origins and so that they would be better able to minister among them.

It is important to realize that Luke gives only



town, they delivered the decisions of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, for the people to obey. ⁵ Meanwhile, the churches grew stronger in faith and increased in number every day.

⁶ They travelled through Phrygia and Galatia, because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do this. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

Paul goes to Macedonia

■ ⁹ There one night Paul had a vision. A Macedonian stood before him and begged him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰ When he awoke, he told us this vision and we understood that the Lord was calling us to give the Good News to the Macedonian people.

¹¹ So we put out to sea from Troas and sailed straight across to Samothrace Island, and the next day to Neapolis. ¹² From there we went inland to Philippi, the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We spent some days in that city.

¹³ On the sabbath we went outside the city gate to the bank of the river where we thought the Jews would gather to pray. We sat down and

began speaking to the women who were gathering there. ¹⁴ One of them was a God-fearing woman named Lydia from Thyatira City, a dealer in purple cloth.

As she listened, the Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. ¹⁵ After she had been baptized together with her household, she invited us to her house, "If you think I am faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us to accept.

Paul and Silas in prison

◆ ¹⁶ As we were on our way to the place of prayer one day, we were met by a slave girl who had a divining spirit and gained much profit for her masters by her fortune telling.

¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us shouting, "These people are servants of the Most High God. They will make known to you a way of salvation." ¹⁸ The girl did this for several days until Paul was annoyed. Then he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you, come out of her!" Then the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her masters realized that all the profits they expected had gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the local authorities. ²⁰ And when they had turned them over to the

6, 18, 20; Gal 4, 13 8, 20, 5

15, 10, 2; 16, 32 18, 3, 6

a few details concerning a journey which must have lasted about two years. Paul's letters enable us to see something of the persevering work to which he dedicated himself in the recently founded communities in order to form believers and their leaders.

On two occasions the Holy Spirit prevents Paul from carrying out his plan to develop the Church in the Roman province of Asia. The Spirit shows him he must go beyond, to Macedonia which was the first province of Europe. Thus, God's will that the Gospel be taken, as soon as possible to Rome, the center of the empire, is confirmed. Paul who is so dynamic

and enterprising follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

■ Suddenly the text mentions we, that is to say, that Luke is beginning to relate his own involvement. We must conclude that in Troas, Paul and Silas meet Luke, a doctor from Antioch who was waiting for them. He may have arrived by boat while the two missionaries were traveling inland.

◆ It seems that everything contributed to make the Philippi incident an example of Christian freedom.

Paul frees a girl who was a fortune-teller. If



officials, they said, ²¹ "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They have come here to introduce customs which are not lawful for us Romans to adopt or practice."

²² So they set the crowd against them and the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be flogged. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows on them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to guard them safely. ²⁴ Upon receiving these instructions, he threw them into the inner cell and fastened their feet between heavy blocks of wood.

A miraculous deliverance

²⁵ About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly a severe earthquake shook the place, rocking the prison to its foundations. Immediately all the doors flew open and the chains of all the prisoners fell off. ²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison gates wide open. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword to kill himself, ²⁸ but Paul shouted to him, "Do not harm yourself! We are all still here."

²⁹ The jailer asked for a light, then rushed in, and fell at the feet of Paul and Silas. ³⁰ After he had secured the other prisoners, he led them out and

asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved."

³² Then they spoke the word of God to him and to all his household.

³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer took care of them and washed their wounds; and he and his whole household were baptized at once.

³⁴ He led them to his house, spread a meal before them and joyfully celebrated with his whole household his new found faith in God.

³⁵ The next morning the officials sent police officers with the order, "Let those men go." ³⁶ So the jailer said to Paul and Silas, "The officials have sent an order for you and Silas to be released. You may leave and go in peace."

³⁷ But Paul said to him, "They flogged us publicly, without trial, men who are Roman citizens; and now they want to smuggle us out secretly? Oh no! Let them come into the prison and lead us out."

³⁸ The police officers reported this to the officials, who were afraid when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they went to the prison with many of their friends and invited them to leave, "We did not know that you were upright men." And when Paul and Silas were leaving, they added, "When you are out,

22. 1 Cor 11, 19; Phil 1, 30; 1 Thes 3, 2
37. 22, 25, 23, 27

25. Eph 5, 19; Col 3, 16

26. 4, 31

31. 4, 12

this "gift" is not fraud, according to the Bible, it comes from being in contact with hidden forces ruling this world (Col 2:15; 1 Cor 2:8), keeping us away from God, because we cannot trust in God and also seek such answers.

Before this healing, the girl's masters could only say that *these men introduce customs which we cannot accept*. The Jews had already used similar arguments and others will do the same by denouncing the true believers "in the name of the sacred traditions of our culture" and without seriously looking at the facts.

In Roman jails there was a central room and in the center of the pavement a grill closed the

opening through which the most dangerous prisoners were thrown into an underground cell. They throw Paul and Silas there. They are perfectly free in spite of their chains. Though they have been beaten and are wounded, they feel like praising God. In the silence of the night, the jailers and the other prisoners listen to them.

God is also listening. This example of Christian freedom draws the witness of the Holy Spirit: the gates open, revealing the presence of God who grants the men freedom.

Note also Paul who knows how to defend his rights (v 37).



please do not bring trouble on us for having spoken sharply to you."

⁴⁰Once outside the prison, Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house where they met and encouraged the brothers and then departed.

Difficulties in Thessalonica

17 ¹Paul and Silas took the road through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

²As Paul used to do, he went to the synagogue and on three sabbaths he held discussions with them about the Scriptures. ³He explained and proved to them that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and he said, "Such a Messiah is this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you."

⁴Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas. So too did a great number of Greeks sympathetic to Judaism and many prominent women.

⁵This only made the Jews jealous, so they gathered some of the good-for-nothing street loafers and formed a mob to start a riot in the town. They came to the house of Jason, in an attempt to bring Paul and Silas before the people's assembly. ⁶Not finding them there, they dragged off Jason and some of the brothers to the city authorities shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" ⁷and Jason

has given them hospitality. They all disregard the decrees of the Emperor and claim that there is another king, Jesus."

⁸In this way they upset the crowd and the city officials who heard them. ⁹The officials released Jason and the others on bail.

¹⁰As soon as night fell, the brothers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea. On their arrival they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹Its members were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica and welcomed the message with great enthusiasm. Each day they examined the Scriptures to see if these things were so. ¹²Many of them came to believe, as did numerous influential Greek women, and many men as well.

¹³But when the Jews of Thessalonica came to know that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they hurried there to cause a commotion and stir up the crowds.

¹⁴At once, the brothers sent Paul away to the coast; but both Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. ¹⁵Paul was taken as far as Athens by his escort, who then returned to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible.

Paul in Athens

+ ¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he felt very uneasy at the sight of a city full of idols. ¹⁷He

1. 1 Thes 2, 2

2. 13, 14

3. 9, 20; 18, 5

5. 13, 45; 1 Thes 2, 15; Rom 16, 21

6. 16, 20; 24, 5

7. Jn 19, 12

o From this journey we must consider the case of Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. Almost all the Jews violently oppose Paul. The Christian community will begin with men of Greek descent who "fear the Lord" whom Paul first met in the synagogues and with other pagan Greeks. Persecution prevents Paul from staying more than two months. How could a church formed under such conditions and beginning with pagans with little training survive? Yet, it persevered: see the *Letters to the Thessalonians*.

+ Athens was the most famous city in the Greek world. Even after the loss of political control, Athens remained as the cultural center of the Roman world. Paul goes there, as he always aims for large cities or ports, where news travels from one place to another and spreads through sea travel.

He is offered the opportunity to speak in the presence of Athens' philosophers and leaders: he accepts immediately. He tries to give a learned twist to his message before



held discussions in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing men, as well as daily debates in the public square with ordinary passers-by.

¹⁸Epicureans and Stoic philosophers debated with him, some of them asking, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others commented, "He sounds like a promoter of foreign gods," because he was heard to speak of Jesus and 'the Resurrection.'¹⁹ So they took Paul and led him off to the Areopagus hall, and said, "We would like to know what this new teaching is that you are talking about."²⁰ Some of the things we hear you say sound strange to us, and we would like to know what they mean."

²¹Indeed, all Athenian citizens, as well as the foreigners who lived there, have as their favourite occupation talking about or listening to what is new.

²²Then Paul stood up in the Areopagus hall and said, "Athenian citizens, I note that in every way you are very religious."²³ As I walked around looking at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed: *To an un-*

known God. Now, what you worship as unknown, I intend to make known to you.

²⁴God, who made the world and all that is in it, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, being as he is Lord of heaven and earth.²⁵ Nor does his worship depend on anything made by human hands, as if he were in need. Rather it is he who gives life and breath and everything else to everyone.²⁶ From one stock he created the whole human race, to live throughout all the earth and he fixed the time and the boundaries of each nation.²⁷ He wanted them to seek God by themselves, even if it were only by groping for him, and eventually to find him.

Yet he is not far from any one of us.²⁸ For: *in him we live and move and have our being*, as some of your poets have said: *for we too are his offspring.*

²⁹If we are indeed God's offspring, we ought not to think of divinity as something like a statue of gold or silver or stone, a product of human art and imagination.

³⁰But now God prefers to overlook this time of ignorance and he calls on

18. Col 1: 22
29. 1: 40, 18

23. 14, 17; Gal 4, 8
31. 10, 42; 1 Thes 1, 10

25. Ps 13, 39

26. 14, 17; Gen 10; Dt 32, 8

these intellectuals: it turns out to be a disaster. Note these learned people's cool welcome of the Gospel. They are more curious about hearing something new than about real involvement.

Paul had in mind, first, to speak about the people who seek God, then, to present God who, in Jesus, comes to seek men, giving them time to convert before judgment. But they did not let him finish his speech.

Let us note that Paul praises these pagan people and their intellectuals.

He wanted them to seek God by themselves. Paul does not condemn the philosophers who do not have faith. In spite of their errors, we must see in them, the efforts and the groping of men to reach the Truth, and the Truth is God. God reveals himself in nature and through all kinds of blessings which life brings us. God arouses in us the concern to unite all people, since we all share the same nature.

Today we must still regard the pagan and

non-Christian religions with respect. These religions express the faith of the people seeking God and the Holy Spirit is at work in them. The Gospel does not destroy but it raises the culture, religions and wisdom prior to it, to a higher level. In the same way, we cannot evangelize the urban masses and the workers without respecting the movements which keep alive the hope of justice for all and the end of the colonial situation prevailing in many countries.

Later, however, Paul points out that God *prefers to overlook that time.* Christ has come: starting with him, who is the head (Col 1: 18), the dispersed children of God are going to be gathered in one body (Jn 11:52; Eph 1:10), and since he is the definitive truth, all must believe in the Gospel. God judges the world through Christ, that is to say, that men are saved or condemned depending on whether they accept or reject this God who appeared poor and humble.



all people to change their ways. ³¹ He has already set a day on which he will judge the world with justice through a man he has appointed. And, so that all may believe it, he has just given a sign by raising this man from the dead."

³² When they heard Paul speak of a resurrection from death, some made fun of him, while others said, "We must hear you on this topic some other time." ³³ At that point Paul left.

³⁴ But a few did join him, and believed. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus court, a woman named Damaris, and some others.

Paul in Corinth

18 ¹ After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, following a decree of the Emperor Claudius which ordered all Jews to leave Rome. ³ Paul went to visit them and then stayed and worked with them because they shared the same trade of tentmaking. Every sabbath ⁴ he held a discussion in the synagogue, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was able to give himself wholly to preaching

and proving to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ One day when they opposed him and insulted him, he shook the dust from his clothes in protest, saying, "You yourselves will account for your deeds! I am not to blame if from now on I go to the Non-Jews."

⁷ So Paul left there and went to the house of a God-fearing man named Titus Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. ⁸ A leading man of the synagogue, Crispus, along with his whole household, believed in the Lord. On hearing Paul, many more Corinthians believed and were baptized.

⁹ One night, in a vision, the Lord said to Paul, "Do not be afraid, but continue speaking and do not be silent ¹⁰ for I will have a harvest of many people in this city. Since I am with you, no one will harm you." ¹¹ So Paul stayed a year and a half in that place, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² When Gallio was governor of Achaia, the Jews rose in a body against Paul and brought him before the court. And they accused him, ¹³ "This man tries to persuade us to worship God in ways that are against the Law."

¹⁴ Paul was about to speak in his own defense when Gallio said to the

32. 1 Cor 1, 23; 15, 12
1 Thes 2, 9
11. Is 41, 10; 1 Cor 2, 3

2. 18, 18; 1 Cor 16, 9
6. 13, 46; 28, 28; 13, 51; Lk 9, 5
12. 19, 38

3. 1 Cor 4, 12; 9, 6; 2 Cor 11, 7; Gal 6, 6;
10. 15, 14; Jn 10, 16; Jer 1, 8

■ Corinth, the main port of Greece, with 600,000 inhabitants, of whom 400,000 are slaves, capital of the province of Achaia, is a religious, commercial and cultural center. It has countless temples with thousands of prostitutes serving in them. The city is famous for its luxury and its corruption. Paul goes there and remains eighteen months – until the end of the year 52. This date is exact: history tells us that Gallio was governor of Achaia during the year 52.

There appears a couple – Aquila and Priscilla. They may have been Christians already, but the emperor's decree had expelled all the Jewish Christians from Rome.

Aquila and Priscilla simply placed themselves at Paul's service to help him. They will assist him on other occasions with the natural availability of people who do not feel tied to any city or country.

Note what Christ says in the vision. Obstacles do not discourage the apostle. He knows that, ordinarily, the devil increases the obstacles when we step into his territory, for fear of losing his dominion. But, in this center of corruption, grace will be more powerful.

◆ In this short paragraph Luke combined the end of the second journey and the beginning of the third.



⁴ Paul then explained, "John himself spoke of another one who was to come, and that one is Jesus." ⁵ Upon hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit came down upon them ⁶ and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. ⁷ There were about twelve of them in all.

⁸ Paul went into the synagogue and for three months he preached and discussed there boldly, trying to convince them about the Kingdom of God. ⁹ Some of them, instead of believing, grew obstinate and criticized the way publicly. So Paul departed from them and took the disciples away. He taught daily in the school of a certain Tyrannus, from eleven to four in the afternoon. ¹⁰ He did this for two years, so that all those who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Non-Jews, heard the word of the Lord.

+ ¹¹ God did extraordinary deeds of power through the hands of Paul. ¹² Even handkerchiefs or cloths that had touched his skin were laid upon the sick and their illnesses were cured, and evil spirits also departed from them.

¹³ Some Jews who travelled around driving out evil spirits, also tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those possessed by evil spirits, saying, "I command you by this Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Among them were the sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva. ¹⁵ But one day, when they entered a house and dared to do this, the evil spirit said to them, "Jesus I recognize and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man with the evil spirit sprang at them and overpowered first one and then another. And he handled them so violently that they fled from that house naked and mauled. ¹⁷ This became known to all the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus; all of them were very impressed and the name of the Lord Jesus came to be held in great honour.

¹⁸ Many of those who had become believers came forward and openly acknowledged their former practices. ¹⁹ Many who had practised magic arts collected their books and burned them in front of everyone. When the value of these was assessed, it came to fifty thousand silver coins.

²⁰ Powerfully, in this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew strong.

4. 13, 34; Lk 3, 3
20. 6, 7; 12, 24

5. 8, 17; 10, 46

12. 5, 15; Lk 8, 44

13. Lk 9, 49; Mt 17, 27

• For three years, Paul had wanted to evangelize Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the most beautiful and largest cities in the empire.

Note the *twelve men*. John the Baptist's disciples. They are believers and they are upright men: yet, they lack what is most important: they had not received the Holy Spirit. *He came down on them* (v 6). See Acts 8:14. It is good to have experienced the gifts of the Spirit at a turning point of our life. It is still better if in our Christian commitments we allow ourselves to be guided by this divine "instinct" instead of always relying on our own ability.

They were baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Must we presume that in the early days, baptism was "in the Name of Jesus" and not "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?" This is not certain. *In the*

Name means: by the power of, and perhaps the baptism "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" was also called "baptism in the Name of Jesus" to distinguish it from the "baptism of John" and from the many baptisms of the Jewish and pagan religions.

But, perhaps, in the first generation, people were baptized in *the Name of Jesus* and later, the Church modified the formula to distinguish itself from groups believing in Jesus, but without acknowledging him to be the Son of God born of the Father. In any case, there is no room for the controversies of these local churches thinking they have reinvented the Gospel, when they condemn the formula used for twenty centuries which names the three divine persons. It is the Church of the apostles which gave the first formula and it is also the Church which, some years



sign of the failure of the twentieth century Church is this: she has lost touch with people in the crowded urban areas, becoming a church of the middle class. Many Catholics try to help the needy and catechize their children; the best evangelists vindicate the rights of the poor. In several countries the bishops' conferences have loosened their links with the rich and work among urban poor people. But in most places the Church does not evangelize them by identifying and adult workers and forming their leaders to build from their own living communities. The people see the Church distant from their life and their experience of life and God. They do not find God's word translated to them in the statements of the hierarchy. As the huge crowds were left without pastors, millions of them created their own churches.





Have you noticed that you put on the dead one? The risen Christ would be one with you.



The silversmiths' riot

■ ²¹When all these events were completed, Paul led by the Holy Spirit decided to travel through Macedonia and Achaia again and then go on to Jerusalem. And he said, "After I have been there, I must make for Rome."
²²So he sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, ahead of him, while he himself stayed on for a time in Asia.

²³About that time the city was deeply troubled because of the *Way*.
²⁴It all began because of a certain silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver models of the temple of the goddess Artemis and whose business brought a great deal of profit to the workers.
²⁵He called them together with others who did similar work and said, "Friends, you know that our prosperity depends on this work.
²⁶But, as you can see and hear for yourselves, this Paul has led astray a great number of people, not only here in Ephesus, but also throughout most of the province of Asia. And he has convinced them that gods made by human hands are no gods at all.
²⁷The danger grows, that not only our trade will be discredited, but even that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will count for nothing. She whom Asia and all the world worships may soon be stripped of her renown."

²⁸On hearing this they became

enraged and began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"
²⁹The uproar spread throughout the whole city. The mob rushed to the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, two Macedonians who were Paul's travelling companions.
³⁰Paul wished to face this crowd, but the disciples would not let him.
³¹Some of the counsellors of the Asian province also, who were friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to show himself in the theatre.

³²Meanwhile the whole assembly was in an uproar. Some shouted one thing, and some shouted another and most of them did not know why they were there.
³³Some of the crowd wanted a certain Alexander to speak, whom the Jews put forward. Alexander intended to prove their innocence before the crowd,
³⁴but, when they recognized that he was a Jew, they began to chant all together, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

³⁵Finally, the town clerk was able to calm the mob. He said, "Citizens of Ephesus, who among you does not know that Ephesus is keeper of the temple of the great Artemis, and of her image which fell from the sky?
³⁶Since these things are undeniable, you must calm yourselves and do nothing rash.
³⁷These men whom you brought here are not temple-robbers nor have they spoken ill of our goddess.
³⁸If Demetrius and his fellow

later, gave the second formula which we read about in Mt 28:19.

+ Many are the signs that Jesus had promised for those who would believe (Mk 16:15-18). Similar things happen today when the Church becomes missionary again.

We are impressed by the cures. Perhaps, the in-depth conversion of those who confess their magic practices and burn their precious books, is more important. Apparently, they did not do it at the time of their baptism, but later, when they were more convinced about their faith.

21. 2 Cor 1, 15 23. 9, 2 27. 16, 19 34. 16, 20, 18, 17

■ The success of the Gospel was so great that it made idolatry stagger. It appeared, however, alongside many other religions. The Roman world was full of religious restlessness and, from Asia in particular, came many doctrines, cults and teachings which claimed to free people from death. But the Gospel was different from all of them since, while those doctrines were teaching theories, the apostles were proclaiming a fact: a Jew named Jesus has risen and we have seen him risen.

There is a chaotic disturbance. The group of idol-makers defend their interests. The Jews



craftsmen want to bring charges against anyone, the courts are open and there are officials. Let them bring charges against each other. ³⁹If there is anything further that needs to be investigated, let it be done in the lawful assembly. ⁴⁰For as it is today, we are in danger of being charged with rioting, since there is no valid excuse we can give for this wild demonstration."

Paul returns to Macedonia

◆20 ¹After the uproar died down, Paul called his disciples together to encourage them. Then he said goodbye and set out on his journey to Macedonia. ²He travelled throughout those regions and spent himself in speaking and encouraging them, and then came to Greece.

³When he had been there for three months, he wanted to set sail for Syria, but as the Jews were plotting against him, he decided to return by way of Macedonia. ⁴When he was about to leave for the Asian province, some companions went with him, Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. ⁵So they went ahead and waited for us in Troas, ⁶while we set sail from Philippi as soon as the festival of

Unleavened Bread was over. Five days later we joined them in Troas where we spent a week.

The Eucharist at Troas

o ⁷On the first day of the week we were together for the breaking of the bread, and Paul, who intended to leave the following day, spoke at length. The conversation lasted until midnight, ⁸with many lamps burning in the upstairs room where we were gathered. A young man named Eutychus was sitting on the window ledge, ⁹and as Paul kept on talking, Eutychus grew more and more sleepy, until he finally went sound asleep and fell from the third floor to the ground. There they found him dead.

¹⁰Paul went down, bent over him and took him in his arms. "Do not be alarmed," he said, "there is life in him." ¹¹Then he went back upstairs, broke the bread and ate. After that he kept on talking with them for a long time until daybreak and then he left. ¹²As for the young man, they lifted him up alive and were greatly comforted.

¹³We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were to pick up Paul. This was the arrangement since Paul intended to travel by foot. ¹⁴In fact, we met him at Assos

1. 16, 40 2. 2 Cor 2, 12 3. 2, 42; 1 Cor 11, 17; 16, 2 4. 10. 9, 36; 1 K 17, 21; Mk 5, 45

who lived quietly among the pagan population, are worried lest they be confused with the Christians and they try to excuse themselves.

◆ Paul spent two and a half years in Ephesus and various details in his letters suggest that Luke's story is quite incomplete as most of Paul's activity is not mentioned. Paul went through a lot of suffering. He may even have been imprisoned. During those months, he wrote the Letter to the Galatians and the first Letter to the Corinthians.

Paul goes to Macedonia (where Thessalonica is located) and to Greece (where he spends some time in Corinth). There, in Corinth, as he perseveres with his project of going to Rome, he writes to the Romans.

o It is not by accident that Luke says that they gathered on the first day of the week, since Christians had separated from the Jews, replacing the sacred Sabbath by the next day, the first day of the week, when Jesus had risen. That was a way of proclaiming this belief.

Naturally they meet in a home and this is the beginning of the Christian gathering which shares instruction and reflection, and concludes with thanksgiving (or Eucharist) and communion with the body of the Lord.

In this gathering, they can all express themselves. What is the content of Paul's long discourse?

– He reads and quotes the Scriptures announcing Jesus;



and taking him aboard, we went on to Mitylene.¹⁵ We sailed from there and arrived off Chios the next day. A day later we came to Samos and the following day we reached Miletus.

¹⁶Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so as not to lose time in Asia, for he was eager to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost, if at all possible.

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders

+ ¹⁷From Miletus Paul sent word to Ephesus, summoning the elders of the Church.¹⁸ When they came to him, he addressed them, "You know how I lived among you from the first day I set foot in the province of Asia,¹⁹ how I served the Lord in humility through the sorrows and trials that the Jews caused me.²⁰ You know that I never held back from doing anything that could be useful for you; I spoke publicly and in your homes²¹ and I urged Jews and Non-Jews alike that they turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.

²²But now I am to go to Jerusalem,

impelled by the Spirit, without knowing what will happen to me there.²³ Yet in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that imprisonment and troubles await me.²⁴ Indeed, I put no value on my life if only I can finish my race and complete the service to which I have been assigned by the Lord Jesus, to announce God's loving-kindness.

²⁵I now feel sure that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the Kingdom of God will ever see me again.²⁶ Therefore I declare to you this day that my conscience is clear with regard to all of you.²⁷ For I have spared no effort in fully declaring to you God's will.

²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has given into your care. Shepherd the Church of the Lord which he has won at the price of his own blood.²⁹ I know that after I leave, ruthless wolves will come among you and not spare the flock.³⁰ And from among yourselves, men will arise corrupting the truth and inducing the disciples to follow them.

17. 14, 23	18. 19, 10; 1 Thes 1, 5	19. 2 Cor 1, 8; 1 Thes 2, 10	22. 21, 11	24. Phil 1, 23; 3, 12
26. 2 Tim 4, 7	28. 1 Pet 2, 25; 5, 3; Heb 13, 20; 1 Pet 2, 9		29. Mt 17, 15; Jn 10, 12	

- he expresses his faith and his commitment to Christ;
- he relates the many happenings in his mission through the Spirit of Christ was at work.

This part of the gathering seems to go on and on until some become drowsy. But it had to conclude with the *breaking of the bread*, the Eucharist.

Through this, the participants witness God's power over death (see 10:36).

+ Paul goes back to Palestine. He already senses, or knows through a revelation from the Holy Spirit that a new part of his life will soon begin: years of imprisonment and trials. So, in saying good-bye, he wants to give some last advice to the leaders of all the communities he established in Asia.

The pastors of the Church must not only watch over the welfare of their parishioners. God had entrusted *his* Church to them and it was their role to prepare it for the trials that would come, and enable the people to keep the faith of

the apostles and remain united until the coming of Christ.

In Paul's discourse we find:

- a personal concern: Had he communicated to the leaders all they would need to fulfil their responsibility? This must be every apostle's concern: to prepare leaders to be really responsible for their communities without constantly needing to be pushed.
- an invitation to follow his example. Although the role of the elders is not exactly that of an apostle, they must, nevertheless, be disinterested: the pastor must not live at the expense of the community if he does not perform a real service, and is not generously committed. They must be watchful. It would be too late to worry about the community once errors had appeared and divisions had occurred. They do not own the Church: they are its servants: the Church belongs to the Lord who *has won it with the price of his own blood*.



³¹Be on the watch therefore, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease to warn everyone even with tears. ³²Now I commend you to God and to his grace-filled word, which is able to make you grow and reach the inheritance that you shall share with all the saints.

³³I have not looked for anyone's silver, gold or clothing. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands of mine have provided for both my needs and the needs of those who were with me. ³⁵In every way I have shown you that by so working hard one must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, 'Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving'."

³⁶After this discourse, Paul knelt down with them and prayed. ³⁷Then they all began to weep, and threw their arms around him and kissed him. ³⁸They were deeply distressed because he had said that they would never see him again. And they went with him even to the ship.

On to Jerusalem

21 ¹When we had finally taken leave of them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos, and the

next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ²There we found a ship that made for Phoenicia; we went aboard and set sail. ³We caught sight of Cyprus but passed it by on our left as we continued on towards Syria. We landed at Tyre, where the ship had to unload cargo. ⁴There we found the disciples and stayed a week. Warned by the Spirit, they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

◆ ⁵But, when it was time, we departed and continued on our journey. All of them, wives and children included, came out of the city with us and, on the beach, we knelt down and prayed. ⁶After that we said goodbye to one another; we boarded the ship and they returned home.

⁷We continued our journey, sailing from Tyre to Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and spent a day with them. ⁸On the following day we left and came to Caesarea. There we entered the house of Philip, the evangelist and we stayed with him. He was one of the Seven, ⁹and had four unmarried daughters who were gifted with prophecy.

¹⁰We were there some days when a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming to us, he took

31. 2 Tim 4, 2; Gal 4, 17 32. Eph 3, 6; Col 3, 24

– a warning about the self-sacrificing destiny of those who serve Christ.

The text also mentions the "bishops" (that word means inspectors). We do not know if they are the elders themselves, or only some of them, those with greater responsibility.

◆ These countless manifestations of the spirit of prophecy which are found throughout Acts, may surprise us.

Today several Christian groups think that this prophetic current has started again, but there are some who say that, on the contrary, such manifestations are pure illusion or hysteria.

It is true that many visions are no more than hallucinations of men weakened by lack of food and sleep. On the other hand, many people have such a vivid imagination that they believe they are seeing when they are only dreaming.

33. 1 S 12, 3 34. 18, 3 6. 20, 36 10. 11, 28

Besides, when a group meets in an atmosphere of exaltation and excitability, there are many strange manifestations which have nothing to do with the Spirit of Jesus. The doctors who assist the victims of such games know this well.

The strange conditions in which people dance, stamp their feet, speak as if they were unconscious (and sometimes the whole assembly together) can be observed in many primitive non-Christian religions, especially in Africa. Therefore, when this happens in a Christian church, we should ask ourselves if this comes from the good spirit, or the evil or stupid spirit. This has nothing to do with the prophetic spirit.

The Bible warns us about prophets who "prophesy without having been sent," or who have the dreams they wish to have (Jer 29:8). The Gospel offers us a way to distinguish the true prophets from the false ones "by their fruits you

Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands with it, saying, ¹¹"Thus speaks the Holy Spirit: This is how the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and hand him over to the foreign power."

¹²When we heard this, we and the brothers of Caesarea begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then he answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴When he would not be persuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵After this we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶With us were some of the disciples of Caesarea who brought us to the house of a Cypriot where we were to stay. He was called Mnason and was one of the early disciples.

Paul is received by the Church of Jerusalem

+ ¹⁷When we arrived in Jerusalem the brothers welcomed us warmly. ¹⁸The next day Paul went with us to James' house where all the elders had gathered. ¹⁹After greeting them, Paul began telling them in detail every-

thing God had done among the Non-Jews through his ministry.

²⁰After hearing this, they all praised God, but they said, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews of Judea have come to believe, and all of them are zealous for the Law." ²¹Yet they have heard that you teach the Jews who live in pagan nations to depart from Moses, telling them not to have their sons circumcised and to renounce Jewish customs. ²²We shall gather the assembly for in any case they will hear that you have arrived. ²³Then do as we tell you.

There are four men among us who have made a vow. ²⁴Take them and purify yourself along with them and pay the sacrifice for them to shave their heads. In that way everyone will know that there is nothing true in what they have been told about you, but that you keep the Law.

²⁵As for the Non-Jews who have become believers, we sent them a letter to tell them that they are only obliged not to eat meat offered to idols, or blood, or flesh of strangled animals; and also to avoid prohibited sexual union."

²⁶So the next day Paul took the men; he purified himself with them

12. Lk 18, 32 13. 20, 24; Lk 21, 12 19. 15, 3 20. 11, 2; Gal 5, 1 21. Rom 2, 15; Gal 3, 22
24. 18, 18; 1 Cor 9, 20 25. 15, 19

will know them." See also 1 Cor 12:1-3.

And yet, we must not doubt the activity of the Spirit of prophecy in the Church. It is more active where there is a deep life of faith and when the Church is faced with more difficult circumstances. See commentary on 8:18.

The more spectacular a "spiritual" manifestation is, the more suspicious it is. The Spirit reveals what is most precious interiorly, without words, or visions, in the center of the soul, which only God reaches. The devil, on the contrary, is very clever in suggesting sensational words and spectacular visions.

He who renounces self and surrenders to Christ sees the Spirit increasingly at work in his life. He becomes used to discerning silent inspiration within. Through experience, he verifies that even when reason would suggest a different way of acting, this inner inspiration is the right

one. He is used to not trusting his own plans and remains attentive to the promptings of the Spirit. And, above all, he is convinced that the gift of prophecy is nothing compared with the Spirit of love (1 Cor. chapter 13).

The story of the journey enables us to appreciate the mutual affection among Christian people. Welcoming travelers who had come from other communities into one's home was an extremely important obligation that Paul emphasizes in several letters. When apostles or prophets came, the delight was greater, because their passage was always marked by manifestations of the Spirit, with the communal meditation on the Word, and with the news they received from the universal Church.

+ The Christians of Jewish origin praise Paul when he gets to Jerusalem, but at the same time,



and entered the Temple to give notice of what day the sacrifice would be offered for each of them to end his time of purification.

Paul is arrested in the Temple

o ²⁷ When the seven days were almost over, some Jews from Asia, who saw Paul in the Temple, began to stir up the whole crowd. They seized him ²⁸ shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is spreading his teaching everywhere against our people, our law and this Sanctuary. And now he has even brought Non-Jews into the Temple area, defiling this Holy Place." ²⁹ They said this because earlier they had seen Trophimus, an Ephesian, with Paul in the city and they thought that Paul had taken him into the Temple.

³⁰ Then turmoil spread through the whole city. People came running from all sides, they seized Paul and dragged him outside the Temple. At once the gates were shut.

³¹ They would have killed him, had not a report reached the commander of the Roman troops that all of Jerusalem was rioting. ³² At once the com-

mander took some officers and soldiers and rushed down to the crowd.

On seeing him with the soldiers, the crowd stopped beating Paul. ³³ The commander went over to Paul, arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains; then he inquired who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ But some in the crowd shouted one thing and others another. As the commander was unable to find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered Paul to be brought to headquarters. ³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, he actually had to be carried up by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob, ³⁶ for a multitude of people followed shouting, "Kill him!"

³⁷ Just as he was about to be taken inside, Paul said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" He replied, "So you speak Greek! ³⁸ Are you not the Egyptian, then, who caused a riot some time ago and let a band of four thousand terrorists out into the desert?" Paul answered, ³⁹ "I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus, a well-known city in Cilicia. I beg you, let me address these people."

28. 6, 12; Mt 27, 40

29. 20, 4

36. Lk 23, 18

they humiliate him. There is a rumor among them that Paul, besides not imposing the Judaic Law on the Christian converts from paganism, also suggests that the Jews abandon the Law. To prove these accusations false, they advise him to become involved in a typically Jewish and very costly ceremony.

Those who insist are the *elders* working with James "the brother of the Lord": all are Jews from Palestine who, in spite of their faith, are still attached to the customs of the Old Testament.

They point out the importance of the Jerusalem community: *thousands of Jews* in order to make their demands respected. They may still have been more numerous than the Christians from the pagan world: this was the burden of the past. Paul accepts for the sake of peace, but that will be his downfall.

o There are several similarities between Paul's arrest and Stephen's a few years before (see 6:9). The Jews from Asia draw up several accusations: the most serious one being that Paul

brought an "uncircumcised" man into the Temple; this profanation was punishable by death. *This man preaches against our people, against our law, and our sanctuary.* There were similar accusations against Christ and Stephen.

This is a false accusation. Nevertheless, the Jews are not totally wrong: through his teachings, Paul forms Christians who replace the Temple worship by faith in Christ; they replace the Law by a life of obedience to the Spirit and Jewish nationalism by universal Christian brotherhood. The Jews' indignation resembles that of some Christian groups who fear that the Church's renewal may engender contempt for their devotions and their churches, and may harm the political solidarity of Catholics.

The Roman troops occupying Jerusalem and keeping order, were stationed in a fortress adjacent to the Temple and overlooking it. Thanks to this the soldiers were able to intervene before Paul met the same fate as met Stephen.



The commander agreed. ⁴⁰ So Paul standing on the steps, motioned to the people with his hand and, when they were silent, he began to speak to them in Hebrew.

Paul addresses the Jews

22 ¹ "Brothers and fathers, listen to what I have to say to you in my defense." ² When they heard him speaking to them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. So he went on.

+ ³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up here in this city where I was educated in the school of Gamaliel, according to the strict observance of our Law. And I was dedicated to God's service as are all of you today. ⁴ As for this way, I persecuted it to the point of death and arrested its followers, both men and women, throwing them into prison.

⁵ The High Priest and the whole Council of elders can bear witness to this: for they gave me letters for the Jewish brothers in Damascus and I set out to arrest the Christians I would find there and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. ⁶ But, as I was travelling along, nearing Damascus, at about noon a great light from the sky suddenly flashed about me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me: 'Saul, Saul, why do you

persecute me?' ⁸ I answered: 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me: 'I am Jesus the Nazarean whom you are persecuting.' ⁹ The men who were with me saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ I asked: 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord replied: 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told all that you are destined to do.' ¹¹ Yet the brightness of that light had blinded me and I was led by the hand into Damascus by my companions.

¹² There a certain Ananias came to me. He was a devout observer of the Law and well spoken of by all the Jews who were living there. ¹³ As he stood by me, he said: 'Brother Saul, recover your sight.' At that moment I could see and I looked at him. ¹⁴ He then said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear the sound of his voice. ¹⁵ From now on you shall be his witness before all the pagan peoples and tell them all that you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized and have your sins washed away by calling upon his Name.'

¹⁷ On my return to Jerusalem I was praying in the Temple, when I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw him. He spoke to me: 'Get ready to leave Jerusalem

1. 9 & 26

2. 7, 2

4. 8, 2; Gal 1, 14; Phil 3, 6; Rom 10, 2

14. Gal 1, 15

15. 3, 14; 7, 52

+ To understand the chapters dealing with Paul's trial, we have to remember that justice in the Roman empire was very well organized. The supreme tribunal was in Rome: this was the *Tribunal of Caesar*, and Roman citizens fearing a mistrial in their province, can appeal to the Tribunal of Caesar. There were governors (or procurators) who administered justice in each province. In the Jewish territory, the Romans who occupied the country kept the important cases for themselves, but they left the rest to the Jewish tribunals, especially religious affairs. Paul was to go through various tribunals, beginning with the Sanhedrin, or religious court of the Jews and all the way to the tribunal of Caesar.

Thus, through Paul, the words of Jesus entrusting to his apostles the mission of proclaiming him before Jewish and pagan authorities, will be fulfilled.

Paul tries to make the resurrection of Christ the theme of his declaration. There was a trial to condemn Jesus. Now, Paul tries to have the governors pay attention to the cause of the risen Jesus, and he succeeds.

In every age, such will be the zeal of the witnesses of Christ when they are accused: to demonstrate that they are not acting out of interest, nor for any human motive, but because they are the servants of Christ.



without delay, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' ¹⁹ I answered: 'Lord, they know well that I imprisoned those who believed in you and had them beaten in every synagogue, ²⁰ and while the blood of your witness Stephen was being poured out, I stood by and approved it and even guarded the cloaks of his murderers.' ²¹ At that point he said to me: 'Go, for I am sending you far away to the pagan nations.'

²²Up to this point the crowd listened to Paul, but on hearing the last words, they began to shout, "Kill him! He does not deserve to live!" ²³They were screaming and waving their cloaks and throwing dust up into the air. ²⁴So the commander ordered Paul to be brought inside the headquarters and questioned after flogging, to find out why they made such an outcry against him.

²⁵ But when the soldiers had strapped him down, Paul said to the officer standing there, "Is it legal to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?"

²⁶On hearing this the officer went to the commander and said, "What are you doing? That man is a Roman citizen." ²⁷So the commander came and asked him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes," answered Paul. ²⁸The commander then said, "It cost me a large sum of money to become a Roman citizen." Paul answered, "I am one by birth."

²⁹Then those who were about to question him backed away and the commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put a Roman citizen in chains.

Paul appears before the Sanhedrin

³⁰The next day the commander wanted to know for certain the

charges the Jews were making against Paul. So he released him from prison and called together the High Priest and the whole Council; and they brought Paul down and made him stand before them.

23 ¹Paul looked directly at the Council and said, "Brothers, to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God." ²At that the High Priest Ananias ordered his attendants to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said, "God is about to strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the Law, and you break the Law by ordering me to be struck!" ⁴At this the attendants protested, "How dare you insult God's High Priest?" ⁵Paul answered, "Brothers, I did not know that he was the High Priest. For the Scripture says: *You shall not curse the ruler of your people.*"

⁶ Paul knew that part of the Council were Sadducees and others Pharisees, so he spoke out in the Council. "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee. It is for the hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial here."

⁷ At these words, an argument broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the whole assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees claim that there is neither resurrection, nor angels nor spirits, while the Pharisees acknowledge all these things.

Then the shouting grew louder, and some teachers of the Law of the Pharisee party protested, "We do not find evil in this man. Maybe a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

¹⁰With this the argument became so violent that the commander feared

21. let 1,5

3. Мт 23, 27

25. 16.37

5. Lev 19, 15

30. 5. 21: 6. 12: Mr 10. 17

6, 5, 17; 26, 6; Phil 3, 5

1. 2 Cor 1. 12

8. Mk 12. 18

2. ln 18.22



that Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He therefore ordered the soldiers to go down and rescue him from their midst and take him back to headquarters.

¹¹ That night the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Courage! as you have borne witness to me here in Jerusalem, so must you do in Rome."

The plot to kill Paul

¹² When it was day, certain Jews formed a conspiracy: they bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

¹³ There were more than forty of them who joined in this conspiracy.

¹⁴ They went to the high priests and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves by oath not to taste food until we have killed Paul." ¹⁵ Now then, it is up to you and the Council together to convince the Roman commander to bring him down to you on the pretext that you want to investigate his case more thoroughly. We for our part, are prepared to kill him before he gets there."

¹⁶ But Paul's nephew heard about the planned ambush, so he went to the headquarters and informed Paul.

¹⁷ Paul sent for one of the officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander for he has something to report to him." ¹⁸ So the officer took him and brought him to the commander, saying, "The prisoner Paul called me and asked me to bring this boy to you because he has something to tell you."

¹⁹ The commander took him by the hand and drawing him aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?" ²⁰ The boy replied, "The Jews have agreed among themselves to ask you tomorrow to have Paul brought down to the Coun-

cil as if to inquire more thoroughly about him." ²¹ But do not be persuaded by them, for there are more than forty of them ready to ambush him, having bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are prepared, and are awaiting your decision." ²² The commander let the boy go with the advice, "Do not tell anyone that you gave me this information."

Paul transferred to Caesarea

²³ Then the commander summoned two of his officers and said to them, "Get ready to leave for Caesarea by nine o'clock tonight, with two hundred infantrymen, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen." ²⁴ Provide horses also for Paul to ride, so that he may be brought safely to Felix the governor."

²⁵ He then wrote the governor a letter to this effect.

²⁶ "Claudius Lysias greets the Most Excellent Governor Felix and communicates to him the following: ²⁷ The Jews had arrested this man and were about to kill him when I intervened with my troops and took him out of their hands, since I knew he was a Roman citizen. ²⁸ As I wanted to know what charge they had against him, I presented him before the Sanhedrin and ²⁹ I discovered that the accusation related to matters of their Law, but there was nothing which deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰ When I was informed that the Jews had prepared a plot against this man, I decided to send him to you and told his accusers to present their complaints before you. Farewell."

³¹ The soldiers acted in accordance with these instructions. They took Paul and brought him to Antipatris by night. ³² On the following day, they



returned to the fortress but the horsemen continued journeying with him. ³³Upon entering Caesarea they handed the letter to the governor and presented Paul to him. ³⁴When Felix had read the letter, he asked Paul from where he was, and when he knew that Paul was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said to him: "I shall hear your accusers when they come." And he ordered that he be kept in custody in the palace of Herod.

The case before Felix

24 ¹After five days Ananias the High Priest came down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. And they presented their case against Paul before the governor. ²Paul was called in and Tertullus accused him in this way:

³"Most Excellent Felix, thanks to you – your labours and your wise reforms – our people now enjoy great peace. We accept all this in every way and in every place, and we are totally grateful to you. ⁴So as not to take more of your time, I beg you to listen briefly to us with your usual kindness. ⁵We have found that this man is a pest, he creates division among the Jews throughout the world and is a leader of the Nazarene sect. ⁶He even tried to profane the Temple, so we arrested him. We would have judged him according to our Law, ⁷but Lysias the commandant intervened in a very violent way and took him from us. ⁸Then he declared that his accusers must present themselves before you. By examining him yourself, you will learn from him about all that we accuse him of."

⁹The Jews confirmed this, firmly maintaining that all this was so.

¹⁰Then the governor motioned to Paul who said:

"As I know that you have administered this nation for many years, make my defense with much confidence. ¹¹You yourself can ascertain that not more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship ¹²and that they did not find me disputing with anyone or inciting the people, either in the Temple or in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³So they cannot prove the things of which they now accuse me.

¹⁴But, this I admit before you, that I serve the God of our fathers according to the Way which they call a sect. I believe everything written in the Law and in the Prophets, ¹⁵and I have the same hope in God that they have that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both the good and the sinners. ¹⁶So I strive always to have a clear conscience before God and before men.

¹⁷After many years, I came to bring help to those of my nation and to offer sacrifices. ¹⁸On that occasion they found me in the Temple; I had been purified according to the Law and there was no crowd or commotion. Yet all began with some Jews from Asia ¹⁹who ought to be here before you to accuse me, if they have anything against me. ²⁰Let these men say what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin ²¹unless it was for having declared in a loud voice when I was before them "Today I am being judged on account of the resurrection of the dead."

²²Felix who was well-informed about the Way, postponed the case and said to them. "When the commandant, Lysias, comes down, I will examine the case thoroughly." ²³So he ordered the captain to keep Paul under guard, giving him certain liberty



and without preventing his friends from attending to him.

²⁴After some days, Felix came with his wife Drusilla who was a Jew. He sent for Paul and let him speak about faith in Christ. ²⁵But when Paul spoke about justice, self control and the future judgment, Felix was frightened and he said to him: "You may leave now; I shall send for you some other time." ²⁶Felix was hoping that Paul would give him money, so he sent for him often and conversed with him.

²⁷Two years passed, and Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and as Felix wanted to remain on good terms with the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

The trial before Festus

25 ¹Three days after Festus arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. ²There the chief priests and the elders accused Paul again. ³In a very hypocritical way, they asked as a favour from Festus that Paul be brought to Jerusalem; but they were planning to kill him on the way. ⁴Festus answered that Paul was under custody in Caesarea and, as he himself had to go there shortly, he added, ⁵"Let those men of higher authority among you go down with me to Caesarea, and if this man has done anything wrong, let them accuse him."

⁶Festus did not stay in Jerusalem for more than eight or ten days, and then he went to Caesarea. The next day, he took his seat on the tribunal and sent for Paul. ⁷When Paul arrived, the Jews who came from Jerusalem stood around him and presented many serious charges which they could not prove. ⁸Paul defended himself from all these saying, "I have not commit-

ted any offense against the Law of the Jews, or against the Temple or against Caesar."

⁹Then Festus who wanted to please the Jews asked Paul: "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem, that you may be tried before me?" ¹⁰Paul answered, "I am on trial before Caesar's tribunal; here I have to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews; you yourself know this very well. ¹¹If I have committed any crime which deserves death, I accept death. But if I have not done anything of which they accuse me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar."

¹²So Festus, after conferring with his council, answered, "You appeal to Caesar. To Caesar you shall go."

¹³Some days later King Agrippa and his sister Bernice arrived in Caesarea to greet Festus. As they were to stay there several days, Festus told the king about Paul's case and said to him,

¹⁴"We have here a man whom Felix left as a prisoner. ¹⁵When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priest and the elders of the Jews accused him and asked me to sentence him. ¹⁶I told them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over a man without giving him an opportunity to defend himself in front of his accusers. ¹⁷So they came and I took my seat without delay on the tribunal and sent for the man.

¹⁸When the accusers had the floor, they did not accuse him of any of the crimes that I was led to think he had committed; ¹⁹instead they quarrelled with him about religion and about a certain Jesus who has died but whom Paul asserts to be alive. ²⁰I did not know what to do about this case, so I asked Paul if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. ²¹But Paul appealed to be judged by the emperor.



So I ordered that he be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar."²² Agrippa said to Festus: "I would like to hear that man." Festus answered him: "Tomorrow you shall."

²³On the following day, Agrippa and Bernice arrived with great ceremony and entered the audience hall with the commanders and the elders of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in and said:

²⁴"King Agrippa and all here present, here you see this man about whom the whole community of the Jews came to see me, in Jerusalem as well as here, protesting loudly that he must not live. ²⁵I, for my part, am convinced that he has not done anything that deserves death. But after he appealed to be judged by the emperor, I decided to send him on. ²⁶Well, if I have no definite information, what can I write to Caesar about him? Therefore I present him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, that you may examine him and that I may know what to write. ²⁷For it seems absurd to me to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him."

Paul's speech before King Agrippa

■ 26 ¹Agrippa said to Paul: "You may speak in your own defence." So Paul stretched out his hand and began in this way:

²"King Agrippa, you have just referred to the accusations of the

Jews. I consider myself fortunate in being able to defend myself against all this before you today, ³for you are an expert in the customs of the Jews and their disputes. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴All the Jews know how I have lived from my youth, how I have lived among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵They have always known me and they can tell you, if they wish, that I have lived as a Pharisee in the most rigorous sect of our religion. ⁶If I am now tried here, it is because of the hope I have in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain with the fervent worship they render to God night and day. For this hope, C king, the Jews accuse me! ⁸But why refuse to believe that God raises the dead?

⁹I myself in the beginning thought that I had to use all possible means to counteract the Name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰This I did in Jerusalem and with the authorization of the chief priests; I put in prison many who believed; and I cast my vote when they were condemned to death.

¹¹I went round the synagogues and multiplied punishments against them to force them to renounce their faith; such was my rage against them, that I pursued them even to foreign cities.

¹²With this purpose in mind, I went to Damascus with full authority, and commissioned by the chief priests:

8. Rom 4, 17; Heb 11, 19

9. 9 & 22

■ Paul presents an historical event: the Jewish people have been hoping and are still hoping for salvation. The divisions and corruption of their leaders do not prevent the people from serving God nor from longing for his intervention.

Then comes the story of his conversion in which Paul develops his dialogue with Christ more than in chapters 9 and 22.

I taught them that they should repent: such was the teaching of the prophets. *That the Messiah had to be raised:* this was the very core

of Christian faith. Felix, the governor, totally ignorant of religious questions, was already saying it in 25:19, after hearing Paul.

Paul is not so preoccupied about defending himself as he is about convincing others: for him Agrippa and Festus are people like everyone else and they need Christ. Festus is amazed by Paul's biblical background and his enthusiasm. Agrippa, moved, says nothing. However, they do not understand nor do they respond to the call; after the diversion, they are again caught up in this world, the life and pleasures of the great



On the way, ¹³O King, at midday, I saw a light from heaven, more brilliant than the sun, that dazzled me and those who accompanied me. ¹⁴We all fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? In vain do you kick against the goad.'

¹⁵I answered: 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said: 'I am Jesus whom you persecute. ¹⁶Now rise up and stand. I have revealed myself to you to make you servant and witness to what I have just shown you and to what I will show you later on. ¹⁷I will free you from all evil that may come from your own people or from the pagans to whom I am sending you. ¹⁸For you shall open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; and through faith in me, may obtain forgiveness of their sins and the inheritance of holy people.'

¹⁹Since that time, King Agrippa, I did not stray from this heavenly vision: on the contrary, ²⁰I began preaching first to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, and then to the pagan nations that they should repent and turn to God, showing the fruits of true conversion. ²¹I was carrying out this mission when the Jews arrested me in the Temple and tried to kill me. But with the help of God, I still stand here today to give my testimony both to the great and the small.

²²I do not teach anything other than what Moses and the Prophets announced beforehand: ²³the Messiah had to die, and after being the first to

be raised from the dead, he will proclaim the light to his people as well as to all nations."

²⁴As Paul came to this point of his defense, Festus said in a loud voice: "Paul, you are mad; your great learning has deranged your mind!" ²⁵But Paul answered: "I am not mad, Most Excellent Festus, but everything I have said is reliable and true. ²⁶The king is acquainted with all these things, so to him I speak with such confidence. I am convinced that he knows everything about this case, for these things did not happen in a dark corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."

²⁸Agrippa said to him: "A little more and you would believe that you have already made me a Christian!"

²⁹Paul answered him: "Whether little or more, I would that not only you but all who hear me this day may come to be as I am – except for these chains.

³⁰At that moment, the king rose and, with him, the governor, Bernice and all the attendants. ³¹When they went out they talked among themselves and said: "This man has done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." ³²And Agrippa said to Festus: "Had he not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free."

Departure for Rome

27 ¹When it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they handed over Paul and the other prisoners into the care of an officer of the Augustan battalion, named Julius.

17. Is 42, 6; Jer 1, 5

24, 46; 1 Cor 15, 20; Col 1, 18

18. 20, 32; Col 1, 12

32. 19, 21; 23, 11

20. 9, 27; Lk 3, 8

23. 13, 47; Lk 2, 9;

◆ They take Paul to Rome with a group of people who have been accused and condemned. With the captain of the boat, there is the authority of the centurion, a Roman official and his soldiers: they know that if a prisoner escapes, his guardian will be executed (see

12:19 and 27:42). The story shows that Paul is quite an expert in these journeys. In 2 Cor 11:25 he says he was shipwrecked three times.

Above all, Paul has Christ's strength: when the storm strikes, the apostle remains strong.

² We boarded a ship of Adramyttium bound for the Asian coasts, and we left accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from the city of Thessalonica. ³ We arrived at Sidon on the next day. Julius was very kind to Paul, letting him visit his friends and be cared for by them. ⁴ From there, we sailed along the sheltered coast of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵ We sailed across the seas off Cilicia and Pamphylia and arrived at Myra in Lycia. ⁶ There the captain found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy and made us board it.

⁷ We sailed slowly for several days, and arrived with great difficulty at Cnidus. As the wind did not allow us to enter that port, we sailed for the shelter of Crete with the Cape of Salmone within sight. ⁸ We turned with difficulty and arrived at a place called Good Ports, near the city of Lasea.

⁹ Time passed and we had celebrated the feast of the Fast, when the crossing began to be dangerous. ¹⁰ Then Paul said to them: "Friends, I believe that it would not be very wise to proceed with our crossing for we could lose not only the cargo and the ship but also our lives." ¹¹ But the Roman officer relied more on the ship's captain and the owner of the ship than on the words of Paul. ¹² And as the port was not suitable for wintering, the majority agreed to set out from there in the hope of reaching the harbour of Crete called Phoenix, overlooking Africa and Choros, where they could spend the winter.

Storm and shipwreck

¹³ Then the south wind began to blow and they thought that they had gained their purpose; they weighed anchor and sailed along the island of Crete. ¹⁴ But a little later, a strong wind

called "the northeaster" swept down on them, from across the island. ¹⁵ The ship was dragged along and could not face the wind, so that we remained adrift.

¹⁶ As we were crossing under the lee of the small island of Cauda, we managed – but with effort – to secure the lifeboat. ¹⁷ After lifting it aboard, they used cables to undergird the hull, and since we feared running aground on the sands of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor. So we continued to be dragged along.

¹⁸ The storm lashed at us so strongly that on the next day they had to throw some of the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ On the third day the sailors with their own hands threw out the ship's gear. ²⁰ For several days neither the sun nor the stars could be seen, and the tempest had not subsided: we lost all hope.

²¹ As we had not eaten for days, Paul stood up among them and said: "Friends, if you had followed my advice when I told you not to set sail from Crete, we would not be in such a danger now, and we could have avoided this loss. ²² But now I invite you to regain courage for no one among you shall die; only the ship shall be destroyed. ²³ Last night there appeared to me an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve: ²⁴ and he said to me: 'Paul, do not be afraid, you must present yourself before Caesar's tribunal, and God has guaranteed you the life of all those who sail with you.'

²⁵ Have courage, therefore, my friends, for I trust in God that it will be just as he told me. ²⁶ But we have to run aground on some island."

²⁷ Near midnight on the fourteenth night, as we were drifting in the Adriatic Sea, the sailors suspected that



land was near. ²⁸They measured the depth of the water and it was thirty-seven metres. After a while, they measured it again and it was twenty-seven metres. ²⁹They feared that we might hit some rocks, so they cast out four anchors from the stern and waited anxiously for morning. ³⁰Then the sailors tried to escape from the ship under the pretext of extending the cables of the anchors from the bow, so they lowered the lifeboat into the sea. ³¹But Paul said to the captain and to the soldiers: "If they leave the ship, you cannot be saved. ³²So the soldiers cut the mooring cables of the boat and let it fall.

³³As they waited for dawn, Paul urged everyone: "For fourteen days we have not eaten anything because of anxious waiting. ³⁴I ask you to eat now if you want to live, for no one will be lost – not even a hair of your heads." ³⁵Having said this, he took bread, gave thanks to God in everybody's presence, broke it and began to eat. ³⁶All were encouraged and they too ate. ³⁷They were two hundred and seventy-six persons in all. ³⁸When they had eaten enough, they threw the wheat into the sea to lighten the boat.

³⁹When morning came, they did not recognize the land but noticed a bay with a beach, so they decided to run the ship aground if possible. ⁴⁰They cast off the anchors and left them in the sea; at the same time, they loosened the ropes of the rudders, hoisted the foresail to the wind and, headed for the beach. ⁴¹But they struck a sandbank and the ship ran aground. The bow stuck and was im-

movable, while the stern was broken up by the violent waves.

⁴²The soldiers then planned to kill the prisoners for fear that some of them might escape by swimming.

⁴³But the captain, who wished to save Paul, did not allow them to do this. He ordered those who knew how to swim, to be the first to jump into the water and head for the shore, ⁴⁴and the rest to hold on to planks or pieces of the ship. So all of us reached land safe and sound.

On Malta

+ 28 ¹After being saved, we learned that the island was called Malta. ²The natives were very cordial. They lit a big bonfire and took good care of us all, since it was raining and cold.

³Paul gathered a bundle of dried twigs and as he threw them into the fire, a viper suddenly came out because of the heat and entwined itself around his hand. ⁴When the natives saw the viper hanging from his hand, they said to one another: "Surely this man is a murderer: he has barely escaped from the raging sea, yet divine justice will not allow him to live."

⁵But Paul shook off the viper into the fire and did not suffer any harm. They waited to see him swell and die; ⁶but after observing him for a while they saw that nothing happened to him, so they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

⁷Near this place was an estate owned by the head of the island named Publius. For three days this man welcomed us hospitably. ⁸It so happened that his father was in bed

34. Mt 10, 30

42. 12, 19; 16, 27

44. 2 Cor 11, 26

5. Lk 10, 19; Mk 16, 18

6. 12, 22

8. Lk 4, 40

+ The story of the snake illustrates Jesus' promise to the missionaries (see Mk 16:17-18). Note also the first thing Paul does when they

come to the island where people had not yet heard about the Gospel: he goes to heal the sick in the name of Christ.



with fever and dysentery. Paul went to see him; he prayed and laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ Because of this, the rest of the sick people on the island went to see him and were cured. ¹⁰ So they showered us with kindness, and on our departure they provided us with everything we needed.

From Malta to Rome

■ ¹¹ After three months, we boarded a ship which had spent the winter at the island. It belonged to an Alexandrian company and carried the figure-head of Castor and Pollux as insignia. ¹² We sailed for Syracuse, staying there for three days, ¹³ and after circling the coast, we arrived at Rhegium. On the following day, a south wind began to blow, and at the end of two days, we arrived at Puteoli ¹⁴ where we found some brothers who invited us to stay with them for a week. And that was how we came to Rome.

¹⁵ There the brothers and sisters had been informed of our arrival and came out to meet us as far as the Appian Forum and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and took courage. ¹⁶ Upon our arrival in Rome, the captain turned the prisoners over to the military governor but permitted Paul to lodge in a private house with the soldier who guarded him.

Paul meets the Jews in Rome

◆ ¹⁷ After three days, Paul called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered, he said to them: "Brothers, though I have not done anything against our people or against the traditions of our fathers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to set me free for they saw nothing in my case that deserved death. ¹⁹ But the Jews objected, so I was forced to appeal to Caesar without the least intention of bringing any case against my own people. ²⁰ Therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I bear these chains."

²¹ They answered: "We have not received any letter about you from Judea, and none of the brothers who have come from there have brought any message or said anything against you. ²² But we wish to hear from you what you think, although we know already that this sect meets with opposition everywhere."

²³ They set a day for him and came in great numbers to his lodging. So Paul explained everything he wanted to tell them regarding the Kingdom of God, and tried to convince them concerning Jesus, taking the Law of Moses and the Prophets as his starting point. This continued from morning till night. ²⁴ Some were convinced by

9. James 5, 14	16. 24, 23	20. 26, 6	23. Lk 24, 27; 24, 44	25. 17, 4; 18, 6	26. Is 6, 9;
Mt 13, 14; Jn 12, 40	28. 13, 45; 18, 6; Is 40, 5		31. 2 Tim 2, 9; Mt 28, 20		

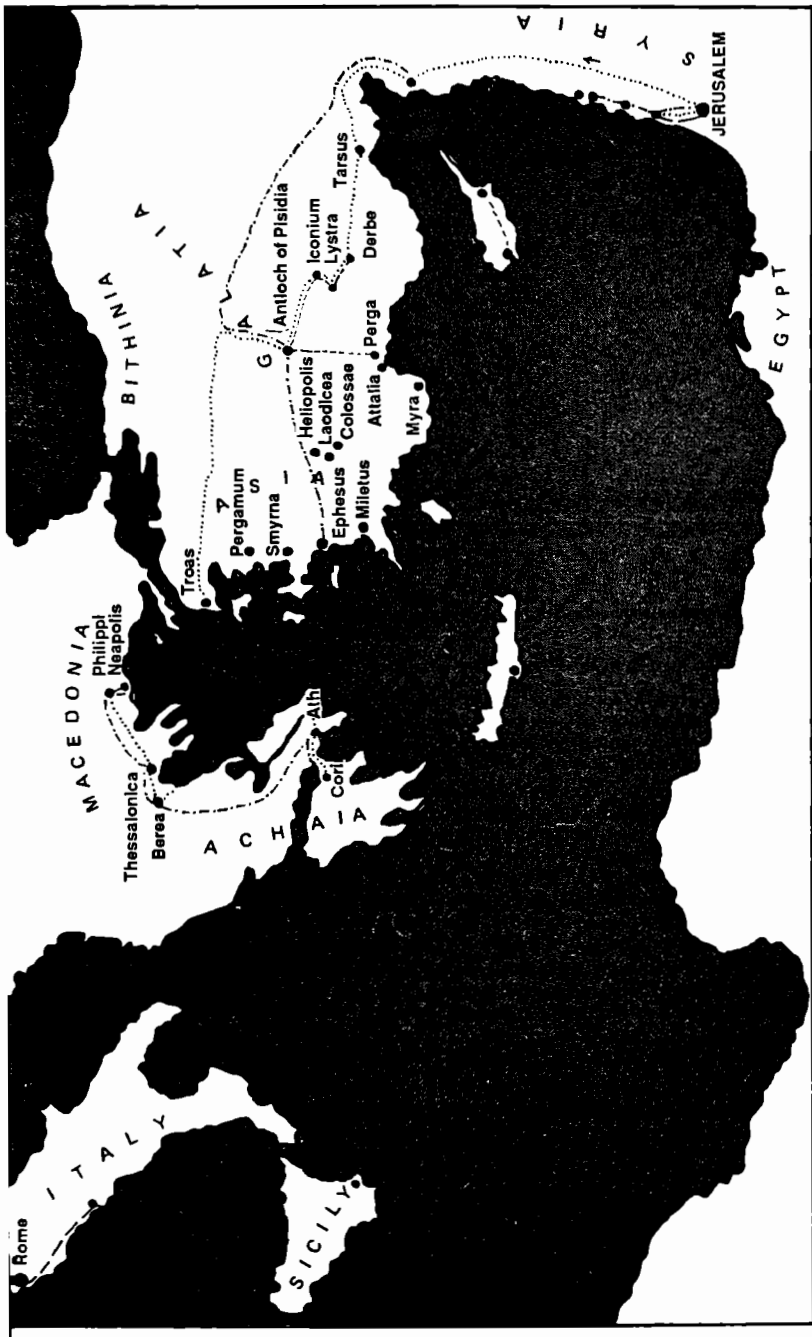
■ When they get to Rome, Paul is treated fairly well. Instead of being put in jail, he is allowed to stay in the city, handcuffed (with his right arm tied to the left arm of the guard).

◆ In Rome, Paul is especially concerned about settling his situation with regard to the Jews; he does not want the accusations brought against him and the following trial to make him seem like a traitor to his nation.

The meeting with the Jews in Rome repeats

what we read concerning the first preaching of Paul (see 13:46-47). It serves as a summary of the book: the Gospel must first be proclaimed to the Jews, but if they reject it, that will not prevent God's word from being proclaimed to other people. Paul stayed in this semi-captivity for two years. Such was the time fixed by the law for preventive detentions.

What happened after that? Luke does not say, and he leaves us with a vision of a Gospel that is triumphant in spite of all the obstacles.



Third mission
Mission in captivity

First mission
Second mission

The Missions of Paul



his words, others were not.²⁵ Finally the Jews left, still arguing strongly among themselves; and Paul sent them away with this statement: "What the Holy Spirit said has come true, when he spoke to your fathers through the Prophet Isaiah:

²⁶Go to this people and say to them: However much you hear, you will not understand; you will see and see again but not perceive.

²⁷The heart of this people has grown hard; they have covered their ears and closed their eyes, lest they

should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest their spirit understand, and I should heal them.

²⁸Know that God's salvation is going to be proclaimed to the pagans: they will listen."

³⁰Paul stayed for two whole years in a house he himself rented, where he received without restraint all those who came to see him. ³¹He proclaimed the Kingdom of God with full certainty and taught the truth about Jesus.

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

Jesus announced the Gospel to the Jewish nation in answer to their deepest concerns. The preaching of the kingdom of God was not limited to "the salvation of individual souls". Jesus was coming as the Saviour of the Jewish people. He did not ignore their collective aspirations but directed them rather towards a more universal mission.

Now, it was necessary that the Gospel should be "good news" also for the Greeks of the Roman empire who heard the preaching of the apostles. But they lived within strong social structures that no one was serious about changing and they remained, therefore, alien to Jewish aspirations for liberation. They longed, however, for some transformation and renewal of the human person. For until then they lived in a world fully convinced that man cannot escape from his blind destiny. They thought it is impossible to overcome universal corruption and death, and no one had explained to them the reason for the conflicts we carry within us. Because of this the believers needed to understand that Christ brought them life.

In this letter to the community in Rome, capital of the Empire, Paul presents the complete plan of salvation as an answer to the concerns of the Greeks, while not forgetting those of the Jews, many of whom were in the community.

Paul says that the salvation is a liberation of the human person and that we are saved when we discover the love of God through the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The internal struggle of men and the divisions among them are only manifestations of that deep and universal evil that Paul calls "Sin". Man would like to be free from his sickness, but lacks the key to the understanding of himself – that he is made to share the life of God and until he attains it, he will continue to suffer the effects of an unconscious or even conscious rebellion against God.

Indeed in every nation many people strive to live upright lives. Besides, among the Jews many followed a path of justice traced out for them by the Bible. But, as Paul says, while man tries to become "holy" by his own deeds and practices and believes in his own merits, he closes the door to the only power that can make him free, which is the merciful love of God.

How can we enter this world of God's love? God offers his hand and teaches us to love. Jesus comes to save us and we crucify him, and it is then that God knows his ineffable love and forgiveness.



**LETTER
TO THE**

ROMANS

1 ¹ From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ
called to be an apostle and set apart on behalf of the Good News.

² This Good News,
promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures,
³ is about his Son, born in the flesh a descendant of David,

⁴ and recognized as the Son of God
through the working of his Power in the Holy Spirit
upon rising from the dead.

⁵ Through him, Jesus Christ, our Lord, I was chosen

⁶ and sent to all the pagan nations to lead them into the obedience of faith
for the sake of his Name.

⁷ All of you, God's loved ones in Rome, are also among these elected of
Christ, called to be holy.

May God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, give you grace and peace.

He who looks at Christ and believes in this sign of divine love attains to true freedom, and Paul stresses the unexpected consequence of this faith: God makes us his sons by pouring his Spirit into us. The believer becomes free of his chains and his weaknesses because he has learned how to love.

Paul does not present any program of social renovation but, in the last pages of the letter, he shows how a community obtains union and brotherhood through mutual understanding, each one trying to take the first step.

Paul longs to visit them

⁸First of all, I give thanks to my God, through Jesus Christ, for all of you, because your faith is spoken of all over the world. ⁹And God, whom I serve by announcing the Good News of his Son, is my witness that I remember you in my prayers at all times. ¹⁰I pray constantly that, if it is his will, he make it possible for me to visit you. ¹¹I long to see you and share some spiritual blessings with you to strengthen you. ¹²In that way, we will encourage each other by sharing our common faith.

¹³You must know, brothers, that many times I have made plans to go to you, but till now I have been prevented. ¹⁴My purpose is to harvest some fruits among you, as I have done

among the other nations. Whether Greeks or foreigners, cultured or ignorant, I feel under obligation to all. ¹⁵Hence my eagerness to make the Gospel progress also among you Romans.

+ ¹⁶For I am not ashamed at all of this Good News; it is God's power saving those who believe, first the Jews, and then the Greeks. ¹⁷This Good News shows us how God makes people upright through faith for the life of faith, as the Scripture says: *The upright one by faith shall live.*

God's "wrath" against humankind

■ ¹⁸It is easy to recognize that God is ready to condemn the wickedness and any kind of injustice of those who

1. 1 Cor 1, 1; Gal 1, 1	2. Is 52, 7; 61, 1; Mk 1, 1; 16, 26	3. 1, 14; 1 Pet 3, 18; 2 Tim 2, 8
4. Acts 2, 33; Phil 2, 9; 1 Pet 1, 21	5. 1 Cor 3, 10; Gal 2, 8; Eph 1, 14; 6, 17	7. Ex 19, 5;
1 Cor 1, 2; 1 Pet 2, 9	9. 12, 1; 15, 16	11. 1 Thes 3, 2
17. 2, 9; Acts 13, 46; Heb 2, 4; Heb 10, 38	18. Mi 7, 9; Zep 3, 1; 1 Thes 1, 10	14. 1 Cor 9, 19
		16. 1, 1

• *Paul, chosen to proclaim the Good News.* Paul speaks of the Gospel three times in this paragraph. At that time the word *Gospel*, which signifies Good News, conveyed the meaning of victory. Paul presents himself as the public announcer of the liberating message given to all humankind.

What is Paul's Gospel? He develops it briefly in the following lines. The Son of God has come down to earth and after sharing the common condition of brotherhood, he has through his Resurrection, taken possession of the Glory due to him.

Recognized as the Son of God (4). The words of Paul can also be translated with *constituted or acknowledged as the son of God*. This does not mean that Jesus was not the Son of God before his resurrection, but that he was then Son of God in a humble and mortal condition. In his Resurrection, the Spirit of God which is the sharing of his Power has permeated his human nature so that everyone now may recognize who he really is: the Son of God.

Paul usually reserves the term "God" to mean God the Father, fountain of the divine being, from whom all divine initiatives originate. The Father communicates his life to the Son. The Son, for his part, reflects this life back to the Father in such a way that they mutually generate the Holy Spirit. The whole vocation of a Christian is rooted in this life of God, and that is why Paul constantly mentions the names of the three divine Persons.

Through him I was chosen by grace as an

apostle. The twelve apostles were selected by Jesus and confirmed in their mission by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Here Paul reminds us that he himself was made an apostle by Jesus who met him on the road to Damascus.

We will encourage each other by sharing our common faith. The apostle, as well as the believer, needs to share anxieties, hopes and a common faith. The Church is a fellowship and in order to develop our Christian life, we must multiply meetings in which we can be in fellowship with one another.

+ *I am not ashamed...* (16). He who is proclaimed Saviour by Paul is a crucified Jew, an unknown carpenter. How often they laughed at Paul when he spoke about this dead man who had risen from the tomb to be the Judge of humankind!

It is the power of God... (16). The miracles which accompany the preaching of the Gospel are only signs of God's powerful action in transforming men and history in every place where the Gospel is preached and inspires those who hear it.

Upright... righteous... righteousness (17). A single word in the Bible means both *justice* and *righteousness*. God is just and God's justice is his intervention to destroy what is evil and to save the faithful. But Paul points out especially the internal effects of the divine action. God transforms man making him like himself. So it is better for us to speak of *righteousness* or even of *holiness*. That is why in this letter we some-

have silenced the truth by their ways. ¹⁹For everything that could have been known about God was clear to them: God himself made it plain. ²⁰For, though we cannot see him, we can at least discover him through his works; for he created the world and through his works we understand him to be eternal and all powerful, and to be God.

²¹So they have no excuse for they knew God and did not glorify him as befits him, nor did they give thanks to him. On the contrary, they lost themselves in their reasonings and darkness filled their minds.

²²Believing themselves wise, they turned foolish: ²³they exchanged the Glory of the immortal God for the

likes of mortal men, birds, animals and reptiles. ²⁴Because of this God gave them up to their inner cravings; they did shameful things and dishonoured their bodies.

²⁵They exchanged God's truth for a lie; they honoured and worshipped created things instead of the Creator, to whom be praise for ever, Amen! ²⁶Because of that, God gave them up to shameful passions: their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷Similarly, the men, giving up the natural sexual relations with women, were lustful of each other, men with men, bringing upon themselves the punishment they deserve for their wickedness. ²⁸And since they did not think that God was

19. Ps 8, 3; 19, 2

20. Wis 13, 4; 1 Cor 1, 21

23. Dt 4, 16; Jer 2, 11; Wis 11, 25

24. Jdg 2, 14; Eph 4, 19

25. Jer 16, 19

times have holiness, or righteousness and holiness (or holy and upright) instead of only righteousness, or justice.

Many among the Jews thought that people become righteous by their own efforts. Paul retorts that the righteousness God wants is something much greater and beyond what human efforts can achieve. We are upright and friends of God when he allows us to approach him after making us holy by his grace.

The apostles preached the Gospel to two classes of persons:

- the Jews, prepared by God to receive the Saviour.
- the Greeks (or people who spoke the Greek language). In fact the Jews considered Greek all those who were subjects of the Roman Empire. These people did not know the Word of God, nor did they have any hope in him.

Paul shows that all people need the Gospel. Because the world lives in sin, and all of us, in a greater or lesser degree, are responsible for existing evil, we must believe in the Gospel if we want to be saved.

■ In these paragraphs Paul speaks of the pagan world of the Greeks. It represents the great majority of humankind that has not received the word of God. In reality, God has not been absent from their conscience, and through centuries of civilization and religious research, they have tried to know God and the truth. But Paul shows the failure of such human endeavour; ignorance and immorality are much more prevalent in the countries where God has not spoken as he did for the Jews.

They knew God and did not glorify him as they should... We have to compare this text with another famous one, found in chapter 13 of Wisdom, and with the speech of Paul in Acts 17: 27-29. In these verses the Bible shows clearly that it is possible for everyone to know God. Anyone who looks at the world and reflects on life, easily finds signs of the presence of God. But when one lives in sin, *truth is silenced*.

People have always worshipped a God, but they have never known him truly and without error, and their errors in regard to God cause their errors regarding the human person and civilization. This is why, in announcing the Gospel, we free people, who are truly in need of the Gospel even though they may feel satisfied with themselves.

God gave them to shameful passions. Here Paul stresses the vice of homosexuality. In the Greek world homosexuality was accepted and even praised by the greatest philosophers. Paul says: this acceptance is not the sign of a more open and free spirit, but rather of an *ignorance of God*.

Likewise at the present time we should not be surprised that in affluent countries homosexuality is accepted by some "Christians." This is the result of the idolatry proper to the consumer society. There it is openly considered as an ideal that those with money and health should be able to satisfy their every desire and live life to the full. These people eventually put creatures in place of God. Though they speak of God, they ignore his *Glory and darkness fills their minds*. They frolic and claim to be happy, but their appearance is that of carnal people, heading to death.

There are close though hidden links between

worth knowing, he gave them up to their senseless minds so that they committed all kinds of obscenities.

²⁹ And so they are full of injustices, perversity, greed, evil; they are full of jealousy, murder, strife, deceit, bad will and gossip. ³⁰ They commit calumny, offend God, are haughty; they are proud, liars, skillful in doing evil. They are rebellious towards their parents, ³¹ are senseless, disloyal, cold-hearted and merciless. ³² They know of God's judgement which declares worthy of death anyone living in this way; yet not only do they do all these things, but they even applaud anyone who does the same.

The Jews also must fear judgment

♦2 ¹ Therefore, you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others. For in judging your neighbour, you condemn yourself, for you practise what you are judging. ² We know that the condemnation of God will reach those who commit these things, ³ and do you think you will escape from the judgment of God in condemning others when you are doing what you condemn?

⁴ Are you taking advantage of God and his infinite goodness, patience

and understanding, and do you not recognize that his goodness is in order to lead you to conversion? ⁵ However, if your heart hardens and you refuse to change, then you are storing for yourself a great punishment for the day of judgment, when God will appear as just judge.

⁶ He will give each one his due, according to his actions. ⁷ He will give everlasting life to him who is seeking glory, honour and immortality and perseveres in doing good. ⁸ But anger and vengeance will be the lot of those who did not serve truth but injustice. ⁹ There will be suffering and anguish for everyone committing evil, first the Jew, then the Greek. ¹⁰ But God will give glory, honour and peace to whoever does good, first the Jew then the Greek, ¹¹ because one is not different from the other before God.

Everyone is judged by his conscience

¹² Those who, without knowing the Law, committed sin, will perish without the Law, and whoever committed sin knowing the Law, will be judged by that Law. ¹³ What makes us righteous before God is not to hear the Law, but to obey it. ¹⁴ When the non-Jews, who do not have law, practise

29. Mk 7, 21; 1 Cor 6, 9; Gal 5, 19; 1 Tim 1, 9; Rev 21, 8	1. Mt 7, 2	4. Wis 11, 23; 2 Pet 3, 9;
Lk 13, 7	5. Ezk 7, 19; Rev 6, 17	6. Rev 11, 18
10 & 11. Dt 10, 17; Acts 10, 34; Eph 6, 9; James 2, 1; Lk 12, 48; Acts 10, 35	8. Ps 62, 13; Mt 16, 27	

homosexuality and idolatry (we speak of practising homosexuality, not of being inclined to it).

♦ You have no excuse, whoever you are... Paul addresses the Jews who wait for God's judgment on the world, and are convinced that they will not be condemned since they have the true religion. To know the teaching of God was, no doubt, an advantage: but Paul reminds them that what is really important is not to know but to do good.

God will give everlasting life... (10). Paul has just condemned the injustice and wrong doing of the pagan world. Now he recognizes that many who have not received a religious education do indeed live justly. In the next paragraph Paul affirms that:

- God will judge, taking into account our knowledge of good and evil; he will deal less severely with the ignorant, more strictly with those who have been instructed in the faith.
- God also has sons and daughters among those who do not believe; only on the day of judgment will it be known who belong to the Kingdom.

Paul opposes *letter to spirit* (27-29). The former refers to a religion of practices, the fulfilment of what is required, without conversion of the heart. The *spirit* means a religion in which the spirit of God makes us capable of serving with love. Two groups of words contrast with each other in the letters of Paul: "flesh, old cove-

naturally what the Law commands, they are giving themselves a law,¹⁵ showing that the commandments of the Law are engraved in their minds. Their conscience, speaking within themselves also shows it, when they condemn or approve their actions.¹⁶ The same is to happen on the day when God, according to my gospel, judges the secret actions of men in the person of Jesus Christ.

¹⁷ You, however, calling yourself a Jew, have the Law as foundation and feel proud of your God.¹⁸ You know the will of God and the Law teaches you to distinguish what is better,¹⁹ and so you believe you are the guide for the blind, light in darkness,²⁰ teacher of those who do not know, instructor of children, because you possess in the Law the knowledge and the truth...²¹ Well, then, you who teach others, why don't you teach yourself? If you say that one must not steal, why do you steal? ²² You say one must not commit adultery, yet you commit it! You say you hate the idols, but you steal in their temples! ²³ You feel proud of the Law, yet you do not obey it, and you dishonour your God. ²⁴ In fact, as the Scriptures say, *the other nations despise the name of God because of you.*

²⁵ Circumcision is of value to you

if you obey the Law; but if you do not obey, it is as if you were not circumcised.²⁶ On the contrary, if uncircumcised men obey the commandments of the Law, do you not think that, in spite of being pagans, they make themselves like the circumcised? ²⁷ The one who obeys the Law without being marked in his body with the circumcision, will judge you who have been marked with circumcision and who have the Law which you do not obey. ²⁸ Because a true Jew is not one who is circumcised only externally, nor is real circumcision that which is marked on the body. ²⁹ A Jew must be so interiorly; the heart's circumcision belongs to spirit and not to a written law; he who lives in this way will be praised not by people, but by God.

What advantage is it to be a Jew?

3 ¹ Then, what is the advantage of being a Jew? And what is the use of circumcision? ² Much, from any point of view. In the first place, it was to the Jews that God entrusted his word.

³ Well now, if some of them were not faithful, will God be unfaithful? Of course not. ⁴ Rather, it will be proved that God is truthful, every man a liar, as the Scripture says: *it will*

16. 1 Cor 4, 5	18. Is 48, 1; Mt 3, 8	19. Mt 15, 14; Jn 9, 40	20. Lk 18, 9	21. Ps 50, 16
24. Is 52, 5; James 2, 7	25. Jer 9, 24; 1 Cor 7, 19	29. Eph 2, 11; Phil 3, 3; Col 2, 11		
2. Dt 4, 8; Jn 4, 22; Bar 4, 4	4. 9, 6; Ps 89, 31; Rev 11, 11; 1 Jn 1, 9; Ps 51, 4			

nant, commandments, Law, letter... " and "Spirit, spirit, new covenant, promise..."

o We have just demonstrated that all are under the power of sin (9). This is the central sentence of the paragraph. The Jews must, like others, rely on faith and be converted. But that is what they have difficulty in understanding, since they have always been believers. They think they are good, and are true believers, because they have been instructed in the faith. They trust in being saved merely for being marked in their body by circumcision.

What is the advantage of being a Jew?...

(1). This question was asked of Paul by the Jews

when he underlined the value of faith. They were like many Catholics today who, seeing how the Church demands of us a personal renewal, say, "What for, if I have already been baptized?"

Baptism is great, indeed. It makes us part of the people of God, but at the same time it confers on us certain responsibilities such as being and acting as disciples of Christ. Baptism is not a life insurance that allows us to live comfortably.

The Law makes sin known (20). The Jewish law, or the law of Moses, is that body of religious liturgical, moral and social laws governing the people of Israel (see 7:4). In the letters of Paul, the Law sometimes designates the Bible and at



be proved that your words are true and you will be winner if they want to judge you.

⁵ Our wickedness shows God to be just. Then, can we say that God is unjust when he gets angry and punishes us? (Some people might speak like this.)

⁶ – Not at all, because, otherwise, how could God judge the world?

⁷ – But if my lie makes the truth of God more evident, thus increasing his glory, is it still a sin?

⁸ – Then, your only choice is to sin, so that good may come of it. Some slanderers say that this is my teaching, but they will have to answer for those words.

⁹ Do we have, then, any advantage? Of course not! For we have just demonstrated that all, Jews and non-Jews are under the power of sin, ¹⁰ as the Scripture says: *Nobody is good, not even one, no one understands, ¹¹ no one looks for God. ¹² All have gone astray and have become base. There is no one doing what is good, not even one. ¹³ Their throats are open tombs, their words deceit. ¹⁴ Their lips hide poison of vipers,*

from their mouth come bitter curses.

¹⁵ They run to where they can shed blood ¹⁶ leaving behind ruin and misery. ¹⁷ They do not know the way of peace, ¹⁸ they have no respect for God.

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Scripture says, it is said for the people of the Law, that is for the Jews. Let them, therefore, be silent and recognize that the whole world is guilty before God. ²⁰ Still more: *no mortal will be worthy before God* if we do not move from the fulfillment of the Law. For the Law limits itself to make sin be known.

Faith, the way to salvation

+ ²¹ Yet, now it is manifested to us what the Law and the Prophets announced: God makes us just and holy without the need of a law. ²² God makes us holy by means of faith in Jesus Christ, and this is applied to all who believe, without distinction of persons. ²³ Because all sinned and all fall short of the Glory of God; ²⁴ and all are graciously forgiven and made holy through the redemption effected in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ For God had given

9. 11, 32; Gal 3, 22; 1 Jn 1, 8
20. 4, 15; Ps 143, 2; Gal 2, 16
1 Jn 2, 2; Eph 1, 7

11. Ps 14, 1; 53, 1; 5, 9
23. 2 Cor 4, 6; 2 Cor 5, 19; Eph 2, 4

15. Is 59, 7; Ps 10, 7; 36, 1
25. Lev 16, 2; Heb 9;

other times the Jewish religion. Many Jews thought that they deserved a reward for practising the Law, but Paul says: true holiness is neither the result of our works nor the reward due to them.

+ Paul has developed two points: the world lives in sin; the practice of the Law is not enough to obtain salvation. He then presents the Good News: God has come to save us through Christ.

All lack the glory of God. God is not satisfied with the actual state of man, even if the latter feels quite satisfied with his mediocre condition. He calls us to share his *Glory*, that is everything in God that makes him great, happy and everlasting. God has created us to bring us into communion with him, and as he is out of reach, he reaches out his hand and makes us just (21). We have already said in 1:17 that when Paul speaks of the justice of God he means God's way of making us holy. God makes us *just and holy*.

Now, confronting all those who think they are

worthy before God because of their own efforts, because they fulfil all the commandments, Paul says: true holiness has to be given to us. For there is no other righteousness or holiness than sharing the perfection and love that are in God himself.

Paul finds it very hard to explain the mystery of salvation with the religious words available at the time, all of which refer to a violent God. He has just spoken of the *justice* of God, but he has pointed out that this "justice" is before anything else, a merciful intervention that makes us holy. He spoke of God's *anger*, but the result of this anger is the coming of the Saviour. He tells us now that God made Christ the *victim* we needed for the atonement of our sins; but we must not think that God, in anger, demands the suffering of an innocent victim. God is the one who provides the victim, and the coming of Jesus expresses the immensity of the Father's love. In a few words, Paul gives to these terms a totally different and new meaning. The divine way of



him to be the victim who, by his blood, obtains our forgiveness; and this is a matter of faith.

²⁶ So God teaches us how he leads us to righteousness. In the past he overlooked sins; those were the times of the patience of God; but now God reveals his holiness; He is just and holy, and whoever believes in Christ Jesus he makes just and holy.

²⁷ Then what becomes of our pride? It is excluded. How? Not through the Law and its observances, but through another law which is faith. ²⁸ For we hold that people are in God's grace by faith and not by observing the Law. ²⁹ Otherwise, God would be the God of the Jews; but is he not God of all men? ³⁰ Of course he is, for there is only one God and he will save by faith the circumcised Jews as well as the uncircumcised nations. ³¹ Do we, then, deny the value of the Law because of what we say of faith? Of course not; rather we place the Law in its proper place.

Abraham, father of the just

4 ¹ What shall we say, then, of Abraham, our father in the flesh? What has he found? ² If Abraham became just and a friend of God because of his actions, he could be

proud. But he cannot be this before God. ³ Because the Scripture says: *Abraham believed God who, because of this, held him to be a just man.*

⁴ Now, when somebody performs a work, his salary is not given to him as a favour, but as a debt that is paid. ⁵ On the contrary, he who has no acts to show but believes in Him who makes sinners just and holy, his faith is taken into account and he is held as just and holy. ⁶ David congratulates in this way those who become holy by the favour of God, and not by their actions: *'Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven and whose offences are forgotten; blessed the man whose sin God does not take into account!'*

⁹ Is this blessing only for the circumcised or is it also for the uncircumcised? We have just said that, because of his faith, Abraham was made a just and holy man, ¹⁰ but when did this happen? After Abraham was circumcised, or before? Not after, but before. ¹¹ He received the rite of circumcision as a sign of the holiness given him through faith when he was still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those uncircumcised who come to faith and are made just and holy. ¹² And he appears to be the father of the Jews, provided that with

26. Acts 17, 30

1. Is 51, 1; Mt 3, 7

Eph 2, 10; Gal 2, 16

27. 1 Cor 1, 29; Eph 2, 9; Gal 6, 13

3. Gen 15, 6; 12, 1; Gal 3, 6; James 2, 20

7. Ps 32, 1

10. Gen 17, 9

29. 10, 12; Acts 15, 11

4. 11, 6; Mt 20, 1; Lk 17, 7;

31. Mt 5, 17

restoring justice is not in condemning, but in saving: by love God conquers evil in such a way that those who never knew love will be saved.

Many of the Jews converted to Christ thought it useful to continue practising the religious prescriptions of the Bible, such as circumcision, observance of the sabbath, cleansings, etc. (Col 2:16), and wanted other believers of the pagan world to observe them as well. Paul rejects that, because the Law had two dimensions. On one hand, it was the divine teaching for human life, such as how to know God, not to kill, etc... and on the other, it was the Law of the Jewish people, with all its own values, rites and customs, unlike that of any other nation. So, since God is God of all nations, he will not oblige them

to give up their own culture and to live as do the Jews.

■ Paul proposes to the Jewish believers the example of their ancestor Abraham. He asks: How did Abraham become the friend of God and why is he taken as the model of believers? Was it because he believed in God's promises, or because he had received the rite of circumcision? It is like asking a Christian today: What is important, to believe in Christ, or to be baptised?

The answer is clear; we become the friends of God by believing in his promises. The rite of baptism ratifies with a divine seal the gift of God and our commitment to him.

Therefore, baptism and the other sacra-

being circumcised, they also imitate the faith Abraham showed before being circumcised.

¹³ If God promised Abraham, or rather his descendant, that the world would belong to him, this was not because of his obeying the Law, but because he was just and a friend of God through faith. ¹⁴ If now the promise is kept for those who rely on the Law, then faith has lost its place. And the promise will never be fulfilled, ¹⁵ for it is proper of the Law to bring punishment: law and sin go together.

¹⁶ For that reason, faith is the way and all is given by grace; and the promises of Abraham are fulfilled for all his descendants, not only for his children according to the Law, but also for all the others who have believed.

Abraham is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written: *I will make you father of many nations.* He is our father in the eyes of Him who gives life to the dead, and calls the non-existent as if already existing, for this is the God in whom he believed.

¹⁸ Abraham believed and hoped against all expectation, so becoming father of many nations, as he had been

told: *See how many will be your descendants.* ¹⁹ He did not doubt although his body could no longer give life – he was about a hundred years old – and in spite of his wife, Sarah, being unable to have children. ²⁰ He did not doubt nor did he distrust the promise of God, ²¹ but on the contrary he was convinced that He who had given the promise had power to fulfill it; and by strengthening his faith, he gave glory to God.

²² It was because of this faith that God held him to be a just and holy man. ²³ *Because of this faith:* these words of Scripture are not only for him, ²⁴ but for us, too, because we believed in Him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from among the dead, ²⁵ he who was delivered for our sins and raised to life for our sanctification.

Now we are in peace with God

◻ ⁵ ¹ Having been made just by faith, we are in peace with God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. ² Through him we obtain this favour: in which we remain and we even rejoice in the expectation of sharing the Glory of God.

13. Gen 12, 2; 22, 15; Heb 11, 8; Gal 3, 15	17. Gen 17, 5; Eek 37, 1; Heb 11, 19	18. Gen 15, 5
19. Heb 11, 11; Mk 9, 23	20. Heb 6, 15; Jer 32, 17; Lk 1, 35	23. 1 Cor 10, 6
Mt 26, 28; 1 Pet 1, 3; Col 2, 11	1. Is 9, 6; Mt 5, 4; Lk 1, 79	2. Phil 3, 9; Is 53, 5; Eph 2, 14
25. Is 53, 6		

ments are the "signs" of faith and have no value without faith. Baptism is the beginning of our living for God in the Christian community. Communion has no meaning unless we live in unity and share the fullness of the life of the Church.

Worthy of notice is the fact that Christian people are now less concerned with rites and devotions that were so important to past generations. In the meantime renewal movements give more stress to essentials: our faith and surrender to Christ.

He did not doubt although his body could no longer give life. Abraham had a faith similar to the Christian who believes in the resurrection of Christ. We also are asked to believe in a God who gives life and for whom nothing is impossible.

And the promise will never be fulfilled (15). Paul shows the great danger of asking God to

look at our good deeds and merits. If we ask him to reward us as humans do, he may show us our sins, so numerous that we cannot count them, and we shall then be empty-handed and lost.

◆ In this magnificent paragraph Paul defines the salvation of Christ. Many Christians today find it hard to reconcile the Old Testament with the New. Some prefer to stay with the Liberator of the Old Testament and the Gospel interests them only in so far as it denounces injustice. On the contrary, others consider the Old Testament as out of date, something which is not for today. For them love takes the place of justice, and the salvation of souls is their substitute for commitment to overcoming social evils.

Here Paul talks of "reconciliation" (10-11). The liberating work of God throughout history is not forgotten, but with the sacrifice of Jesus, it is clear that rebellion and violence are the es-

³ Not only that, we feel secure even in trials, knowing that trial produces patience, ⁴ from patience comes merit and that merit is the source of hope, ⁵ which does not deceive, because the love of God has already been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.

⁶ Consider, moreover the time that Christ died for us: when we were still sinners and weakened by sin. ⁷ Few would accept to die for an upright person; although, for a very good person, perhaps someone would give his life. ⁸ But God showed his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Having become just and holy in his blood, with much more reason now shall we live, through him, without fearing punishment. ¹⁰ From enemies we have got peace with God through the death of

his Son; with much more reason now we may be saved through his life. ¹¹ Not only that; we feel secure in God because of Christ Jesus, our Lord, through whom we have been reconciled.

Adam and Jesus Christ

¹² Now, sin entered the world by means of one man and, through sin, death, and later on death spread to all humankind, because all sinned.

¹³ There was no Law yet, but sin was in the world. As there was no law, they could not speak of disobedience, ¹⁴ but death reigned equally among them, from Adam to Moses, although their sin was not disobedience as in Adam's case (This was not the true Adam, but foretold the other who was to come).

¹⁵ Well then, the effects of God's

3. 2 Cor 4, 17; 12, 9; James 1, 2

5. Ps 22, 5; 25, 3; Gal 4, 6

6. Tit 3, 5; 1 Jn 4, 13

8. Tit 2, 14; 1 Pet 3, 18

9. Jn 3, 16; 15, 1; 1 Jn 3, 16; 4, 10

10. 2 Cor 5, 18; Eph 2, 16; Col 1, 20

12. Gen 3; Wis 2, 24; 1 Cor 15, 21; James 1, 15

14. 1 Cor 15, 45; Col 1, 15

sence of sin in the world. It is necessary to work for a genuine liberation, through obedience and non-violence as a start. The life and passion of Jesus contain the secrets of both of these. The salvation of humankind, that is, its reconciliation at all levels, comes from this sacrifice. And so, in the next paragraph Paul presents Christ as the *other and true Adam* (5:14), that is, the man by whom divided and mortal humankind is being built up.

We know that our conversion and that of many people does not bring an instant solution to human problems, but we also know that all other remedies would be useless unless the world receives the message and example of a reconciliation in which truth and forgiveness go hand in hand.

By faith we are at peace with God (1). What do we believe in? We believe in the personal love of God for us, seen in Jesus given up and risen for us.

We are at peace with God. Our past debts have been settled. Before we had deep guilt, because we were unable to love one another and change our lives. But now the believer knows that he is loved and forgiven.

Christ died for us while we were still sinners (6). We are accustomed to hear about Christ dying for our sins, and often enough we are not touched, for his sacrifice seems to be far away and quite unreal. But when by the grace of God we understand it, love suddenly pours from our

hearts. Return love for love: this is the beginning of true conversion.

We obtain this favor in which we remain (2).

We call state of grace this gift or grace mentioned by Paul. It is not necessary to feel it in order to have it. God works in us a marvelous transformation, and most of the time, without our feeling it or noticing anything. Many people are mistaken when they look for a church or a group where they can feel themselves "born again". This is not the way of the true friends of God: they do not need to see or to feel, but rather to believe in what God is working in them. Especially when undergoing trials, we realize that grace sustains us.

We rejoice in the expectation of our sharing the Glory of God (2). Faith looks to the future and becomes hope. Hope is not a kind of opium that helps us deaden our present miseries; on the contrary, it is the strength that permits us to endure and win.

Hope does not deceive. In contrast to the people of the Old Testament, who remained always in what was temporary or provisional, waiting for a definitive truth and justice, the Christian already experiences what he will one day fully enjoy. Something of that flavour or bouquet of the divinity has been poured into our hearts (5) and that is the peace that God grants us when his Spirit comes to us.

• Paul has just described the interior renewal

gift surpass those of sin. We know that multitudes die because of the fault of one man, but how much more abundant is the grace of God and the gift he granted to the multitudes, through this unique man Jesus Christ. ¹⁶ The grace of God more than compensated for sin. The disobedience that brought condemnation was of one sinner, whereas the grace of God brings forgiveness to a world of sinners. ¹⁷ If death reigned because of the disobedience of one man only, how much more will be reign and life for those who receive the grace of God through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Just as the sin of one man brought sentence of death to all men, so, too, one man bore the punishment, and brought pardon and life to all men; ¹⁹ and as the disobedience of one only made many sinners, so the obedience of one man allowed a multitude to be just and holy.

²⁰ The Law itself, introduced later on, caused sin to increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ and, as sin caused death to reign, so grace will reign in its own time and, after making us just and friends of God, will bring us to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Through baptism we died with Christ

[+6] ¹ Then, what shall we do? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase more abundantly?

² Of course not. If we have died to sin, how can we go on living in it?

³ You know that those of us plunged by baptism into Christ Jesus, were plunged with him to share his death. ⁴ By baptism we were buried with Christ to share his death and, as Christ was raised from among the dead by the Glory of the Father, so we must walk in a new life. ⁵ We have

17. 2 Tim 2, 17; Rev 20, 4 19. Is 53, 11; Phil 2, 8; Heb 5, 8 20. 7, 8

of the believer. Now he widens this horizon and says that salvation has reached all humankind.

For Paul, as for the Jews of his time, Adam meant both the first man created by God and the whole of humankind. Never did Paul think, as some did after him, that the sin of the first father had been punished in his descendants although they were not guilty. Indeed, from the beginning of humankind to the present generation, only one Adam comes to life, distrustful, a rebel and violent in the person of all of us. Without forgetting that the first sin brought wider consequences, ulterior rebellions without end have made human existence heavier each day and alien to the plan of God.

In these paragraphs *Sin* is referred to the totality of powers that keep humankind a slave and inclined to evil. None of us could consider himself innocent of the sins of others. And Sin begins with our difficulty in recognizing truth and judging according to truth. By this we know that we are not sons of God by birth.

So when Paul speaks of Adam and Sin he does not mean an individual person, but refers to the universal condition. He does it principally because it is easier to compare one person with another. We know Christ and what he came to change; so we understand better what humankind is lacking when Christ is absent: there is

Adam, one and multiple, with Sin reigning over a world of slaves.

Through sin death... (12). In Genesis, God threatened man with death if he sinned; and in fact sin brought man death. Not only the death produced by human conflict, not only the physical death coming to everyone, but death in a wider sense. Dead are those who daily suffocate their good intentions and are paralyzed by selfishness; dead are those who are guided by their instincts and do not rise above material interests; to believe, hope and love.

This foretold the other Adam who was to come... (14). To the picture of human destiny presented in Genesis (ch. 2 and 3), Paul opposes another image, that of the crucified Christ. To the scene of sin near the forbidden tree, Paul opposes that of redemption fulfilled on the "tree" of the cross. In the first scene there are three characters: Man (Adam), Sin (the serpent), Death. In the second, there are four: Man (Christ), Sin, Death and Justice (or new and holy life).

The grace of God more than compensated for sin (16). The damage caused by sin from the very beginning increases each day; at times we feel crushed and powerless by the evil forces present everywhere. Paul, however, sees the greatness of the gift of God: while humankind increases and sin enters into all areas of society,

been buried with him to share in his death, in a symbolic form; and so we will also share in his resurrection.

■ ⁶ We know that our old Adam was crucified with Christ; the part of our being that had been enslaved by sin has to die, so that we may no longer serve sin – ⁷ on dying it becomes free of sin. ⁸ If we have died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, once risen from among the dead, will not die again and, in the future, death will have no power over him: death has no more dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death of Christ was to die to sin once for all; his life now is to live for God.

¹¹ So you, too, must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Do not allow sin any control over your mortal

being; do not submit yourselves to its evil inclinations, ¹³ and do not give over to sin your members as instruments to do evil. On the contrary, offer yourselves as persons returned from death to life, and let the members of your body be as holy weapons at the service of God. ¹⁴ Sin will not control you again, for you are not under sin, but under grace.

¹⁵ I ask again: are we to sin because we are not under the Law, but under grace? Certainly not. ¹⁶ If you have given yourselves up to someone as his slaves, you are to obey the master who commands you; aren't you? Now that master may be either sin, or obedience that leads you to holiness. ¹⁷ Let us give thanks to God for, after having sin as your master, you have been given to another, that is, to the doctrine of faith, to which

6. Col 3, 1-10

9. 1 Pet 3, 18; Heb 9, 26

10. 8, 3; 2 Cor 5, 2

11. 1 Pet 2, 24

16. Jn 8, 34

God calls more people to free them from the slavery of evil.

There is something more. In this paragraph, somewhat complicated, Paul hints that the redemption of Christ does much more than correct the errors of humankind. God is not satisfied with helping us and making us better, but after beginning the lifting up of men, invites them to reign in life, that is to share his own Glory.

How much more will there be glory and life for those who receive grace (17). Christ embraces all of us, gathers us in his sacrifice and becomes the new head of humankind. Perhaps Paul is thinking only of the salvation of those who have listened to the Gospel, believed in Christ and entered the Church. But note how he stresses the fact that Christ saves a *world of sinners*. Christ is the new Adam and the head not only of believers, but of humankind as well. Man continues today to be drawn by the flood of evil originated by Adam. But humankind is also saved as a whole, as long as people try to lift up their brothers. He who does not fulfil this task loses salvation, for Sin will be in one way or another the disregard for our neighbour.

The Law caused Sin to increase (20). The law given to the Jews was occasion for a greater number of sins because they knew their duties but did not practise them. Laws are not enough to make man obey God. When only laws are given and without love, the child or the adult rebel against them, instead of obeying them.

+ *We have died to sin* (2). As a consequence of sin, humankind is in a state of death. To change this state and find life, we have to be united with Christ in his passion, that is, to die and rise with him. This is baptism. In the early Church, they baptized for the most part adults who had already received the Gospel and wanted to enter the community of the "holy people of God". Baptism required a conversion. And so, when Paul says "baptism", he means the complete way of conversion, including catechism, initiation into Christian life... Otherwise baptism would be only a rite.

We were plunged with him to share his death (3). Baptism means entering into Christ to share the benefits of his sacrifice. It also means the acceptance of a complete change of life, that of Christ in his death and resurrection.

■ *You must consider yourselves dead to sin*. It is obvious that baptism, even if received with faith, does not make us perfect at once. Shall we then imitate the Jews who gave so much attention to their commandments? Shall we be paralyzed by fear of so many temptations and daily faults? Paul proposes another way: We have to believe, above all, that sin has no power over us. Besides, we have constantly to look to Christ, knowing that we belong to him, and that he is the one who transforms us. This apparently unconcerned union with him will be more effective than remaining restless. This is the way that the "little" St. Therese fosters in those who feel



you listen willingly.¹⁸ And being free from sin, you have become slaves of holiness –¹⁹ you see that I try to explain this in human terms.

There was a time when you let your members be slaves of impurity and disorder, walking in the way of sin; convert them now into servants of justice and holiness, to the point of becoming holy.

²⁰ When you were slaves of sin, you did not feel under obligation to holiness, but, ²¹ what were the fruits of those actions of which you are now ashamed? The result of all of that was death. ²² Now, however, you have been freed from sin and serve God. You are bearing fruit and growing in holiness, and the result will be life everlasting. ²³ So on one side is Sin: its reward, death; on the other side is God: he gives us, by grace, life everlasting in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

The Christian is not bound by the Jewish religion

◆ 7 ¹ You, my brothers, understand Law. Have you forgotten that everyone is subject to the Law while

he is alive?² The married woman, for example, is bound by law to her husband while he is alive; but, if he dies, she is free from her obligations as a wife. ³ If she lives with another while her husband is alive, she will be an adulteress; but once the husband dies, she is free and could become the wife of another man without being an adulteress.

⁴ It was the same with you, brothers, who have died in the person of Christ. You died to the Law, that you may belong to another, who has risen from among the dead, so that we may produce fruit for God. ⁵ When we lived according to the flesh, the sinful passions awakened by the Law were at work in our bodies to produce the fruit of death, ⁶ but we have died to what was holding us; we are freed from it and now we serve with the spirit of renewal instead of the old way of the commandments.

⁷ Then, shall we say that the Law is part of sin? Of course not. However, I would not have known sin if it had not been through the Law. I would not be aware of greed if the Law did not tell me: *Do not covet*:

18. Gal 5, 13; Jn 8, 36	19. 12, 1	22. Jn 15, 8	23. Gal 5, 8; James 1, 15	2. 1 Cor 7, 39
4. 2 Cor 5, 15; Eph 2, 15; Col 2, 14		5. Eph 2, 3; 4, 22	6. 2 Cor 3, 6	7. Ex 20, 17

weak and incapable of accomplishing much.

Do not allow sin any control over your mortal being. The faithful, although conscious of belonging totally to Christ, commit sins every day. Their sins, however, do not deprive them of what is most important, trust in the Father, which allows them to stand up after each fall (1 John 2:1). They know that they are and always will be sinners whom God forgives, as long as they try to amend and be better. We achieve freedom day by day by voluntarily submitting to the requirements of a better life.

In Paul's time there were cases of slaves being exchanged by owners. Besides, a free man with debts could sell himself to his debtor in payment of his debts. The comparison used by Paul teaches us to be meekly at the disposal of the Spirit, as slaves who are not owners of their own persons. Let us look for what the Spirit advises before making any decision.

The Christian's life must appear quite a slavery to whoever looks at it externally. Yet the

Christian feels and knows himself to be free. The best example could be that of a mother totally dedicated to her sick child: she is totally free, because she has no other law than her love.

◆ The last chapter presented Christ who frees us from sin and death and becomes our only master. Then Christians of Jewish origin could ask: What about the Law of the Old Covenant? Is it no longer of value? Was it not given by God himself?

You have died to the Law (4). The Law was something temporary, provisional. The time of the Law has ended with the death of Christ.

Though the Law was for the Jews the highest authority, baptized Jews are no longer obliged to obey it. Of course, many commandments deal with justice and mercy, and Christians must not disregard them, but in spite of that, Christians should no longer follow a "religion of commandments", but have absolute faith in Christ, the only saviour.

We died to what was holding us (6). The Law!



⁸ Sin challenged the commandment by stirring in me all kinds of greed; whereas, without a law, sin lies dead.

⁹ I lived, when there was no Law; but, when the commandment came, sin came back ¹⁰ and I died. It happened that the law of life had brought me death. ¹¹ Sin took advantage of the commandment to deceive me, and brought me death through the commandment.

¹² So then, the Law is holy, as the commandment is holy, just and good. ¹³ But, being good, would it give me death? Of course not. Sin was what caused death, taking advantage of something good; so, the commandment let all the sinful working of sin be seen.

The Law without Christ makes man divided

o ¹⁴ We know that the Law is spiritual, but I am made of human weakness, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I cannot explain what is happening to me, because I do not do what I want, but on the contrary, the very things I hate.

¹⁶ Well then, if I do the evil I do not want to do, I agree that the Law is good; ¹⁷ but, in this case, I am not the one striving toward evil, but it is sin, living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, I mean, in my flesh. I can want to do what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ In fact I do not do the good I want, but the evil I hate. ²⁰ Therefore, if I do what I do not want to do, I am not the one striving towards evil, but sin which is in me.

²¹ I discover, then, this reality: in wishing to do something good, the evil within me asserts itself first. ²² My inmost self agrees and rejoices with the law of God. ²³ but I notice in my body another law challenging the law of the spirit, and delivering me as a slave to the law of the sin written in my members. ²⁴ Alas, for me! Who will free me from this condition linked to death? ²⁵ Let us give thanks to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!

So my spirit acts as a servant of the law of God while my mortal being serves the law of sin.

8. 5:13; James 1, 14; 1 Cor 15, 56
12. Dt 4, 8

14. Ps 51, 1; Jn 3, 6; Gal 5, 17

9. Lev 18, 5;

Dt 4, 1; Esk 20, 1

11. Gen 3, 13; 2 Cor 11, 3

17. Gen 6, 5; 8, 21; Jer 10, 23

25. 1 Cor 15, 57

of Moses, the great gift of God to Israel was part of a temporary situation in which man was not fully free. We must understand that no Law, or Church's decree, or religious constitution, can rule over our conscience. Still less any civil law.

The Christian feels free before civil and religious authorities: he obeys because he sees in the laws an indication of God's will but he holds the right to criticize them according to the criteria of his faith. Though religious laws teach us a way, none of them may prevail over the clear demands of a well-informed conscience.

In the same way we cannot unconditionally become disciples of any human wisdom, such as ideologies of liberation, oriental sciences... Everything human is worthy, but Christ, Wisdom of God, judges everything.

See the same theme in 2 Cor 5:14: *if he died for all, then all have died.*

I lived when there was no Law (9). It would be erroneous to think that Paul is speaking about his own past. He is rather playing a role and speaks on behalf of Man (see commentary 5:12-14). The other actors of the drama are Sin, the Law and Death.

For the Jews the conclusion is clear: the Law with its commandments had no power to renew the human person.

o Paul describes the situation of the person who knows the commandments but not the love of God. He is not a liberated person, but a divided one. Two opposing forces struggle within him: on one side the Law that tells him what to do, and on the other *another law* in his *flesh*, that is in his nature. He is not really free.

There is something well disposed within man: *the spirit*, and something that resists the demands of duty: *the flesh* (see Mk 14:38). *The flesh* does not mean the body; this word designates what in us is weak in face of duty and God's call to holiness. In his letter to the Galatians, when Paul speaks of the "works of flesh," he points out not only drunkenness or sexual immorality, but also desires and feelings such as envy and ambition. *Flesh* means everything subject to temptation. And so the fight against the flesh is not a rejection of the body.

Our liberty is impotent when faced with sin, that is, it can do nothing against the forces of evil

We have received the Spirit

+8 ¹ There is no longer grievous contradiction for those living in Jesus Christ. ² For, in Jesus Christ, the Law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ The Law was without effect because flesh was not responding. Then God, planning to destroy sin, sent his own Son, in the likeness of the sinful human condition, to conquer and condemn the sin in this human condition. ⁴ Since then, the perfection intended by the Law would be fulfilled in those not walking in the way of the flesh, but in the way of the Spirit.

Life through the Spirit

■ ⁵ Those walking according to the flesh tend towards what belongs to the flesh; those led by the spirit, to

what is spirit. ⁶ Flesh tends towards death, while spirit aims at life and peace. ⁷ What the flesh plans is against God: it does not agree, it cannot even agree with the law of God. ⁸ So, those walking according to the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ Yet you are not under the control of the flesh, but of the spirit, because the Spirit of God is within you. If you did not have the Spirit of Christ, you would not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ On the other hand, if Christ is with you, even if the body dies, as a consequence of sin, the spirit keeps on living for it is in the grace of God. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of Him who raised Christ from among the dead is within you, He who raised Christ from among the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies. Yes, he will do it through his Spirit who dwells within you.

2. Jer 31, 33; Ezk 36, 27; 2 Cor 3, 17; Gal 5, 18	3. 2 Cor 5, 21; Heb 2, 14	4. Mt 5, 17
5. Gal 5, 16	7. James 4, 4; 1 Jn 2, 15	9. 1 Cor 3, 16
	11. 1 Cor 6, 14; 2 Cor 4, 14	

dragging down all mankind. Dullness of spirit in our fellow workers, family problems, the general spread of pornography, selfishness and consumerism: the flesh within us becomes an accomplice of all these evils.

In this chapter Paul continues to play the role of the man who still does not know Christ and remains divided and enslaved. The next chapter will deal with the opposition between the spirit and the flesh for those who believe in Christ. For them there is a solution to their conflicts: they live in peace. And so Paul ends crying out: *who will free me...? Thanks be to God.*

+ *There is no longer grievous contradiction.* The sinner was divided between his conscience and his bad habits, and without hope of escaping from it. For those who have believed in Christ, however, that situation has ended.

God sent his own son (5). We know that almsgiving can never take the place of the salary that a man earns through his own work; no matter how much we help suffering or abandoned people, they will not become responsible until they themselves face their problems. The same is true regarding the salvation of man. It is not God who takes pity on sinners and says: "How sad! So irresponsible!... But I will dress them up in white and forget their sins, so they may look holy and be sealed at my side." God does not want to disguise reality, but to create humankind anew. So one of the human race must personally defeat Sin (that is the power of death that

keeps mankind paralyzed and divided).

He sent him in the likeness (3). In the likeness: Jesus carries on his shoulders the sins of others, but he did not commit any sin (Heb 2:14 and 4:15). Since the sacrifice of Christ, the power of his Spirit has made believers also capable of being victorious over the forces of death.

Through love and forgiveness God created a new world without rancor or desire of revenge or hidden remorse of conscience. We are at peace with him; we are at peace with each other.

■ *All walking in the Spirit of God are children of God* (14). All the benefits received through faith, all graces that God gives us are various aspects of one single grace: God has adopted us as his sons and daughters and gives us his Spirit. The Spirit of God is what unites him with his Son. And that is why the Spirit acts in everything that God created through his Son. He abides in a special manner in those adopted children of God.

The human life of Christ prepared the way for the communication of the Spirit to those who were to be adopted, in order later on to be made divine, that is transformed in God. First comes Christ, then Spirit. This is why Paul reminded us first of the saving work of Christ (ch. 5 & 6); now he tells us about Spirit.

Those led by the Spirit (4). Shall we write "by the Spirit", or "by the spirit"? In biblical understanding, spirit means something which is ours and God's at the same time. Man is *flesh and blood*; he has *heart, soul and mind*; but the

¹² Then, brothers, let us leave the flesh and no longer live according to it. ¹³ If not, we will die. Rather, walking in the Spirit, let us put to death the body's deeds so that we may live. ¹⁴ It is those walking in the Spirit of God who are children of God.

¹⁵ You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall into fear, but the Spirit that makes you adopted children and every time we cry, "Abba! Father!", ¹⁶ the Spirit assures our spirit that we are children of God. ¹⁷ If we are children, we are heirs, too. Ours will be the inheritance of God and we will share it with Christ; for if we now suffer with him, we will also share the Glory with him.

The universe, too, waits for its redemption

◆ ¹⁸ I consider that the suffering of our present life cannot be compared with the Glory that will be revealed and given to us. ¹⁹ All creation is ea-

gerly expecting the transformation of the children of God. ²⁰ For the created world was subjected to frustration; this did not come from itself, but from the One who assured it, however, a hope; ²¹ for the created world will be freed from this fate of death and share the freedom and the Glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth. ²³ Not creation alone, but even ourselves, although the Spirit was given to us as a foretaste of what we are to receive, we groan in our innermost being, eagerly awaiting the day when God will adopt us and take to himself our bodies as well.

²⁴ To hope is the way we are saved. But if we saw what we hope for, there would no longer be hope: how can you hope for what is already seen? ²⁵ So we hope for what we do not see and we will receive it through patient hope.

15. Gal 4, 6; 2 Tim 1, 7	17. Gal 3, 4; 2 Tim 2, 12; 1 Pet 4, 13	18. 2 Cor 4, 17	20. Ecl 1, 2;
Gen 3, 17	21. Is 25, 7; 65, 17; Rev 21, 1; 2 Pet 3, 12	22. Is 66, 7; Jn 16, 21	
23. 2 Cor 1, 22; Eph 1, 14	24. Heb 11, 1; 11, 27; 1 Pet 1, 8		

spirit is something that God sends into man. So, in this paragraph, sometimes it seem more appropriate to say "the spirit", meaning our spirit visited by God, and at other times: "the Spirit", that is the third divine Person, through whom God gives himself to us.

You did not receive a spirit of slaves. The Spirit changes our manner of being and behaving before God. Now we know him as a Father. From this knowledge comes this adhesion, joyful and without fear to whatever he demands of us. We can say: "Our Father", as Christ taught us.

Those led by the Spirit go to what comes from the Spirit. And then they begin to freely desire a new way of living in imitation of Christ. The desires of the Spirit animate our life. We experience them as an interior calling, a security and a joy.

In following the desires of the Spirit we really feel free: this life, however, is demanding. Each day we have to go a little further in *putting to death the works of the flesh* (14), that is everything that paralyzes us and makes us cling to this world. *Put to death*: we call it mortification.

The Spirit assures our spirit that we are children of God (16). Whoever lives in the spirit lives

in the light. While we remain firm in the teaching of Christ and share in the life of the Church, the Spirit gives us internal knowledge and joy in the things of God. The Spirit guides us and inspires us each day how to please God.

◆ The description of "living in the Spirit" continues. The believer who looks around notices that not only his brethren, but the whole world is being transformed.

The glory that will be given to us. Though the Spirit dwells in our innermost being, we expect the transformation of our whole being. Now, though we have the peace of Christ, temptations and sufferings prevent us from enjoying glory and being fully free. With the transformation of our whole being (Paul calls it *the body*: 23) we shall reach the glorious freedom of the children of God.

It is impossible to consider Man apart from this world in which he lives. Are there elsewhere in the Universe other intellectual beings? The Bible says nothing about it. It only says that all created life is drawn by the same mystery of death and resurrection that marks our destiny and that we have known through Christ.

All creation is eagerly expecting (19). When God created man, he ordered him to rule over creation. So sinful man ruled over the world, but

ο ²⁶ The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness, for we do not know how to ask; but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that cannot be expressed. ²⁷ And He who sees inner secrets, knows the desires of the spirit praying for the holy ones, for he prays according to the will of God.

Who shall separate us from the love of God?

+ ²⁸ We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called according to his plan. ²⁹ Those whom he knows beforehand, he also predestines to be like his Son, similar to him, so that he may be the First-born among many brothers. ³⁰ And so, those whom God chose, he called them, and when he calls them he makes them just and holy, and after making them holy, gives them his Glory.

³¹ What shall we say after this? If God is with us, who shall be against

us? ³² God who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not with him, give us all things? ³³ Who shall accuse those chosen by God if he is making them just? ³⁴ Who will dare to condemn them? Will it be Christ, he who died, and still more rose and is seated at the right of God interceding for us?

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will it be trials, or anguish, persecution or hunger, lack of clothing, or dangers or sword? ³⁶ As the Scripture says: *For your sake we are being killed all day long; they treat us like sheep to be slaughtered.*

³⁷ No, in all of this we are more than conquerors, thanks to him who has loved us. ³⁸ I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor spiritual powers, neither the present ³⁹ nor the future, nor cosmic powers, were they from heaven, or from the deep world below, nor any creature whatsoever will separate us from the love of God, which we have in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

26. Lk 11, 13; James 4, 5; Gal 4, 6	27. 1 Cor 2, 12	29. Col 1, 15; Eph 1, 11; 2 Thes 2, 13;
1 Cor 15, 49; 2 Cor 3, 18	33. Is 50, 8	34. Heb 7, 21
36. Ps 44, 23	38. 1 Cor 3, 22; Col 2, 15	35. 1 Cor 4, 9; 2 Cor 4, 11

his sin infected whatever he touched. The Bible itself notes that the progress of society quite often brings with it slavery and exploitation. The discoveries of science have been used to destroy millions of lives in world wars. Paul tells us now that the world, infected by sin, will be transformed and "spiritualized" when we attain resurrection.

The whole creation groans and suffers the pangs of birth (22). We don't see a peaceful progress in this world. What we see, rather, are contradictions, tensions and violence. For this earth is not the permanent abode of the children of God. On the contrary, it is a place of suffering, struggle and dark faith that prepares us for what we await from God: "The day when God will adopt us and take our mortal bodies to himself."

ο *We don't know how to pray.* We often think that we pray only when we are saying something and asking for things. Paul shows that words are not important, but rather the deep desire of the Spirit of God within us is.

The Spirit intercedes for us. It is good to present our problems and worries to God using words that the Spirit inspires. And still better

when the Spirit invites us to remain in silent prayer, when God communicates his peace to us.

+ In the last pages Paul has described God's action on us through his Spirit. But in fact, the providence of the Father covers all the events of our lives. Nothing happens in the world, in our family, in our lives merely by chance or because it was so destined.

Those whom he knows beforehand... How: Paul stresses this personal attention the Father gives to each of us!

Those whom God chose (30). From the beginning of the world God has known us in Christ: How different from human parents who do not know their children before birth! He has known and loved us from the very time he created us.

He calls them. Whatever be the way we come to know Christ, it is a personal call of God who gives us the opportunity to believe.

He makes them holy. That is, whatever is good in us and pleasing to him, he has given us:

Those whom he knew beforehand (20). On reading this verse some have thought that we are not really free, and that those elected by God are

Why have the Jews not believed?

9 ¹ I will tell you with all sincerity in Christ and my conscience assures me in the Holy Spirit that I am not lying: ² I have great sadness and constant anguish for the Jews. ³ I would even desire that myself suffer the curse of being cut off from Christ, instead of them who are my brethren and kinsmen by race. ⁴ They are Israelites whom God received as his sons, and on them rests his Glory. Theirs are the covenants, the Law, the worship and the promises of God. ⁵ They are descendants of the Patriarchs and from their race Christ was born, he who is, above all, God blessed for ever and ever: Amen!

⁶ We cannot say that the word of God has not been fulfilled. For not all Israelites are Israel. ⁷ And not because they are of the race of Abraham, are they all his children, for it was said to him: *The children of Isaac will be called your descendants.* ⁸ This

means that the children of God are not identified with the race of Abraham, but only with the children born to him because of the promise of God. ⁹ To such promise this text is referring: *I shall return about this time and Sarah will have a son.* ¹⁰ Also when Rebekah, the wife of our father Isaac, became pregnant, ¹¹ and before the twins were born, when they hadn't yet done right or wrong, God said: *The elder will serve the younger.* So the plan of God kept on depending on his free choice, ¹² not on the merits of anybody, but on his own calling, ¹³ as the Scriptures say: *I chose Jacob and rejected Esau.*

God is not unjust

◆ ¹⁴ Shall we say that God is unjust? Of course not. ¹⁵ However God said to Moses: *I shall forgive whom I forgive and have pity on whom I have pity.* ¹⁶ So what is important is not that the man worry or hurry, but that God have compassion. ¹⁷ And he says in

3. Ex 32, 32	4. Ex 4, 22; 19, 5; Is 40, 5; 2 S 7, 14; Eph 2, 12	5. Rom 1, 3; 1 Jn 5, 20; Tit 2, 13
6. Num 23, 19; Is 55, 10	7. 2, 28; Mt 3, 9; Jn 8, 39; Gen 21, 12	8. 1 Cor 10, 18; Gal 6, 16
9. Gen 18, 10	11. Gen 25, 23; 1 Thes 1, 4; 2 Pet 1, 10	13. Mal 1, 3
16. Tit 3, 5; Phil 3, 12	17. Ex 9, 12	15. Dr 32, 4; Ex 33, 19

saved automatically. In fact, we don't read that some are elected for salvation, others not. Paul only says that they are elected to know Christ, which is not the same as salvation.

The kingdom of God goes much farther than the Church. The great majority of humankind do not know Christ and the Gospel. Yet God knows how to lead and save them. for the sacrifice of Christ saves all humankind. Paul is addressing believers and reminds them that to believe in Christ is a great personal grace: let them not be discouraged.

See also commentary on 9:14.

Who shall be against us? Paul is thinking of the evil surrounding us that frequently drags us down. He is thinking of the day of Judgment, when the accuser, the Spirit of Evil, could face us with the faults we have committed. He thinks of our troubled conscience that often brings us remorse. None of these will be stronger than the love and forgiveness of Christ. The believer should not be alarmed at his repeated faults, or doubt the love of God, but try to live according to the truth.

■ Paul, being a Jew, shares the worries of the few Jews who have believed in Christ. Why did

the chosen people not recognize its Saviour? If they were a chosen nation, why were so few selected?

It is the same worry of Catholic families when their children do not go to church or when teenagers declare they have lost their faith. It is the same uneasiness we feel in the course of a mission: those who habitually go to church are perhaps the hardest to lead to conversion and the ones that most obstruct the evangelization of outsiders.

This happens because faith cannot be transmitted from fathers to children like an inheritance. Faith is and always will be a grace from God.

◆ Paul repeats what he said in 8:28: to know Christ is a grace that God gives to whomsoever he wishes. But if he does not grant this grace, he will surely grant some other grace so that man may be saved even without the knowledge of Christ.

The argument based on the story of Jacob and Esau means just that: Jacob is preferred to Esau for a determined mission (12). Let us notice, also, that in verse 13, quoting the prophet Malachi 1:3, Jacob and Esau do not represent



Scripture to Pharaoh: *I made you Pharaoh to show my power in you, and for the whole world to know my name.*¹⁸ And so God takes pity on whom he wishes, and hardens the heart of whomsoever he wishes.

¹⁹ Will anyone dare say, "Why, then, does God complain, if no one can resist his will?"²⁰ But you, my friend, who are you to call God to account? Should, perhaps, the clay pot say to its maker: why did you make me like this?²¹ Is it not up to the potter to make from the same clay a vessel for beauty or a vessel for menial use?

²² If God, in order to show his wrath and the extent of his power, endured with so much patience vessels that deserved his wrath, fit to be broken, ²³ he now wants to show the riches of his Glory with other vessels whom he mercifully prepared for glory.²⁴ And he called us, not only from among the Jews, but from among the pagans, too, ²⁵ as he said

through the prophet Hosea: *I will call 'my people' those that were not my people, and 'my beloved' the one who was not beloved.*²⁶ And in the same place where they were told: 'You are not my people', they will be called sons of the living God.

²⁷ With regard to Israel, Isaiah proclaims: *Even if the sons of Israel are as numerous as the sand of the sea, only a few will be saved.*²⁸ This is a matter that the Lord will settle in Israel without fail or delay.²⁹ Isaiah also announced: *If the Almighty Lord had not left us some descendants, we would have become like Sodom and similar to Gomorrah.*

³⁰ What are we saying, then? That the pagans, who were not aiming at peace with God and holiness found it (I speak of being holy by faith);³¹ while Israel, hoping for holiness from the Law, lost the purpose of the Law.³² Why? Because they relied on the observance of the Law, not on

18. Ex 4, 21

20. Wis 12, 12; Job 11, 7; 38, 2

21. Jer 18, 6; Is 29, 16; 45, 10

22. 2, 4; 3, 26

23. Eph 1, 4; 2, 4

25. Hos 1, 9; 2, 1

27. Is 6, 13; 10, 22; Zep 3, 12

29. Is 1, 9

32. Lk 18, 9

two persons, of whom, one would be rejected, but the two peoples of Israel and Edom, named after them. Likewise in 9:17: God *hardens the heart* of Pharaoh.

For the Hebrews the heart is the symbol of the mind. This then means: God lets Pharaoh be dull of mind, or stubborn, in order to bring him to defeat. This does not mean anything more than that or that God would lead someone to sin or send him to hell.

PREDESTINATION

Many make use of these sentences of Paul and other passages from the Bible to assert we are not really free and if God has created us to be condemned to hell, there is nothing we can do. How can we wholeheartedly love a God who behaves like this?

If God calls us to a personal relation of love and faithfulness with him (Os 2,21), it is precisely because we are free and responsible (Sir 15:14). If God destined someone for hell, how could he call him and demand that he live a holy life? It would be the most cruel of jokes.

Speaking of predestination, we say:

- God, who is not controlled by time, has no before or after. He sees and determines at

the same time the beginning and the end for each of us. No life fails because of the negligence of God or of his bad faith (Rom 8:28; James 1:13). No one can prevent his saving plans: Rom 8:15.

- Our salvation is a gift of God. No one can believe and please God unless he has been called: Rom 11:5; Phil 2:13. No one is to be proud of his merits or demand a reward: Eph 2:9; Phil 3:9.
- God is the one who works everything in us, as long as we open ourselves to his action. Only those who refuse to be receptive are responsible for their condemnation. The Church therefore speaks of "predestination" to express this saving work; but she has never spoken of predestination with regard to hell. Compare Matthew 25:34: *the kingdom prepared for you*, with 25:41: *the fire reserved for the Devil*.

We must not confuse two different ideas of predestination:

For Paul, *predestination* refers to the loving plan of God from the very beginning. It was then that God decided how to lavish on each of us the riches of his love through his Son. See commentary of Eph 1:5.

the Lord without having believed in him? And how could they believe in him without having first heard about him? And how will they hear about him if no one preaches about him? ¹⁵ And how will they preach about him if no one sends them? As Scripture says: *How beautiful to see those coming to bring good news.* ¹⁶ Although not everyone obeyed the good news, as Isaiah said: *Lord, who has believed in our preaching?* ¹⁷ So, faith comes from preaching, and preaching takes root in the word of Christ.

¹⁸ I ask: Have the Jews not heard? but of course they have. Because the voice of those preaching resounded all over the earth and their voice was heard to the end of the world. ¹⁹ Then I must ask: *Did not Israel understand?* Moses was the first to say: *I will make you jealous of a nation that is not a nation, I will excite your anger against a crazy nation.* ²⁰ Isaiah dares to add more: *I was found by those not looking for me, I have shown myself to those not asking for me.* ²¹ While referring to Israel, the same Isaiah says: *I hold out my hands the whole day long to a disobedient and rebellious people.*

A remnant of Israel has been saved

11 ¹ And so I ask: Has God rejected his people? Of course not. I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² No, God has not rejected the people he elected. Don't you know what Scripture says of Elijah when he was accusing Israel before God? ³ He said: *"Lord, they have killed your prophets, destroyed your altars, and I remain alone; and now they want to kill me."* ⁴ What was the answer of

God? *"I kept for myself seven thousand who did not worship Baal."* ⁵ In the same way now there is a remnant in Israel, those who were chosen by grace. ⁶ If it was by grace, it did not result because of the observance of the Law. Otherwise grace would not be grace.

⁷ What then? What Israel was looking for, it did not find, but those did whom God elected. The others hardened their hearts, ⁸ as Scripture says: *God made them dull of heart and mind; to this day their eyes cannot see nor their ears hear.* ⁹ David says: *May they be caught and trapped at their banquets; may they fall, may they be punished.* ¹⁰ *May their eyes be closed so that they cannot see and their backs bent forever.*

Do not despise those who stumbled

¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall? of course not. Their stumbling let salvation come to the pagan nations and this, in turn, will spur the jealousy of Israel. ¹² If the fault of Israel made the world rich, if its partial failure made the pagan nations rich, what will happen when Israel reaches fulfilment?

¹³ Now I will speak to you who are not Jews: I am spending myself as an apostle to the pagan nations, ¹⁴ but I hope my ministry will be successful enough to awaken the jealousy of those of my race, and finally to save some of them. ¹⁵ If the world made peace with God when they kept themselves apart, what will it be when they are welcomed? Nothing less than a passing from death to life.

¹⁶ When the first fruits are consecrated to God, the whole is consecrated. If the roots are holy, so will be

15. Is 52, 7	16. Is 53, 1	18. Ps 19, 4	19. Dt 32, 21	20. Is 65, 1	1. 2 Cor 11, 21; Phil 3, 5
2. 1 S 12, 22; Ps 94, 14; Jer 31, 37	3. 1 K 19, 10	4. 1 K 19, 18	5. 9, 6-13	8. Dt 29, 3	
9. Ps 69, 22	12. Mt 8, 11; 21, 43	14. 1 Cor 9, 22	15. 2 Cor 5, 17		

the branches. ¹⁷ Some branches have been cut from the olive tree, while you, as a wild olive tree, have been grafted in their stead, and you are benefiting from their roots and sap. ¹⁸ Now therefore, do not pride yourself and despise the branches, because you do not support the roots, the roots support you. ¹⁹ You may say, "They cut the branches to graft me." ²⁰ Well. But they were cut because they did not believe, while you stand by faith. Then do not pride yourself too much, rather beware: ²¹ if God did not spare the natural branches, even less will he spare you.

²² Admire at the same time both the goodness and severity of God: He was severe with the fallen and he is generous with you, as long as you remain faithful. Otherwise you will be cut off. ²³ Maybe if they do not keep on rejecting the faith they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ If you were taken from the wild olive tree to which you

belonged and, inspite of being of a different species, you were grafted into the good olive tree, how much more may they, of the same species, be grafted into their own tree.

Israel will be saved

+ ²⁵ I want you, brothers, to understand the mysterious decree of God, lest you feel superior to them: a part of Israel will remain hardened until the majority of pagans have entered. ²⁶ Then the whole of Israel shall be saved, as Scripture says: *From Zion will come the Liberator who will purify the sons of Jacob from all their sins.* ²⁷ *And this is the covenant I will make with them: I will take them away from their sins.*

²⁸ Regarding the Gospel, the Jews act as enemies, but it is for your benefit. Regarding the election, they are still beloved because of their fathers. ²⁹ Because the call of God and his gifts cannot be nullified.

³⁰ Through the rebellion of the

17. Eph 2, 15

19. Is 7, 9

26. Is 59, 20; Jer 31, 33

29. Dt 4, 37; Num 23, 19

THE DESTINY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

+ Both paragraphs 11:11 and 11:25-32 deal with the destiny of the Jewish people. It is a fact that the great majority did not receive Christ. Later on, as Jesus had foretold, they were scattered all over the world, becoming a people without a land, united only by their Law, traditions and above all, by that certitude of being the people of God chosen among all other peoples of the world.

In later times, the Jews have been persecuted or exterminated in many nations and in Christian countries by people motivated by religious fanaticism. Sometimes they were forced to convert and adopt the Christian faith. The less fanatical among Christians considered that Israel bore the punishment for the crime committed by their forefathers when they condemned Jesus; and they saw in the tragedy of Israel, and then in its survival, a sign of God's Providence. The Jews could no longer be considered the people of God and their religion was a religion of the past.

But now, with a more lucid mind and spirit, we recognize that the Jews have never stopped being the people of God. By a wonderful design of God the Jews have been giving to us, Christians, many examples of how we should behave. While Christians confused often enough nation-

alism and religion, adopting frequently causes alien to the spirit of the Gospel, the Jewish people, without weapons and country, kept united by their faith, in spite of persecutions. While Christians settled into the present, seeing in their religion a moral teaching, completely forgetting they had to prepare for the second coming of Christ, the Jews on the other hand were anxious for a world without frontiers, denouncing the idols that oppose social justice: false nationalism, worshipping of military values, cult of the civil and religious authorities.

We discover day by day that the Jewish religion is not a dead religion, because the Bible is for the Jews a fountain of life. It seems as if God placed Jews and Christians in competition, as Paul gives us to understand. The Jews no longer hope for a Saviour and consider everything said in the Bible about the Messiah as referring to the chosen people as a whole, who are to save the world. And they continue hoping for a better world promised by God, but which is never fully realised. The Christians, however, hope for a better world, knowing that the kingdom of God has already arrived and that in Christ we possess everything.

Paul states clearly that at the end of the world Israel will be reconciled with Christ and that Jews

Jews the mercy of God was for you who did not obey God.³¹ They, in turn, being now in rebellion so that you may receive God's mercy, will receive mercy in due time.³² For God submitted all to disobedience, in order to show his mercy to all.

³³ How deep are the riches, the wisdom and knowledge of God! His decisions cannot be explained, nor his ways understood! ³⁴*Who has ever known God's thoughts? Who has ever been his adviser?* ³⁵*Who has given him something first, so that God had to repay him?* ³⁶For everything comes from him, has been made by him and has to return to him. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

Christian life: Be concerned for others

12 ¹ I beg you, therefore, my brothers, by the mercy of God, to give yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice pleasing to God: that is our spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to the world where you

live, but rather be transformed through the renewal of your mind. You must discern the will of God, what is good, what pleases, what is perfect.

³ The grace that God has given me allows me to tell all of you not to think too highly of yourselves, but wisely, that you may become wise. And let each one appreciate the measure of faith and talents given to him by God.

o ⁴ Take as example our body. It is one, even if formed by many members, but not all of them with the same function. ⁵ The same with us; being many, we are one body in Christ, depending on one another. ⁶ Let each one of us, therefore, serve according to our different gifts. He who, by God's gift, is a prophet, let him speak whatever faith inspires him. ⁷ Let the deacon fulfill his office; let the teacher teach, ⁸ and he who encourages, convince.

You must, likewise, give with an open hand, preside with dedication, and be cheerful in your works of charity.

32. Gal 3, 22	33. 1 Cor 2, 11; Jer 23, 18	34. Is 40, 13	35. Job 41, 3	36. 1 Cor 8, 6; Heb 2, 10;
1. 6, 11; 15, 16; 1 Pet 2, 5	2. Eph 4, 23; 2 Cor 3, 18; 5, 17; Phil 1, 10			3. 2 Cor 10, 13;
Phil 2, 3	5. 1 Cor 12, 12; 10, 17; Eph 5, 30			

and Christians will recognize that their two separate histories are really only one.

■ *Give yourselves as a sacrifice pleasing God.* The Christian is asked, above all, to give himself to the fulfilling of God's plans. His worship and duties to God do not consist principally in what he does on Sundays (no matter how important it may be) but in his daily conduct.

Do not be conformed to the world where you live. We see ourselves surrounded by so many customs, advertisements, fashions, songs, governmental plans,... that rob and deprive us of our personality. They take away from us what is ours and what makes us human persons: our liberty. In each country and environment people become used to doing what everyone else does, and no one dares to rebel against evil as long as he is not personally bothered. But although a Christian be neither aggressive nor a pessimist, he cannot agree with the world as it is.

Transform ourselves (2). God demands not only good deeds, but still more a complete transformation of our person. First of all we must

acquire new criteria and a new understanding of our existence. With baptism, that makes us new creatures, there also begins a renovation of the mind enlightened by God. See this in Eph 4:3.

So you will know the will of God. A blind obedience to the commandments of God and Church is not the way. What is needed is a constant effort to learn, to meditate and to understand the will of God in everything that happens to us.

Take for example our body. See 1 Cor 12: We are only one body and no one can avoid his responsibilities. Paul stresses how each of us has a particular function in the Church. Those parish where a multitude attends mass every Sunday merely as assistants, without having a community life are very imperfect churches.

o From the way he speaks about Christian community, Paul lets us know that in his time it was not organized as in our churches of today. If the early Church not everything depended upon priests educated apart from the common people and sent to the Christian communities from

Christian life: Love

◆⁹ Let love be sincere. Hate what is evil and hold to whatever is good.

¹⁰ Regarding brotherly love, have love for one another.

Regarding respect, judge others as more worthy.

¹¹ Regarding your duties, do not be lazy.

Be fervent in the Spirit and serve God.

¹² Have hope and be cheerful.

Be patient in trials and pray constantly.

¹³ Share with other christians in need.

With those passing by, be ready to receive them.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not wish evil on anyone.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who are joyful, and weep with those who weep.

¹⁶ Live in peace with one another. Do not seek honors, but accept humble duties. ¹⁷ Do not hold yourselves as wise. Do not return evil for evil, but try to earn the appreciation of others.

¹⁸ Do your best to live in peace with everybody. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but let God be the one who punishes, as Scripture says: *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.* ²⁰ And it adds: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; by doing this you will*

heap burning coals upon his head.

²¹ Do not let evil defeat you, but conquer evil with goodness.

Submission to authority

13 ¹ Let everyone be subject to the authorities governing us. For there is no authority that does not come from God, and the existing ones have been established by God. ² He who, therefore, resists authority goes against the order established by God, and those who resist deserve to be condemned.

³ In fact, who fears authority? Not those who do good, but those who do evil. Do you want to be without fear

11. Col 4, 2

12. Eph 6, 18; 1 Pet 4, 9

14. Mt 5, 38; 1 Cor 12, 26

16. Pro 3, 7

17. 1 Thes 5, 15; 1 Pet 3, 9

18. Heb 12, 14

19. Lev 19, 18; Heb 10, 30; Dt 32, 35

20. Pro 25, 21

1. In 19, 11; Mt 22, 16; 1 Tim 2, 1; 1 Pet 2, 13; Tit 3, 1; Pro 8, 15

outside. As we said in Acts 12:35, the community elected a Council of Elders or presbyters, approved by the Apostles. The most respected among them were the "Prophets." The Body of Presbyters, who had authority over the Church, were those who celebrated the Eucharist.

Everyone's gifts were taken into account by the organization which considered also as gift, the ability to serve in the Church. See Eph 4:11 and commentaries on 1 Tim 4:14.

But throughout history the Church has had to change its organization and constantly adjust itself to the development of social structures and cultural development.

Give with an open hand. Paul passes from the good discharge of duties to the ministry of love for others.

◆Verses 9-13 present a program of Christian life. Unlike the commandments concerning external acts, Paul stresses internal attitudes and dispositions.

Do not return evil for evil. A demanding commandment of forgiveness so often formu-

lated by Jesus. It is a false wisdom that which advises us to return evil for evil, mean behaviour for mean behaviour, a tooth for a tooth... It is also false wisdom (16) to strive to be noticed by adopting customs of a higher social class, or to dream of a life without material problems, to have more consideration for moneyed people, for the powerful or for good speakers.

○ Some governments which have imposed their own unlimited authority through violence and lies, bribe churches and pastors to interpret this paragraph in their favour. Other people are scandalized by what Paul says: How could such a government be *at the service of God* and enjoy his authority? Does not the Scripture say in other places that the Devil is the one who gives power to his worshippers? (Luke 4:5-7; Rev 13:1-19; John 12:31 & 14:30)

Let us remember that Paul and his readers lived in a world where almost no one questioned the legitimacy of Roman authority. And as there is neither a common good and peace, nor nation without authority and obedience, Paul



of a person in authority? Do good and he will praise you.⁴ He is the steward of God for your good. But if you do not behave, fear him for he does not carry arms in vain; he is at the service of God who judges and punishes wrongdoers.

⁵ It is necessary to obey, not through fear but as a matter of conscience. ⁶ For that same reason you pay the taxes, and the collectors are God's officials. ⁷ Give each one his due; to whomever you owe contributions, make a contribution; to whom taxes are due, pay taxes; to whom respect is due, give respect; to whom honour is due, give honour.

⁸ Do not be in debt to anyone. Let only this be the debt of one to another: love, because he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the whole Law. ⁹ You know the commandments: *Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not covet*; and whatever else are summarized in this one: *You will love your neighbour as yourself*. ¹⁰ Love cannot do the neighbour any harm; so love fulfils the whole Law.

8. Jn 13, 34; Col 3, 14
 1 Thes 5, 4; 1 Cor 7, 26
 6. 1 Cor 10, 30; 1 Tim 4, 4

states that obedience to the constituted authority is ordered by God. In saying: *he who resists the authority*, Paul means persons who resist in order to serve their own interest or that of their group. They are bad citizens for they create divisions and harm everyone: 1 Peter 2:13; Tit 3:1.

Paul did not know the modern problems of rebellion against an oppressive power and no one can address his words to those who resist because of their conscience. In any case, the Christian subjects his conscience only to Christ. When the authorities demand something that is against truth and justice, he resists with the means his conscience reveals to him, ready to suffer punishment provided by human laws, and even to give his life. The great majority of the martyrs the Church honors today were condemned in their time as subversive persons and enemies of social order.

He is the steward of God for your good (4). We have to ask, then, if authority promotes goodness. When the laws favour only a minority, or allow corruption, or are oppressive to the

Children of the light

+ ¹¹ You know what hour it is. This is the time to awake, for our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed; ¹² the night is almost over and day is at hand. Let us discard, therefore, everything that belongs to darkness, and let us take up the arms of light. ¹³ As we live in the full light of day, let us behave with decency; no banquets with drunkenness, no prostitution or vices, no fighting or jealousy. ¹⁴ Put on, rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not be led by the will of the flesh nor follow its desires

The weak and the strong

14 ¹ Welcome those weak in faith and do not criticize their scruples. ² Some think they can eat any food, while others, less liberated, eat only vegetables. ³ If you eat, do not despise those who abstain; if you abstain, do not criticize those who eat, for God has welcomed them. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? Whether he stands or falls, the one concerned is his master:

10. 1 Cor 13, 4; Mt 19, 18
 4. James 4, 11; Mt 7, 1
 5. Gal 4, 10; Col 2, 16

poor, they are not at the service of God: let us remember Is 5:8; 7; 10:1-3; Am 5:7-12.

Besides, the believer does not approve the fact that certain persons organize their own political or economic party in a way that makes them in fact Masters and Lords, capable of eliminating anyone who opposes their absolute monopoly of power.

Jesus, for his part, refused to take part in politics (Mc 12:3). But he did not speak against those who want to do so. He was free enough to denounce authority and to break the most sacred laws when they became oppressive.

During the past century the Church has reminded us very often that no authority can deprive a human being of his rights, and that everybody should be careful to elect authorities who serve the common good. In these matters let us hear the doctrine of the Church: Gaudium and Spes 73-76.

+ *You know what hour it is* (11). During the first thirty years of the Church all expected that the coming of Jesus would be soon. Later on

But he will not fall, for his master is able to keep him standing.

⁵ For some, there are good and bad days; for others, all days are equal. Let everyone act according to his own conscience. ⁶ He who distinguishes among days, does that for the Lord, and he who eats, eats for the Lord and in eating he gives thanks to the Lord. And he who does not eat, does it for the Lord and gives him thanks as well.

⁷ In fact, none of us lives for himself, nor dies for himself. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Either in life or in death, we belong to the Lord; ⁹ Christ experienced death and life to be Lord both of the living and of the dead. ¹⁰ Then you, why do you criticize your brother? And you, why do you despise him? For we will all appear at the tribunal of God. ¹¹ It is written: *I swear by myself, word of the Lord, every knee will bend before me, and every tongue shall confess truth before God.* ¹² So each of us will account for himself before God.

¹³ Therefore, let us not continue criticizing one another; let us try, rather, never to put in the way of our brother anything that would make

him stumble or fall. ¹⁴ I know, I am sure of this in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of itself, — it is only unclean for those who consider it unclean. ¹⁵ But if you hurt your brother because of a certain food, you are no longer walking according to love. ¹⁶ Let not your eating cause the loss of the one for whom Christ died. Let not what is true in you be spoken ill of.

¹⁷ The kingdom of God is not a matter of food or drink; it lies in justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ and if you serve Christ in this way, you will please God and be praised by people. ¹⁹ Let us look, then, for what strengthens peace and makes us better.

²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God because of food. All foods are clean, but you are wrong to make another fall because of what you eat. ²¹ And it may be better not to eat meat, or drink wine, or anything else that causes your brother to stumble.

²² Keep your own belief before God, and happy are you if you never act against your own belief. ²³ Instead, whoever eats something in spite of his doubts, is doing wrong, because he does not act according to his belief,

8. 1 Cor 3, 23; 2 Cor 5, 15
Acts 10, 15

9. Acts 10, 42
1 Thes 1, 6

11. Is 49, 18
20. 1 Cor 7, 15; 14, 26

12. Gal 6, 5
21. 1 Cor 8, 13

14. Mt 15, 11;
22. James 4, 17

when they realized that history could last much longer, the waiting of the believer was directed to the day when, upon his death he would meet Christ individually. In the present century we came to realize that history is going towards an end and that we not only have to be ready for the last hour, but that we must also work for the evangelization of the world. The Gospel is the power that, directly or indirectly, brings all human history to maturity: by living holy and responsible lives we hasten the coming of the kingdom of God (2 Pet 3:12).

■ *Welcome those weak in faith.* The Christians of Rome, of many different cultures, were still influenced by their former religious customs. For years many had been taught that to eat this or that food was evil, that to work on this or that day was not good. Habits take a long time to change. Paul reminds us of Christ's teaching (Mk

7:19): there are no forbidden foods or drinks.

Paul rejects, however, the disputes about all these things. *Do not criticize their scruples.* Whoever has overcome common prejudices must respect the conscience of others. Each must sacrifice his own comfort for the well-being of others when this is required. We find similar difficulties when Christians of different environments, races or political groups have to live together. It is an opportunity for them to show respect for one another.

Whatever we do against our conscience is sin (23). We must form our conscience; no one can remain in doubt, with prejudices or truths that are not well-founded. In any case, we must follow our own conscience. It is, therefore, a grave responsibility to acquire good criteria through lectures, conversations, reading the Bible, and above all, by taking advantage of the

and whatever we do against our conscience is sin.

15 ¹ We, the strong and liberated, should bear the weakness of those who are not strong, instead of pleasing ourselves. ² Let each of us bring joy to our neighbour, helping him to grow up in goodness; ³ Christ himself did not look for his own contentment, as Scripture says: *The insults of those insulting you fell upon me.* ⁴ And we know that whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, for the comfort given us by the Scripture helps our perseverance and maintains hope. ⁵ May God, the source of all perseverance and comfort, give to all of you to live in peace in Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may be able to praise in one voice God, Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

⁷ Welcome, then, one another, as Christ welcomed you for the glory of God. ⁸ Look: Christ put himself at the service of the circumcised Jews to fulfill the promises made by God to their fathers; here you see God's faithfulness. ⁹ The pagans instead give thanks to God for his mercy, as Scripture says: *Because of that, I will sing and praise your name among the pagans.* ¹⁰ And in another place: *Rejoice, pagan nations, with God's people.* ¹¹ And again: *praise the Lord, all people and let all nations speak of his*

magnificence. ¹² Isaiah says: *A descendant of Jesse will come who will rule the pagan nations and they will hope in him.*

¹³ May God, the source of hope fill you with joy and peace in the faith so that your hope may increase greatly by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul feels responsible for the Christians of Rome

◆ ¹⁴ As for me, brothers and sisters, I am convinced that you have goodwill, knowledge and capacity to advise each other; ¹⁵ nevertheless I have written boldly in some parts of this letter to remind you of what you already know. ¹⁶ I do this according to the mission given to me when I was sent to the pagan nations. I dedicated myself to the service of the Good News of God as a priest of Christ Jesus, in order to present the non-Jews to God as an agreeable offering consecrated by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ This service of God is for me a cause of pride in Christ Jesus. ¹⁸ Of course I would not dare to speak of other things but what Christ himself has done through me, my words and my works, ¹⁹ with miracles and signs by the power of the Holy Spirit, — so that the non-Jews may obey the faith. In this way I have extended the Good

3. Ps 69, 9
Ps 117, 1

4. 1 Cor 10, 11; 2 Tim 3, 16; 1 Mac 12, 9
12. Is 11, 10

5. Phil 2, 2
16. 1, 9; 12, 1; Phil 2, 17

9. Ps 18, 50

11. Dt 32, 43; 1

light the Church provides us in so many ways.

◆ Here we see how gentle Paul was. He has the authority of an apostle of Christ and is able to solve the problems of the Church of Rome. Yet, although he has something to teach them, he takes great care not to create divisions or rivalries and he shows respect for the founders or leaders of the Roman community.

As a priest of Christ (16) This term must not be interpreted as meaning what we understand by the Church's priests. The first Christians did not use the word *priest* to designate their ministers, in order not to confuse them with the

Jewish or pagan ministers who offered victim to God. Here, however, Paul compares himself to them. He does not present burnt offerings to God, but instead, he presents the pagans and reconciles them to God. This is the new spiritual worship (12:1) that the apostles offer to God.

Today there is a danger of giving too much attention to magnificent liturgical celebrations forgetting the difficult and often misinterpreted work of reconciling persons who are both liberated and aware of their human worth. Only those who dedicate themselves to this evangelization can rightly celebrate the Eucharist.

²⁰ I have been very careful, however, and I am proud of this, not to preach in places where Christ is already known, and not to build upon foundations laid by others. ²¹ Let it be as Scripture says: *Those not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.*

o ²² This work has prevented me from going to you. ²³ But now there is no more place for me in these regions, and as I have wanted for so long to go and see you, ²⁴ I hope to visit you when I go to Spain. Then you could help me go to that nation, once I have abundantly enjoyed your company.

o The trip to Spain would mean going further than Rome, center of the known world. This gives us an idea of how zealous Paul was in creating new communities in all parts of the world, without waiting for the newly founded ones to attain perfection. After his example, any mature Christian community of the Church should be concerned about becoming missionary, reaching out beyond their neighbourhood and parish. Even sending people to other places and countries where Christ is still unknown, regardless of their own stage of growth and the number of their priests or other ministries.

I go to Jerusalem to help that community.

³⁰ I beg of you, brothers, by Christ Jesus our Lord and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the fight, praying to God for me; ³¹ pray that I may avoid the snares of the enemies of faith in Judea, and that the community of Jerusalem may welcome the help I bring. ³² And so I will go to you with joy and, God willing, be refreshed in your company. ³³ The God of peace be with you. Amen.

16 ¹ I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, deaconess of the church of Caesarea. ² Please receive her in the name of the Lord, as it should be among brothers and sisters in the faith, and help her in whatever is necessary, because she helped many, among them, myself.

³ Greetings to Prisca and Aquilas, my helpers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ To save my life, they risked theirs; I am very grateful to them, as are all the churches of the pagan nations. ⁵ Greetings also to the church that

20. 2 Cor 10, 15 21. Is 52, 15 26. Acts 19, 21; 2 Cor 8-9; Gal 2, 10 27. 1 Cor 9, 11; Gal 6, 6
34. 2 Cor 13, 11; Phil 4, 9 1. Acts 18, 18 3. Acts 18, 23

It is often difficult to avoid tensions in the Church between groups of different cultures or classes. Quite often, it is even difficult to dialogue. Then the service of love will make hearts agree where minds cannot come to an understanding.

The last sentence is a prayer of thanksgiving to God. It is similar to another more developed with which he begins the letter to the Ephesians.

meets in their house. Greetings to my dear Epānetus, the first in the province of Asia to believe in Christ.⁶ Greet Mary, who worked so much for you.

⁷ Greetings to Andronicus and Junias, my relatives and companions in prison; they are well known and served Christ before I did.

⁸ Give greetings to Ampliatus, whom I love so much in the Lord.

⁹ Greetings to Urbanus, our fellow worker, and to my dear Stachys.

¹⁰ Greetings to Apelles, who suffered for Christ, and the family of Aristobulus.

¹¹ Greetings to my relative Herodion, who works in the Lord's service.

¹² Greetings to Tryphaina and Tryphosa, who toil for the Lord's sake.

¹³ Greetings to Rufus, elected of the Lord, and his mother who was a second mother to me.

¹⁴ Greetings to Sincritus, Flegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers staying with them.

¹⁵ Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nerus and his sister, Olympas and all the brothers in Christ Jesus with them.

¹⁶ Greet one another with a brotherly embrace. All the churches of Christ send their greetings.

A warning

+ ¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, I beg of you to be careful of those who are causing divisions and troubles in teaching you a different teaching from the one you were taught. Keep away from them,¹⁸ because those persons do not serve Christ our Lord, but their own interests, deceiving with their soft and entertaining language those simple of heart. ¹⁹ Anybody knows that you are very obedient, and because of that I am happy, but I wish to warn you to do what is good and avoid what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan and place him under your feet.

May Christ Jesus, our Lord, bless you. ²¹ Timothy, who is with me sends you greetings, and so do Lucius, Jason and Sosipatros, my relatives.

²² I Tertius, the writer of this letter send you greetings in the Lord.

²³ Greetings from Gaius, who has given me lodging and in whose house the church meets. Greetings from Erastus, treasurer of the city, and from our brother Quartus.

Glory be to God!

²⁵ He is able to give you strength, according to the Good News I proclaim announcing Christ Jesus,

and revealing a mysterious plan, kept hidden for long ages in the past,²⁶ but which is now revealed

and is brought by the prophetic books to the knowledge of all nations, according to the will of the eternal God, for them to believe and obey.

²⁷ Glory to God, who alone is wise, through Christ Jesus, for ever! Amen.

13. Mk 15, 21

18. Phil 3, 19

26. Rev 10, 7; 1, 5; 2 Cor 10, 5; Rev 7, 12; Eph 3, 21

16. 1 Cor 16, 20; 2 Cor 13, 12; 1 Thes 5, 26

19. 1, 8; 1 Cor 14, 21

20. Phil 4, 9; Gen 3, 15

17. Tit 1, 10; 3, 10

25. Eph 3, 20; Col 1, 26

1 letter to the Corinthians



1 From Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and from Sosthenes, our brother.

² to God's Church which is in Corinth: to you whom God has sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to become holy, together with those who everywhere call upon the name of our Lord Christ Jesus, their Lord and ours.

³ Receive blessing and peace from God our Father, and Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁴ Constantly I give thanks to my

God for you and for the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For you have been fully enriched in him with words as well as with knowledge, ⁶ even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you. ⁷ You do not lack any spiritual gift and only await the glorious coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord. ⁸ He will keep you steadfast to the end, and you will be without reproach on the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ The faithful God will not fail you after calling you to this fellowship with his Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

1. Rom 1, 1; Gal 1, 1

2. Acts 5, 11

3. Acts 2, 21; Rom 10, 13

7. Lk 17, 30; Phil 3, 20;

1 Pet 1, 7

9. 1 Thes 5, 24; Heb 10, 23; Rom 8, 17

INTRODUCTION

Some persons praise the first Christians as if they had been models of all virtues. In fact there were no more miracles then than now.

In Corinth, a very active and corrupt city, there existed a dynamic, though not well ordered Church, formed of Jews and Greeks converted by Paul. Many of them were in danger of returning to the vices of their former lives, once the enthusiasm of the first Christian years and had passed. Those responsible in the Church, were apparently not capable of dealing with many problems: internal divisions and doubts about faith. They therefore called upon Paul who wrote the present letter because he could not interrupt his work in Ephesus.

We notice the authority with which Paul, from afar, leads the Church in the name of Christ; also his manner of teaching: before answering any question, he reasserts the foundations of the faith.

The Corinthians, in the midst of a pagan world, were concerned about matters that are again relevant in our times:

- about celibacy and marriage
- about living together with those who do not share the Christian faith,
- about the conducting of the assemblies, for both the celebration of the Eucharist and the use of "spiritual gifts."
- about the resurrection of the dead.



Divisions among the faithful

+ ¹⁰ I beg of you, brothers, in the name of Christ Jesus, to agree among yourselves and do away with divisions; please be perfectly united, with one mind and one judgment.

¹¹ For I heard from people of Cloe's house about your rivalries. ¹² That is what I understand, because some say, "I am for Paul," and others: "I am for Apollo," or "I am for Peter," or "I am for Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided or have I Paul been crucified for you? Have you been baptized in the name of Paul?

¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you, except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that he was baptized in my name. ¹⁶ Yes, I also baptized the Stephanas family. Apart from these, I do not recall having baptized anyone else.

10. Rom 12, 16; 2 Cor 13, 11; Phil 2, 2

12. 3, 23; 2 Cor 10, 7

14. Acts 1, 8; Rom 16, 23

18. 2 Cor 2, 15; Rom 1, 16

22. Mt 12, 38; 16, 1

1. Jn 2, 18; 4, 48; 6, 30

o *From Paul called to be an apostle.... to God's church in Corinth... with those who everywhere call upon the name of our Lord Jesus.* With these three expressions Paul defends his authority. He reminds the Corinthians, so easily entrenched in their rivalries, that they are part of a greater reality, the Universal Church of God.

Called to become holy. You have to become holy, but you are already. *Holy*, in the biblical sense, is the person or thing that belongs to God. The baptized have been consecrated to God and form part of the people who belong to God, the assembly of the holy ones, that is the Church. Indeed, these "holy ones" have to improve much more to be really holy, as we shall see in the letter.

In Christ. A single Greek preposition used by Paul is to be translated into English as *in*, or *through* or *with* according to the case. "In Christ" has many meanings:

- We are sons of God, made after the image of the only Son of God, and God loves us *in Christ*.

- God the Father saves us *through Christ*.

- The Father calls us to share *with Christ* his inheritance,

- We have become part of the body of Christ, we live *in Christ* and have received his Spirit.

- As the word "Christian" did not exist in that time, Paul often says "in Christ" to mean: Christian. So, to get *married in Christ* (ch. 7) means to be married as a Christian.

The folly of the cross

■ ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim his Gospel And not with beautiful words! That would be like getting rid of the cross of Christ. ¹⁸ The language of the cross remains nonsense for those who are lost. Yet, for us who are saved, it is the power of God, ¹⁹ as Scripture says: *will destroy the wisdom of the wise and I will demolish the reasoning of the learned.* ²⁰ Masters of human wisdom, men of letters, philosophers there is no place for you! And the wisdom of this world? God let it fail

²¹ At first God spoke the language of wisdom, and the world did not know God in his wisdom. Then God thought of saving the world through the foolishness that we preach.

²² The Jews ask for miracles and the Greeks for a higher knowledge

In his advice to the Corinthians, Paul shows us how to act when reviewing the activities of our parish, of our apostolic group. Instead of being discouraged by the problems we face, and accusing one another when something fails, the first thing to do is to remember what we already have in common.

We see, in this text and all through this epistle conflicts, divisions and sins (4:8; 5:1; 6; 11:17 etc.). Quite often, as we experience in today's Church evil and conflicts, we tend to idealize the early Church. "Those Christians were devout and full of fervor," we say, "but the Church in the course of history lost her mystique, and now we are in decay." In fact the New Testament shows us communities which were as we are, confronting the same challenges and weaknesses. Each generation of Christians has to learn how to follow Jesus and how to be Church.

- + The first sin of the Church is the divisor among the believers. In the Church of Corinth each one uses the name of an apostle to back his aggressive behaviour or to form a group apart.

Agree among yourselves and do away with your divisions (10): be a united family. This admonition is understood when the Church is a community sharing the same concerns. But it is a little different when the church gathers together a great number of people of different backgrounds who are perhaps opposed in daily life. In this case the Christian community must be united, not by ignoring reality and never talki

²³ while we preach a crucified Messiah. For the Jews, what a great scandal! and for the Greeks, what nonsense! ²⁴ But he is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God for those called by God among both Jews and Greeks.

²⁵ In reality, the "foolishness" of God is greater than the wisdom of men, and the "weakness" of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ Brothers and sisters, look and see whom God has called. Few among you can be said to be cultured or wealthy, and few belong to noble families. ²⁷ Yet God has chosen what the world considers foolish, to shame the wise; he has chosen what the world considers weak to shame the strong. ²⁸ God has chosen common and unimportant people, making use of what is nothing to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that *no mortal may boast before God*. ³⁰ But, by God's grace you

are in Christ Jesus, who has become our wisdom, from God, and who makes us just and holy and free.

³¹ Scripture says: *Let him who boasts boast of the Lord*.

2 ¹ When I came to reveal to you the mystery of God's plan I did not count on eloquence or an intellectual approach. ² I was determined not to know anything among you but Christ Jesus, and him crucified. ³ I came weak, fearful and trembling; ⁴ my words and preaching were not brilliant, or clever to win listeners. ⁵ It was, rather, a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that you may believe, not by human wisdom, but by the power of God.

The Spirit teaches us wisdom

■ ⁶ In fact, we do speak of wisdom to the mature in the faith, although it is not a wisdom of this world or of its rulers, who, by the way, come to

30. Col 2, 3 31. Jer 9, 23; 2 Cor 10, 17; Gal 6, 24

4. 14, 25; 1 Thes 1, 5

6. Heb 5, 12; Col 2, 15

ing of inequalities, but by recognizing individual and collective faults in daily life. The Church can never be a reunion of passive or "heavenly" people.

Christ did not send me to baptize (17). When the church encloses itself in its own problems, Paul reminds them of their mission: Is our first concern to preach the Gospel, or to appear as leaders and ministers of the community?

■ *This would be like getting rid of the cross of Christ* (17). Don't look for titles, but bear the cross of Christ. The cross must be present in the message we preach and in the way we preach it. The means we choose to proclaim the Good News must be in accordance with the announcement of a Saviour poor and crucified.

We need faith to teach a life of poverty and renunciation that Christ presents to us. To the Jews waiting for a glorious saviour, Paul presented a crucified man who had been unable to free his nation. And they were scandalized. Today the active non-violence of the Church is a scandal for all those who think this way is ineffective and too slow for the problems surrounding us.

Likewise it is hard to work in evangelization with poor means, to be criticized by those living in peace with the world and to hope that God will give his grace where we act in weakness, without advertisement or human prestige.

See whom God has called (26). The Church of Corinth is formed of ordinary people: this is their strength. Everybody has his place and his mission in the Church. But ordinary people and poor communities, often persecuted and calumniated, have a primary role in the evangelization of the world. God wants them to evangelize the rich and at times, even the hierarchy.

○ *I came weak, I was fearful and trembling*. Paul gives us an example. One has to take risks if he wants to announce Christ. Several people want not to act before they are fully prepared. They learn all their life and broken down before having begun. When we feel confident and well prepared, we cannot be sure that God will take advantage of our words or give anyone inner conversion and make him one of his chosen.

It was a demonstration of Spirit and power (5). The power of Spirit, the power of prayer, the power of suffering. The Spirit is poured out after Jesus has suffered and died. But with him, we can expect everything. Healings and miracles are worthless (and the devil takes advantage of them) unless they affirm faith in Jesus crucified, acting through the humble and present in the poor.

■ Paul never intended to be considered a wise or eminent speaker by his audience. Yet he *speaks of wisdom to the mature in the faith*

nothing. ⁷We teach the mystery and secret plan of divine wisdom, which God destined from the beginning to bring us to Glory.

⁸No ruler of this world ever knew this; otherwise they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. ⁹But as Scripture says: *Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it dawned on the mind what God has prepared for those who love him.* ¹⁰God has revealed it to us, through his Spirit, because the Spirit probes everything, even the depth of God.

¹¹Who but his own spirit knows the secrets of a person? Similarly, no one but the Spirit of God knows the secrets of God. ¹²We have not received the spirit from the world, but the Spirit who comes from God and, through him, we understand what God in his goodness has given us.

¹³So we speak of this, not in terms of human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit of God, and we express spiritual matters in a spiritual language. ¹⁴He who remains on the human level does not understand the

things of the Spirit. They are foolishness for him and he does not understand because they require a spiritual experience. ¹⁵On the other hand, the spiritual person judges everything but no one judges him. ¹⁶*Who has known the mind of God that he may teach him?* But we have the mind of Christ.

Many are the workers, the building is one

+ 3 ¹I could not, brothers, speak to you as spiritual persons but as men of flesh, for you are still infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk and no solid food, for you were not ready for it and up to now you cannot receive it ³for you are still men of flesh. As long as there is jealousy and strife, what can I say but that you are at the level of the flesh and behave like ordinary people.

⁴While one says: "I am from Paul," and the other: "I am from Apollos," what are you but people still at a human level?

⁵For, what is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants and through

7. Rom 16, 25; Eph 1, 9; Col 1, 26

9. Is 64, 4

14. 3, 1; 12, 10; 1 Thes 5, 19

16. Is 40, 13

4. 1, 12

(6). The text says in more precise terms: "to the perfect ones." At this time, several religions were calling "perfect" the believer who had received some secret information not given to all the members of the sect. Also in the Church some considered themselves as belonging to a higher class of believers because of some gifts of the Spirit they had received, especially if they were able to speak endlessly on matters of faith.

But Paul faces them with his own gifts as prophet and apostle. He can teach them those essential truths that don't need many words, but that should be expressed by him who has a deeper experience of the living God.

The Spirit of God knows the secrets of God (11). What is this secret of God? What he gives us (12). To know God means to know the ways of God and his plan of salvation. But ordinarily it is difficult to express what God has given us to know and experience, that is if our experience is really spiritual. We can only transmit spiritual wisdom to those who have reached spiritual maturity. Because of this, Paul tells the Christians of Corinth that most of them are not able

to criticize him.

He who remains on the human level (Paul says precisely: "the carnal man") does not reach the truth of Christ. However the spiritual person, not necessarily the intellectual person, knows by gift of God the things of God.

The spiritual person judges everything and no one judges him. He who sees has no way of convincing the blind person that there are colors. He sees them, however, and knows that if the blind person does not see them, it is not because the thing is doubtful, but because the blind person has neither eyes nor criteria for that. It is the same with the spiritual person and the carnal one.

+ I laid the foundation as a good architect (10). Paul is a founder of churches and others come after him, apostles, prophets or teachers, to preach and encourage the people. Paul is not jealous, but it could be that some of them seek their own prestige, forgetting that the Church belongs only to God. It could also be that the believers compare one apostle with another,

them you believed, as it was given by the Lord for each of them. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered the plant, but God made it grow. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but God who makes the plant grow.

⁸He who plants and he who waters work to the same end, and the Lord will pay each according to his work. ⁹We are fellow-workers with God, but you are God's field and building.

¹⁰I as a good architect, according to the capacity given to me, I laid the foundation, and another is to build upon it. Let each one be careful of how he works upon it. ¹¹No one could lay a foundation other than the one which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Then if someone builds with gold upon this foundation, another with silver and precious stones, or with wood, bamboo or straw, ¹³the work of each one will be shown for what it is. The day of Judgment will make it public, and fire will be the test for everyone. ¹⁴If your work withstands the fire, you will be rewarded;

¹⁵but if your work becomes ashes, you will pay for it. You will be saved, but it will be as if passing through fire.

■ ¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit is within you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys this temple of God, God will destroy him. God's temple is holy, and you are this temple.

Do not divide the Church

◆ ¹⁸Let no one deceive himself. If anyone of you considers himself a wise man, let him become a fool, so that he may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's eyes. To this, Scripture says: *God catches the wise in his own wisdom.* ²⁰It also says: *The Lord knows the reasoning of the wise, that it is useless.*

²¹Because of this, let no one become an admirer of any man, for everything belongs to you, ²²Paul, Apollos, Cephas – life, death, the present and the future. Everything is yours, ²³and you belong to Christ, and Christ is of God.

10. Eph 2, 20; 1 Per 2, 5	13. Is 1, 25; Mal 3, 2; Mt 3, 12	17. 6, 19; 2 Cor 6, 16
18. 1, 20; 4, 10	19. Job 5, 13	20. Ps 94, 11
		21. 1, 12
		23. Rom 8, 28

and do this readily inasmuch as they are ignorant of what apostolic work really is.

Fire will be the test for everyone (13). Paul uses the languages and images of his time. The day of God's judgment seemed to be imminent and everyone thought that God would purify and cleanse the world by fire. So Paul concludes that whatever we did not do according to the will of God and with the means he wanted will be destroyed by fire (remember what happened with many apostolic projects which produced no durable fruit). As for those who did not work with the one purpose of serving God, they will not be condemned to hell, of course, but they will suffer personally and will have to pay. This text supports the belief in Purgatory, that is, in a purification process at the time of death or after death for all persons not given entirely to the Spirit of Christ. See commentary on Mt 5:21.

■ *Do you not know that you are God's temple* (16). Christ is the new Temple that takes the place of the temple of the Jews (Jn 2:19 & Mk 15:38). The Temple of God is Christ because in him abides all the divine Mystery. The

Temple of God is likewise the Church because in her the Holy Spirit is working. The Temple of God is also each home and each believer (see 6:19) because the Spirit lives in each one of them.

◆ *Everything is yours and you belong to Christ.* A fundamental affirmation which is the basis of Christian liberty. We are followers of no human person, great as he may be among the authorities of the Church. God made us for himself and no one can impose his own way of understanding the will of God.

On the other hand, remember what non-believing philosophers have said: Man created God out of his own misery. Whatever man was lacking in order to feel great and happy, he attributed to a superior being, who had everything, and in worshipping him, he felt identified with him and forgot his own misery. This theory is not completely false: in fact people make idols for themselves, be they singers, athletes or politicians; and they feel happy when their idols have and do everything they themselves cannot do or have. They die for causes not their own and they

4 ¹Let everyone then see us as the servants of Christ and the stewards of the secret works of God. ²Being stewards, faithfulness shall be demanded of us; ³but I do not mind if you or any human court judges me. I do not even judge myself; ⁴my conscience indeed accuses me of nothing, but that is not enough for me to be without reproach: the Lord is the one who judges me.

⁵Therefore, do not judge before the time, until the coming of the Lord. He will bring to light whatever was hidden in darkness and will disclose the secret intention of men's hearts. Then each one will receive from God the praise he deserves.

⁶Brothers, you forced me to apply these truths to Apollos and to myself. Learn by this example not to believe yourselves superior by siding with one against the other. ⁷How, then, are you different from the others? What have you that you have not received? And if you received it, why are you proud, as if you did not receive it?

Comforted Christians and harassed apostles

+ ⁸So, then, you are rich and satisfied, and feel like kings without us! I wish you really were kings, so that we might enjoy the kingship with you!

1. 2 Cor 5, 19; Tit 1, 7	2. Eph 3, 2	3. 2, 14; Jn 5, 34	4. Mt 6, 22	5. Rom 2, 16;
2, 29	6. 1, 12; 3, 5	8. Rev 3, 17	9. 15, 31; Rom 8; 36;	2 Cor 4, 11; Heb 10, 33; Eph 3, 10
10. 2 Cor 4, 8; 6, 4; 11, 23	12. Mt 5, 44; Rom 12, 44	17. 11, 1; Phil 2, 5; 1 Thes 3, 6		
18. Acts 19, 21				

feel proud of people and institutions that exploit them. But this is not the case of the instructed and discerning Christian. His first duty is to grow and be free. He is not on earth to fulfill duties, but his real duty is to mature, following the Perfect Man who is Christ.

+ The Corinthians now feel rich in their faith, their knowledge and Christian experience. They do not need Paul anymore. Many of them now consider Paul as a poor Jewish itinerant preacher, below their level, Greeks of an ancient culture.

The Apostle knows that his own culture and strong personality would have given him a bright

⁹It seems to me that God has placed us, the apostles, in the last place, as if condemned to death, and as spectacles for the whole world, for the angels as well as for men.

¹⁰We are fools for Christ, while you show forth the wisdom of Christ. We are weak, you are strong. You are honoured, while we are despised.

¹¹Until now we hunger and thirst, we are poorly clothed and badly treated, while moving from place to place.

¹²We labour, working with our hands. People insult us and we bless them, they persecute us and we endure everything; ¹³they speak evil against us and we try to make peace. We have become like the scum of the earth, like the garbage of humankind until now.

¹⁴I do not write this to shame you, but to warn you as very dear sons.

¹⁵Because even though you may have ten thousand guardians in the Christian life, you have only one father; and it was I who gave you life in Christ through the Gospel. ¹⁶Therefore I advise you to follow my example.

¹⁷With this purpose I send to you Timothy, my dear son and trustworthy in the service of the Lord. He will remind you of my way of Christian life, as I teach it in all churches everywhere.

¹⁸Some of you thought that I could

future. He sees at the same time the narrow mindedness of his adversaries but allows them to make fun of him. They think he is a fool, and in a way he is. However, even if taken for a fool he brought them to Christ.

■ Paul knows that such a sinner cannot be brought to repentance unless he experiences the bitterness of his treachery. So the community must ask that he suffer in his health and his belongings (see in Job 1:12 and 2:6 the meaning of *delivered to Satan*). This ex-communication is not merely a human gesture. What the Church binds on earth is bound in Heaven (Mt 18:18). God is committed to send trials which

not visit you and became very arrogant. ¹⁹But I will visit you soon, the Lord willing, and I will see, not what those people say, but what they can do. ²⁰Because the kingdom of God is not a matter of words, but of power. ²¹What do you prefer, for me to go with a stick or with love and gentleness?

Expel the immoral brother!

5 ¹You have become news with a case of immorality, and such a case that is not even found among pagans. Yes, one of you has taken as wife his own step-mother. ²And you feel proud! Should you not be in mourning instead and expel the sinner. ³For my part, although I am physically absent, my spirit is with you and, as if present, I have already passed sentence on the man who committed such a sin. ⁴Let us meet together, you and my spirit, and in the name of our Lord Jesus and with his power, ⁵you shall deliver him to Satan, so that he loses everything and his life, but his spirit be saved in the day of Judgment.

⁶This is not the time to praise yourselves. Do you not know that a little yeast makes the whole mass of dough rise? ⁷Throw out, then, the old yeast

and be a new dough. If Christ became our Passover, you should be unleavened bread. ⁸Let us celebrate, therefore, the Passover, no more old yeast, which is sin and perversity; let us have unleavened bread, that is purity and sincerity.

⁹In my last letter I instructed you not to associate with immoral people. ¹⁰I did not mean, of course, those who do not belong to the Church and who are immoral, exploiters, embezzlers or worshippers of idols. Otherwise you would have to leave this world. ¹¹What I really meant was to avoid and not to mingle with those who, calling themselves brothers, become immoral, exploiters or idolaters, gossips, drunkards or embezzlers. In which case you should not even eat with them.

¹²Why should I judge outsiders? But you, are you not to judge those who are inside? ¹³Let God judge those outside, but as for you, *drive out the wicked person from among you.*

Do not bring your brothers to court

6 ¹When you have a complaint against a brother, how dare you bring him before pagan judges instead of bringing his case

20. 1 Thes 1, 5; 2 Cor 13, 3 Rev 2, 22	6. Mt 16, 6 12. Col 4, 5; 1 Thes 4, 12	21. 2 Cor 10, 2; Gal 6, 1 11. 6, 9; Mk 7, 21; Gal 5, 19; 1 Tim 1, 9; Rev 21, 8; Rom 13, 13	1. Lev 18, 8 3. Col 2, 5 4. Mt 18, 18; 13. Dt 17, 7; Mt 7, 23; 2 Cor 6, 17
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may be at the same time a warning to the Church and a way of repentance for the sinner.

You should be unleavened bread (7). Jesus had compared the kingdom of Heaven to yeast that leavens the whole mass. Here Paul uses the same comparison to show how evil spreads to all. The believers have been spiritually raised with Christ. As the Jews used unleavened bread to celebrate the Passover, in the same way the Christians have to be, in a figurative sense unleavened bread, that is, they must lead a sinless life before God, and so worthily celebrate their Passover, which is the Resurrection of Christ.

I did not mean those who do not belong to the Church (10). The believer is not afraid to live among sinners. It is his mission to give light to those who are in darkness and to imitate Christ

who ate with sinners. But he avoids sharing with those believers who continue to sin and are unrepentant.

Why should I judge outsiders? (12). Jesus taught us the way to follow, but we cannot demand of unbelievers that they understand and accept our morals regarding reconciliation, sex, abortion, as long as their conscience is unable to recognize the criteria of the Gospel. The authorities of the Church are not commissioned to condemn them, but to be witnesses of the light.

o Paul asks the believers to appoint one of the community to solve cases among them in a personal way, as the Gospel indicates (Mt 18:15). This has to be done in those Christian communities that have become genuine communities



before the brethren of the Church? ²Do you not know that you shall one day judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you incapable of judging such simple problems?

³Do you not know that we will even judge the angels? And could you not decide on problems of this world?

⁴But no. For problems of the present life you go after men for whom the Church has no esteem. ⁵Shame on you! Is there not even one wise man among you who could be the arbiter among brothers?

⁶But no. A brother brings a suit against a brother, and he files that suit before unbelievers. ⁷It is already shameful that you have suits against each other. Would it not be better to suffer wrong and to receive some damage? ⁸But no. You wrong and damage others, and those are your brothers and sisters. ⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God?

Do not deceive yourselves; those who have unlawful sexual relations, or worship idols, or who are adulterers, homosexuals of any kind, ¹⁰or

thieves, exploiters, drunkards, gossips or embezzlers will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven. ¹¹Some of you were like that, but you have been cleansed and consecrated to God and are in friendship with God in the Name of Christ Jesus and the Spirit of our God.

Sexual immorality

◆ ¹²Everything is lawful for me, but not everything is to my profit. Everything is lawful for me, but I will not become a slave of anything.

¹³Food is for the stomach, and the stomach for food, but God will destroy them both. Yet, the body is not for sexual licentiousness, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴And God who raised the Lord, will also raise us with his power.

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are part of Christ? And you would make that part of his body become a part of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶But you well know that when you join yourselves to a prostitute, you become one with her. For Scripture says: *The two will become one flesh.* ¹⁷On the other

7. Mt 5, 39; 1 Thes 5, 15; 1 Pet 3, 9
2 Cor 4, 14

15. Rom 12, 25

9. 5, 11; Gal 5, 19

17. Gen 2, 24; Jn 6, 63

13. Col 2, 22

14. Rom 8, 11;

◆ *Everything is lawful to me, not everything is to my benefit.* Men without conscience used to quote the first part of this sentence to justify their immoral behaviour.

Food is for the stomach... the body is for the Lord. Paul contrasts what is purely biological in our body with what makes up our whole person. To eat and drink are requirements of the stomach (modern language: body). But in sexual union the body is given (modern language: person). This is why the believer who belongs to Christ cannot give himself to a prostitute.

Paul's answer to the Corinthians is the only answer to our concern with regard to sexual morality in a society which allows everything except killing and stealing. There is but one principle for the instruction of youth with regard to premarital sex and homosexuality – our body has been consecrated to Christ and is one with his own body.

○ In this chapter Paul begins to answer some of the questions put to him by the Corinthians in writing. The first are about marriage and chastity.

Christian life had encouraged everywhere the esteem for chastity. But that esteem could be inspired as well by other non-christian motives. Many doctrines in the Greek world considered evil and unclean whatever came from the body; and so, for some Christians, perfection meant living like angels, condemning among other things, marriage.

Paul does not teach everything on marriage, but only clarifies the relation between chastity and marriage. Spouses belong to Christ with all their being, consecrated by baptism. Therefore they cannot become slaves to the demands of their bodies. Love rather than sex guides them.

* *Beware of having relations outside marriage* (2). Many modern believers are shocked to see that Paul doesn't mention the positive aspect of sex, at the service of love, but only speaks of possible sins. But we must bear in mind that we are separated from Paul by twenty centuries. The understanding of the value of marriage and still more, of conjugal love, is a fruit of Christianity. Only in the twelfth century in Christian countries the conscience of love appears. This has

unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband who believes. Otherwise, your children also would be apart from God; but as it is, they are consecrated to God.

¹⁵ Now, if the unbelieving husband or wife wants to separate, let them do so. In this case, the christian husband or wife is not bound, for the Lord has called us to peace. ¹⁶ Besides, are you sure, wife, that you could save your husband, and you, husband, that you could save your wife?

■ ¹⁷ Except for this, let each one continue living as he was when God called him. This is what I order in all churches. ¹⁸ Let the circumcised Jew not remove the marks of the circumcision when he is called by God, and let the non-Jew not be circumcised when he is called. ¹⁹ For it is of no importance to be circumcised or not, but only to keep the commandments of God.

²⁰ Let each one therefore, remain in the state in which he was when he was called by God. ²¹ If you are a slave, do not worry but, if you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity.

18. 1 Mac 1, 15; Rom 2, 25; Gal 5, 6	22. Eph 6, 6; Phlm 16	23. 6, 20	28. 7, 16;
Lk 12, 51; 14, 26	29. Rom 13, 11; Eph 5, 16		

separation and divorce were legal and constantly practised.

Your children are also consecrated to God (14). Would it not be an error to think that the children of Christian parents are completely separated from God as long as they are not baptized? For grace has touched them already by the love, care and prayers of their parents. We must not use false arguments when we wish to convince Christians parents that they should have their children baptized.

■ *Let each one continue living...* (17). It seems as if Paul wants us to live in mediocrity without personal ambitions or desires of betterment. It is not so. He rather places personal freedom above anything else. For a believer the maximum good is to possess Christ.

But if you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity. Conditions of work and social life sometimes impede the following of the will of God and being truly free. But the faithful cannot

²² The slave called to believe in the Lord is a freedman of the Lord. And he who has been called while free, becomes slave of Christ. ²³ You have been bought by God at a very great price; do not become slaves of men.

²⁴ So then, brothers and sisters, in whatever state each was when called by the Lord, let him continue living before God.

Marriage and virginity

◆ ²⁵ With regard to those who remain virgins, I have no special commandment from the Lord, but I give some advice, hoping that I am worthy of trust by the mercy of the Lord.

²⁶ I think this is good in these hard times in which we live. It is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ If you are married, do not try to divorce your wife; if you are not married, do not marry. ²⁸ He who marries, does not sin, nor does the young girl sin who marries. Yet they will experience trouble in ordinary life, and I would like to spare you.

²⁹ I say this, brothers and sisters: time is getting shorter, and those who are married must live as if not mar-

have as sole objective in life the improvement of their social condition, because in each social situation there are hidden dangers of slavery. We know of people who become *slaves of men* in order to obtain a better salary or a higher position. And we easily confuse better condition with better paid work.

We translate: If you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity. But it could also be translated as: *Even if you could gain your freedom, take advantage of the present situation*, that is: instead of being concerned so much for the advantages of becoming a free man, live fully your life today.

◆ Paul remarks that marriage can be the cause of internal division for those who serve Christ. Many committed Christians well know that they cannot dedicate themselves as fully to the service of their brethren as they would wish, either because a partner does not understand or because they have to attend to family matters.

ried; ³⁰ those who weep as if not weeping; those who are happy as if they were not happy; those buying something as if they had not bought it, and those enjoying the present life as if they were not enjoying it. ³¹ For the order of this world is vanishing.

³² I would like you to be free from anxieties. He who is not married, is concerned about the things of the Lord and how to please the Lord. ³³ Instead, he who is married, is taken up with the things of the world and how to please his wife, and he is divided in his interests.

³⁴ Likewise, the unmarried woman and the virgin are concerned with the service of the Lord, to be holy in body and spirit. The married woman, instead, worries about the things of the world and how to please her husband.

³⁵ I say this for your own good. I do not wish to lay traps for you but to lead you to a beautiful life, and to be entirely united with the Lord.

o ³⁶ If anyone is not sure whether he is behaving correctly with his fiancée because of the ardor of his passion, and considers it is better to get married, let him do so: he commits no

sin. ³⁷ But if another, of firmer heart, thinks that he can control his passion and decides not to marry so that his fiancée may remain a virgin, he does better. ³⁸ So then, he who marries does well, and he who does not marry does better.

³⁹ The wife is bound as long as her husband lives. If he dies, she is free to be married to whomsoever she wishes, provided that she does it in the Christian way. ⁴⁰ However, she will be happier if, following my advice, she does not marry, and I believe that I have the Spirit of God.

Can we share in pagan customs?

8 ¹ Regarding meat from the offerings to idols, I think that all of us have knowledge but knowledge puffs up, while love builds. ² If anyone thinks that he has knowledge, he does not yet know as he should know, ³ but whoever loves God, God has known him.

⁴ Can we, then, eat meat from offerings to the idols? We know that an idol is without existence and that there is no God but one. ⁵ People speak

31. 1 Jn 2, 15; James 1, 11

32. Gal 5, 1; Lk 14, 20

34. Lk 2, 37

39. Rom 7, 2

40. 2 Cor 10, 2

3. 13, 13; Gal 4, 9

4. 1 K 5, 18

Paul then defends the way of chastity "because of the kingdom of God" indicated by Jesus (Mt 19 12). In Corinth, the city of vice where thousands of prostitutes lived around the temples, as was the custom in pagan religions, the new Christian community was discovering the way of virginity. Paul does not give orders here, only advice, encouraging this way of life for those who have received the grace to follow it. And the fact that each baptized person is consecrated to Christ is for Paul sufficient reason to speak in favor of virginity.

For the order of this world is vanishing (31). No commitment or agreement, not even those of marriage, keep us tied to the world.

o *If anyone is not sure (36).* This can also be interpreted as: "if anyone feels he cannot behave correctly with his young virgin." In this case Paul would be referring to a trial of religious life, which in fact took place in the primitive church. Some Christians shared their house with a girl

who could have been their girl-friend, both consecrating their virginity to the Lord. Paul, in this case, would invite them not to persevere in this commitment if they did not feel capable of keeping their virginity.

It is still possible to translate this as follows: "if someone (some father) thinks it would not be right to prevent his young daughter who lives with him from marrying." In that case the paragraph would refer to the father who, following the customs of the time, gave his daughter in marriage, but could also decide that she should remain a virgin.

■ We live in a pluralist society, where many do not share our faith and we wonder sometimes if we should take part in their feasts or activities that are not in harmony with our faith. For example, how to deal with relatives or neighbours of another religion? What a married woman may do when her husband does not share her scruples? May a person belong to a group or party

indeed of other gods, in heaven and on earth and, in this sense, there are many gods and lords. ⁶ Yet for us, there is but one God, the Father, from whom everything comes, and to whom we go. And there is one Lord, Christ Jesus, through whom everything exists and through him we exist.

⁷ Not everyone, however, has that knowledge. For some persons who until recently took the idols seriously, that food remains linked to the idol and eating of it stains their conscience which is unformed.

⁸ It is not food that makes us agreeable to God. If we eat, we gain nothing, and if we do not eat, we do not lose anything. ⁹ We are free, of course, but let not your freedom cause others, who are less prepared, to fall. ¹⁰ What if this person with an unformed conscience sees you, a person of knowledge, sitting at the table in the temple of idols? Will not his weak conscience, because of your example, move him to eat also? ¹¹ Then with your knowledge you would have caused your weak brother or sister to perish, the one for whom Christ died? ¹² When you hurt the weak conscience of your brothers and offend them, you sin against Christ himself. ¹³ There-

fore, if any food will bring my brother into sin, I shall never eat this food lest I bring my brother or sister fall.

Renouncing one's own rights: the example of Paul

9 ¹ As for me, am I not free? I am an apostle and I have seen Jesus, the Lord, and you are my work in the Lord. ² Although I may not be an apostle for others, at least I am one for you. You are in the Lord an evidence of my apostleship ³ and my defense against those who question my authority.

⁴ Now, have we not the right to be fed? ⁵ Have we not the right of bringing along with us a sister as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cefas? ⁶ Am I the only one, with Barnabas, bound to work?

What soldier goes to war at his own expense? ⁷ What farmer does not eat from the vineyard he planted? Who tends a flock and does not drink from its milk? ⁸ Are these rights only accepted human practice? No. The Law says the same. In the law of Moses it is written: *Do not muzzle the ox which threshes grain.* ⁹ Should this mean that God is concerned with oxen, ¹⁰ or rather with us? There is no

6. 12, 4; Mt 23, 8; Eph 4, 5	7. Rom 14	12. Mt 18, 5	13. Rom 14, 9	1. 6, 12;
15, 8; 2 Cor 3, 3	5. Mt 10, 10; Lk 8, 2	6. Acts 18, 3; 2 Cor 11, 7; 1 Thes 2, 9		
7. Dt 20, 6; 2 Tim 4, 4	9. Dt 25, 4			

when many of its members are opposed to the Church? This is the problem that Paul deals with when answering about meat sacrificed to idols. The discussion begun here continues in paragraph 10:23-11:1.

There were many sacrifices of animals in the pagan temples. After the sacrifices, in a room of the temple they used to celebrate at a banquet where the meat of the victims was served. Christians were often invited by their pagan friends to these banquets. On other occasions, meat from these sacrifices was offered to them in the homes of their pagan friends. Even in the public market, most of the meat was from the animals offered to idols.

Paul doesn't want the Christians to become a group of fanatics keeping themselves apart from society. Although it is true that offering sacrifice to idols is a sin, not for that reason is the meat

unclean. False gods do not exist and have no power. Besides Jesus had said that it is not what enters into man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of his heart (Mk 7:15).

Knowledge puffs up while love builds (1). Well formed Christians could perfectly well eat of that meat, knowing it was not sinful. However it was their duty to respect the opinion of others and so avoid scandalizing those unable to understand their reasons.

In verses 7:10 and 11:12, Paul speaks of those of *weak or unformed* conscience, meaning the believers who have not yet had sufficient religious instruction or who have been badly instructed. They think that something is sinful when in reality it is not; or they are weak and follow others when their conscience reproaches them for doing so.

What if this person sees you sitting at the

doubt that this was written for us. No man plows without expecting a reward for his plowing and no one threshes without hoping for a share of the crop. ¹¹ Then, if we have sown spiritual riches among you, would it be too much for us to reap some material reward? ¹² If others have had this right among you, surely we have it all the more.

Yet we made no use of this right and we prefer to endure everything rather than put an obstacle to the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those working in the sacred service eat from what is offered for the temple? and those serving at the altar receive their part from the altar. ¹⁴ The Lord ordered likewise, that those announcing the Gospel live from the Gospel. ¹⁵ Yet, I have not made use of my rights and now I do not write to claim them. I would rather die! For of this, I am proud, and no one will deprive me of this.

¹⁶ Look, I have no merit in announcing the Gospel, for I am bound to do it. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! ¹⁷ If I preached voluntarily, I could expect my reward, but I am bound to do it and I am only fulfilling my office. ¹⁸ How can I, then, deserve

a reward? In announcing the Gospel, I will do it freely without making use of the rights given to me by the Gospel.

¹⁹ So, finally, feeling free with everybody, I become everybody's slave in order to gain a greater number. ²⁰ To save the Jews I became a Jew with the Jews, and because they are under the Law, I myself came under the Law, being free from it. ²¹ With the pagans, not subject to the Law, I became one of them, although by being under the law of Christ, I also have a law with respect to God. Yet I wanted to gain those strangers to the Law. ²² I shared, also, the scruples of people without a liberated conscience, in order to gain those people who are still weak. ²³ So I made myself all things to all people, in order to save, by all possible means, some of them. I do it for the Gospel, and with the hope of sharing its reward.

Faith demands sacrifice

■ ²⁴ Have you not learnt anything from the stadium? Many run, but only one gets the prize. Run, therefore, in order to win it, ²⁵ as athletes who impose upon themselves a rigorous discipline. Yet for them the wreath is of

11. Rom 15, 27; Gal 6, 6	13. 1 Pt 18, 1	14. Lk 10, 7	15. 2 Cor 11, 10	17. Acts 26, 19;
2 Cor 5, 14	20. Acts 16, 3; 21, 23	21. 11, 1; Gal 2, 20; Rom 14, 1; 15, 1		

table of the idols (10). There is something graver here. In chapter 10: 14-22 Paul will state that a Christian cannot partake of such a banquet in the temple itself. Now, he does not state it clearly, but cautiously, showing that this could be a cause of scandal for others.

+ *Have we not the right to be fed?* In asking the Corinthians to forget their right of eating sacrificed meat, Paul gives himself as an example and tells them how he also renounces his right of being maintained by the churches. The churches gave food and drink to the apostles who visited them, and took care of the Christian women attending them (5) as in the case of Jesus (Lc 8:2). However, to give a proof of detachment, Paul did not accept this favour and lived by the work of his hands (Acts 18:3).

I made myself all things to all people (23). Paul gives a guideline to apostles of all times. Ap-

ostolic movements require their members to know very well their environment and the problems of their companions. And so committed Christians must share the life style and human aspirations of their companions in everything that is not sinful. Becoming like Paul, "A Greek among the Greeks", not in appearance but in reality, they will be able not only to attract new members for their group or for the church (as the Jews did), but to implant the faith in the whole human person with his own culture.

■ Paul is now ready to tell the Corinthians that they may not share the cult of idols. To justify his position (for the Corinthians it was very strict), Paul presents two arguments:

- No racing contest is won without self-sacrifices.
- The Bible has many examples of how God punished those who practised a cult of idols.



laurels which wither, while for us, it does not wither.

²⁶ So, then, I run knowing where I go. I box but not aimlessly in the air.

²⁷ I punish my body and control it, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be rejected.

10 ¹ Let me remind you, brothers and sisters about our forefathers. All of them were under the cloud and all crossed the sea. ² They were in a way baptized in the cloud and in the sea to be the people of Moses, ³ and all of them ate from the same spiritual manna ⁴ and all of them drank from the same spiritual drink. For you know that they drank from a spiritual rock following them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵ However, most of them did not please God, and they died in the desert.

⁶ All of this happened as an example for us, so that we may not fall into evil desires, as they did.

⁷ Do not follow idols, as some of them did and Scripture says: *The people sat down to eat and drink and stood up for orgy.* ⁸ Let us not fall into sexual immorality, as some of them did and in one day twenty-three thousand of them fell dead. ⁹ And let us not tempt the Lord as some of them did, ¹⁰ and were cut down by the destroying angel.

¹¹ All these things happened as a warning for us, when the last times

come upon us. ¹² Therefore, let he who thinks that he stands beware, lest he fall. ¹³ No trial greater than human endurance has overcome you. God is faithful and will not let you be tempted above your strength. He will give you, together with the temptation, the means to resist.

¹⁴ Therefore, dear friends, shun the cult of idols.

¹⁵ I address you as intelligent persons; judge what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion with the blood of Christ? And the bread that we break, is it not a communion with the body of Christ?

¹⁷ The bread is one, and so we, though many, form one body, sharing the one bread.

¹⁸ Consider the Israelites. For them, to eat of the victim is to come into communion with its altar.

¹⁹ I do not say that the meat is really consecrated to the idol, or that the idol is a being. ²⁰ However, when the pagans offer a sacrifice, the sacrifice goes to the demons, not to God. I do not want you to come into fellowship with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink at the same time from the cup of the Lord and from the cup of demons. You cannot share in the table of the Lord and in the table of the demons. ²² Do we want, perhaps, to provoke the jealousy of the Lord? Could we be stronger than he?

26. Phil 3-12; 1 Tim 2, 5 1. Ex 13, 21; 14, 22; 16, 4 4. Num 20, 7 5. Num 14, 16; Jn 6, 58 7. Ex 32, 6
8. Num 25, 9 9. Num 21, 5 10. Num 17, 6 11. Heb 3, 8; 1 P 4, 7; 1 Jn 2, 18 13. Rom 11, 20; Gal 6, 1;
1 Thes 5, 24; Heb 10, 23; Mt 6, 13; Lk 21, 36 15. 1 Jn 5, 21 16. 11, 25; Mk 14, 23 17. Rom 12, 5;
Eph 4, 4; 4, 25 18. Rom 9, 4; Gal 6, 16 20. Dt 32, 17; Bar 4, 7; Rev 9, 20 21. 2 Cor 6, 15 22. Dt 32, 21

Athletes impose upon themselves a rigorous discipline (25). Like them, we must renounce many things that are not evil. We need discipline to be really free, whether in the use of alcohol or tobacco, and not idly waste time in front of the television or reading magazines. While the world lures us to be spectators and consumers, we must be agents of salvation, the salt of the earth. The second paragraph recalls the example of Israel (see Ex 32 and Num 21).

The rock was Christ (1). The Jewish legends

said that the rock mentioned in Ex 17:5 followed the Israelites in their journey. Paul does not affirm that legend as true. He only recalls it as an image of Christ, present in his church.

◆ *The bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ (16).* Paul will return to speak of the Eucharist in 11:18. This mysterious meeting with the Risen Christ, besides being a personal encounter with Christ, makes of all of us one body. *We form one body.* This does not only mean that we feel united, but that the Risen

¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray without a veil?

¹⁴ Common sense teaches us that it is shameful for a man to wear long hair, ¹⁵ while a long hair is the pride of a woman, and it has been given to her precisely as a veil.

¹⁶ If some of you want to argue, let it be known that it is not our custom nor the custom in the churches of God.

The Lord's supper

■ ¹⁷ To continue with my advice, I cannot praise you, for your gatherings are not for the better but for the worse.

¹⁸ First, as I have heard, when you gather together, there are divisions among you and I partly believe it. ¹⁹ There may have to be different groups among you, so that it plainly appears who are approved among you.

²⁰ Your gatherings are no longer the Supper of the Lord, ²¹ for each one eats his own food and, while one is hungry, the other is getting drunk.

²² Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or perhaps you despise the Church of God and desire to humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say? Shall I praise you? For this I cannot praise you.

²³ This is the tradition of the Lord that I received and that in my turn I have handed on to you; the Lord Jesus, on the night that he was delivered, took bread and, ²⁴ after giving thanks, broke it, saying, "This is my body which is broken for you; do this in memory of me." ²⁵ In the same manner, taking the cup after the supper, he said, "This is the new Covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink from it, do it in memory of me."

²⁶ So, then, whenever you eat of this bread and drink from this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes. ²⁷ Therefore, if anyone eats of the bread and drinks from the cup of the Lord unworthily, he sins against the body and blood of the Lord.

²⁸ Let each one, then, examine

18. 1, 11 19. 2 Tim 2, 19 23. Lk 22, 14
27. Heb 6, 6; 10, 29 28. 2 Cor 13, 5

25. Ex 24, 8; Jer 31, 31 26. Rev 22, 20; Mt 26, 29

equality proclaimed by Jesus and tries to turn back (11-12).

By the way Paul ends the discussion, we see that he himself was aware of the weakness of his arguments. Was he assured that the *angels* in charge of the order in the world would be shocked on seeing women's liberation (10)?

■ Without making any transition Paul passes to the most important act of the Christian assembly, the Eucharist. These lines are the oldest testimony relating to the Supper of the Lord, and were written in the year 55 A.D. some years ahead of the gospels.

The community gathered around the same table. After the supper, solemnized by the singing of the psalms, the leader of the community said a prayer of thanksgiving, remembering the last supper of Jesus, and repeated his words to consecrate the body and blood of Christ. Then everyone received communion from the same bread and the same cup.

In 10:16 Paul recalled two aspects of the Lord's Supper:

– It is the communion of the body and blood of the Lord.

– It affirms a union of love among all: *we form one body*.

Here Paul denounces the Corinthians for their sin with regard to these two points.

Each one eats his own food. In order not to share with a brother who is poorer and brought less, or to avoid the company of someone who belongs to another group.

Another is getting drunk and therefore not in condition to receive the body of Christ.

In not recognizing the body (29). This term points out at the same time:

– he who does not distinguish consecrated bread from ordinary bread and does not receive it with due respect, as the body of Christ.

– he who ignores his brothers in the celebration of the Eucharist. He does not recognize the body of Christ as formed by all the assembled Christians.

The Eucharist is the center and the heart of the life of the Church, which is, before else, a fellowship. The Church is not only an instrument for spreading the Good News, but is also the place here on earth where people can already experience the union between themselves and with Christ.

himself before eating of the bread and drinking from the cup. ²⁹ Otherwise, he eats and drinks his own condemnation in not recognizing the Body.

³⁰ This is the reason why so many among you are sick and weak and several have died. ³¹ If we examined and corrected ourselves, the Lord would not have to act against us. ³² The Lord's strokes are to correct us, so that we may not be condemned with this world.

³³ So, then, brothers, when you gather for a meal, wait for one another ³⁴ and, if someone is hungry, let him eat in his own house. In this way you will not gather for your common condemnation. The other instructions I shall give when I go there.

Spiritual gifts and harmony

12 ¹ With respect to the spiritual gifts, I will remind you of the following. ² When you were still pagans, you went to your dumb idols

as people possessed. ³ I tell you that no man inspired by the Spirit of God may say, "A curse on Jesus" as no one can say "Jesus is the Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There is diversity of gifts, but the Spirit is the same. ⁵ There is diversity of ministries, but the Lord is the same. ⁶ There is diversity of works, but the same God works in all.

⁷ The Spirit reveals in each one his presence with a gift which is also a service. ⁸ To one is given to speak with wisdom, through the Spirit. Another teaches according to the same Spirit. ⁹ To another is given faith, in which the Spirit acts; to another the gift of healing, and it is the same Spirit. ¹⁰ Another works miracles, another is a prophet, another recognizes what comes from the good or evil spirit; another speaks in tongues, and still another interprets what has been said in tongues. ¹¹ And all of this is the work of the one and only Spirit, who gives to each one as he so desires.

31. Rom 14, 22; Heb 12, 7

3. Mt 16, 17; Phil 2, 11

6. Eph 4, 11

8. 1, 5; 2, 6

9. 13, 2

10. Acts 2, 11; 19, 6

11. Rom 12, 3; Eph 4, 7

You are proclaiming the death of the Lord till he come (26). All the Eucharists celebrated around the world each day and every minute of the day, remind us that the death of Christ fills up the time until his coming.

History cannot cease, nor civilization be stagnant as happened in past centuries. Not only does technical progress force us to advance, but also the requirements of justice. Those resulting from the death of the innocent (and here God is the innocent) destroy in time all established order. This death does not allow the world to rest or have peace. The Church reminds us of the death of Christ, not as preserving the past, but drawing from this unique event new energies for both reconciling and condemning.

That is why there are so many sick (30). The Lord uses many signs to admonish us. Sometimes through personal illness; more usually, through the weakness and spiritual anaemia of the Church. Respecting the exigencies of a worthy celebration of the Eucharist would be sufficient to renew the Church.

◆ In the Church of Corinth the Holy Spirit reveals his presence by giving many believers spiritual gifts. All marvel when some of them, touched by the Spirit, begin praising God with

words understood by no one. And they feel still more the presence of God when a prophet reveals to another what is on his conscience or gives to someone a special message from God.

Paul intervenes in two ways. First to establish order. Pagans went wild in the frenzied celebration of their feasts, while the Spirit makes everyone more responsible. When a frenzied individual cried out what was senseless or scandalous, it was a proof that he was not inspired.

Paul reminds us that *the gifts of the Spirit* (sometimes called *charismas*), have several aspects. There are *gifts*, especially evident in miracles. But there are also *ministries* (5), that is services, as is evident in the leading of a community. These should also be called *works*, because in them man must not praise himself, but all must be seen as the work of God.

If we only said that these services come from Christ, people might think that most important in the Church is the authority of those who govern in the name of Christ and at times are considered his "vicars". But these gifts and ministries are also related to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows where he pleases and multiplies among believers of simple heart gifts and initiatives that renew the church. The mission of the ministers

Comparison with the body

ο ¹²As the body is one, having many members, and all the members, while being many, form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³All of us, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men, have been baptized in one Spirit to form one body and all of us have been given to drink from the one Spirit.

¹⁴The body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵Even though the foot says, "I do not belong to the body for I am not a hand," it continues to be part of the body. ¹⁶Even though the ear says, "I do not belong to the body for I am not an eye," it continues to be part of the body. ¹⁷If all the body were eye, how would we hear? And if all the body were ear, how would we smell?

¹⁸God has arranged all the members, placing each part of the body as

he pleased. ¹⁹If all were the same part where would the body be? ²⁰But there are many members and one body. ²¹The eye cannot tell the hand, "I do not need you," nor the head tell the feet, "I do not need you."

²²Still more, the parts of our body that we most need are those that seem to be the weakest; ²³the parts that we consider lower are treated with much care ²⁴and we cover them with more modesty because they are less presentable, whereas the others do not need such attention. ²⁵God himself arranged the body in this way, giving more honour to those parts that need it, so that the body may not be divided, but rather each member may care for the others. ²⁶When one suffers, all of them suffer, and when it receives honour, all rejoice together.

²⁷Now, you are the body of Christ

12. Rom 12, 4

13. Gal 3, 28

27. Rom 12, 5; Eph 5, 30

(bishops, priests or lay ministers) is not principally to govern and command the Church, but to recognize the true work of the Spirit in the community.

He shares them as he pleases (11). The Spirit gives the Church what it needs at the right place and the right time. These paragraphs speak of the concerns of the Church of that time, very different from ours today. The Spirit is leading the Church now towards the building of a world of justice and peace and many believers have received spiritual gifts which, without being apparent in miracles, inspire their exemplary and fruitful lives. Whereas, in those early times, the newly converted Christians discovered that God was among them. Through gifts of prophecy, wisdom, teaching, the Church unfolded day by day the innumerable consequences of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The same Spirit... the same Lord... the same God. God is the fountain of the various gifts granted to the Church and is also the model of how diversity may be coupled with unity.

ο A detailed comparison with the body helps us to understand what the Church is, showing at the same time how we must compliment and respect each other.

We cannot have a true community unless each of us shares in its life, placing his talents at the service of others. Even the most humble, poor and uneducated Christian may have riches of a moral or artistic order, with which he is able to serve his brothers and sisters. As soon as one is really committed to a Christian life, the spirit

awakens in him new and sometimes unsuspected capabilities. If we pay attention to the riches of our brothers and sisters, and awaken in them the consciousness of their dignity and responsibility, we shall see a new resurgence in the Church, fruit of the Spirit. It would take too long to recall the harm done to the Church in some places because of the passivity of the Christian people in a clericalized church.

At the end of the paragraph Paul lists the various gifts according to their importance. First, not what appears more miraculous, but what is most constructive for the Church. That is why the apostles occupy the first place. These are, not only the twelve chosen by Jesus, but also those who like them and accepted by them, are founding new communities and governing those already existing. Then, in second place, come the prophets, who not only announce words of God, but strengthen the community with the gifts of faith and wisdom which inspire their preaching.

In the last place are those who receive the gift of speaking in tongues, although in Corinth it was as if they had already reached Heaven.

+ *I will show you a much better way* (12:31). As the Corinthians marvelled at the spectacular and wonderful things worked by the Spirit, Paul tells them that the only important thing is the ability to love.

'Love or charity? At the beginning both words meant the same thing. But later on, the word "charity" came to mean the help given in the form of alms, although the giving of alms alone

and each of you individually is a member of it.²⁸ So God has appointed us in the Church. First apostles, second prophets, third teachers. Then come miracles, then the gift of healing, material help, administration in the Church and the gift of tongues.

²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Can all perform miracles,³⁰ or cure the sick, or speak in tongues, or explain what was said in tongues?³¹ Set your hearts on the most precious gifts. But I will show you a much better way.

No gift higher than love

+13 ¹If I could speak all the tongues of men and of angels, but were given no love, I would only be sounding brass or clanging cymbals. ²If I had prophecy, knowing secret things with all kinds of knowledge, and faith great enough to remove mountains, but had no love, I would be nothing. ³If I gave everything I had to the poor, and even gave up my own body, but only to receive praise and not through love, it would be of no value to me.

⁴Love is patient, kind, without envy. It is not boastful or arrogant. It is not ill-mannered nor does it seek its own interest. ⁵Love withstands anger and forgets offenses. ⁶It does not take delight in wrong, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love excuses everything, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love will never end. Prophecies may cease, tongues be silent and knowledge disappear. ⁹For knowledge grasps the truth imperfectly and prophecy as well. ¹⁰And when what is perfect comes, everything imperfect will pass away. ¹¹When I was a child I thought and reasoned like a child, but when I grew up, I gave up childish ways. ¹²Likewise, at present, we see dimly as in a faulty mirror, but then we shall see face to face. Now, we know in part, but then I will know Him as He knows me. ¹³Now we have faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

Gifts of prophecy and tongues

+14 ¹Strive, then, for love and set your hearts on spiritual

28. 14, 1; Eph 4, 11; Acts 13, 1
Gal 4, 9; Col 1, 4; Thes 1, 3; 5, 8

2. Mk 11, 23

6. 2 Cor 13, 8

12. Num 12, 6

13. 8, 7;

is not real love. On the other hand, for many people, true love is only that of a man and a woman. So it is indifferent whether we say charity or love, but we have rather to clarify what love really is. Paul does just that in the present text.

If I could speak... if I had... To love is more important than performing miracles, more important than doing great things for others and dying for a cause, all of which can be done without love.

Love will never end. Love is the only thing that we shall take with us on passing to a better life. Only on love in our life shall we be judged.

When I was a child (11). This comparison tells us that our life of faith is only a preparation and prelude to what we shall be in Heaven. Heaven is to see God face to face. Then, everything we have now will vanish and only love will remain. In the measure that we are able to love God and our neighbour in the present life, in that measure shall we share, after resurrection, the Glory of God, face to face.

Faith, hope, love (13). Paul quite often joins these three "virtues," that is the three movements of the Christian soul. In no other place does he state this more clearly than here. There is no authentic love without faith and hope.

The greatest of the three is love. Sometimes this sentence is used to misrepresent what is essential to Christian life. For many say, "I do good to my neighbour, what else does God ask of me? But it would not be difficult to prove that such a love is very limited, selfish and impure. This "love" is unable to transfigure our life making us the transparency of Christ. Love will be everything when it reaches its perfection, that is, when we see God: *I will know him as he knows me.* As long as we do not see God, love is immature; this is the time when love must grow through the faith and knowledge of God's word; also through hope and perseverance as we follow Jesus poor, free and in the midst of trials.

■ It seems that the assemblies in Corinth were very disorderly. People did not wait for their turn

gifts, especially that you may prophesy.² He who speaks in tongues does not speak to people, but to God, for no one understands him; the spirit makes him say things that are not understandable.³ The prophet, instead, addresses all people to give them strength, encouragement and consolation.⁴ He who speaks in tongues strengthens himself, but the prophet builds the Church.

⁵ Would that all of you spoke in tongues! But, better still if you were all prophets. The prophet has the advantage over the one speaking in tongues unless someone explains what was spoken, so that everyone may profit.⁶ Look, brothers, if I go to you and I speak in tongues, of what use will it be to you if I do not bring you some revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching?

⁷ When someone plays the flute, or harp, or any musical instrument, if there are not tones and notes, who will recognize the tune?⁸ And if the bugle call is not clear, who will get ready for battle?⁹ The same with you. If your words are not understood, who will know what is said? You will be talking to the moon.¹⁰ There are many languages in the world, and each of them has meaning¹¹ but, if someone talks to me in a language that I do not

understand, I become a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker to me.

¹² As you set your heart on spiritual gifts, be eager to build the Church and you will receive abundantly.¹³ Because of this, he who speaks in tongues should ask God for the ability to explain what he says.

¹⁴ When I am praying in tongues, my spirit prays, but my mind remains idle.¹⁵ What shall I do, then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with my mind. I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind.¹⁶ If you praise God only with your spirit, how will the ordinary person add the "Amen" to your thanksgiving? Since he has not understood what you said.¹⁷ Your thanksgiving was indeed beautiful, but it was useless for others.

¹⁸ I give thanks to God because I speak in tongues more than all of you¹⁹ but, when I am in the assembly, I prefer to say five words from my mind, which may teach others, than ten thousand words in tongues.

²⁰ Brothers and sisters, do not remain as children in your thinking. Be like infants in doing evil, but mature in your thinking.²¹ God says in the Law: *I will speak to this people through men talking other tongues and through lips of foreigners, but*

4. Acts 15, 32 5. Num 11, 29 15. Eph 5, 19

to speak, but spoke at the same time, especially the women. Paul invites them to be silent. Those with spectacular gifts felt more important and did not respect the most elementary order. Some who pretended to be inspired spoke and acted very strangely and at times shamefully.

Paul establishes an order of priority, giving preference to those gifts that most help to strengthen the Church. He compares the Church to a building. We build it when we help others to grow, to be better and more united. And what makes a person better is charity, and not the performance of extraordinary gifts and charismas, as miracles, languages and such like. This is why Paul has just emphasized charity as the paramount gift. This is why extraordinary performances do not mean holiness; God can

use anybody, even sinners and non-Catholics, to perform for other's benefit. The truth of a religion does not rely on the fact its preachers can heal the sick or do similar things, therefore filling stadiums and impressing large audiences. It relies on its fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles, as found in the Church.

The spirits of the prophets are submitted to the prophets (32). What comes from the Spirit always blends with what comes from man. Those who think they are inspired must be careful not to lessen what comes from the Spirit with their own beliefs and desires. No inspiration allows us to disregard our brethren or rightful authority.

There are several reasons for thinking that vv. 34-35 were not written by Paul but were added later on by someone else.

16. 2 Cor 1, 20 20. Eph 4, 14 21. Is 28, 11



even so my people will not listen to me. ²² So, speaking in tongues is a signal for those who refuse to believe, not for those who believe, while prophecy is a signal for those who believe, not for those who refuse to believe.

²³ Imagine that the whole Church is gathered together and all speak in tongues when unbelievers and uninformed people enter. What will they think? That you are crazy. ²⁴ Instead, suppose that each of you speaks as a prophet; as soon as an unbeliever or an uninformed person enters, all of you call him to account and disclose his most secret thinking. ²⁵ Then, falling on his face, he will have to worship God and declare that God is among you.

²⁶ What then shall we conclude, brothers? When you gather, each of you can take part with a song, or a teaching, a revelation or by speaking in tongues, or interpreting what has been said in tongues. But let all this build the Church.

²⁷ Are you going to speak in tongues? Let two or three, at most, speak, each in turn, and let one interpret what was said. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, hold your tongues and speak to God.

²⁹ As for the prophets, let two or three speak, with the others commenting on what has been said. ³⁰ If a revelation comes to one of those sitting by, let the first be silent. ³¹ Even all of you could prophesy, one by one, for the instruction and encourage-

ment of all. ³² The spirits speaking through prophets are submitted to prophets, ³³ because God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.

³⁴ (Let women be silent in the assemblies, as in all the churches of the saints. They are not allowed to speak. Let them be submissive as the Law commands. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to know, let them consult their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in Church.)

³⁶ Did the word of God, perhaps, come from you? or did it come only to you? ³⁷ If someone among you thinks that he is a prophet or a spiritual man, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸ If he does not recognize that, God will not recognize him.

³⁹ So, then, brothers, set your hearts on the gift of prophecy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ However, everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Resurrection is a fact

15 ¹ Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, of the Good News that I preached to you and which you received and on which you stand firm. ² By that Gospel you are saved, provided that you hold to it as I preached it. Otherwise, you will have believed in vain.

³ In the first place, I have passed on to you what I myself received: that Christ died for our sins, as Scripture says; ⁴ that he was buried; that he was

23. Acts 2, 13	26. Eph 4, 12	34. 1 Tim 2, 13	37. 1 Jn 4, 6	1. Gal 1, 11	3. 11, 23;
Lk 1, 2	4. Lk 24, 27; 24, 34				

◆ *Let me remind you of the Good News.* I remind you of the unique event that brings happiness to humankind: a man has risen from among the dead and he will raise us. This is the heart of the Christian message.

I have passed on to you in the first place (3). It is not a story, or a novel, but a fact. And the apostles are witnesses of this. Paul recalls several apparitions of Jesus; what impresses us most is

perhaps that of the five hundred who saw Jesus on one occasion (this letter was written twenty five years after that event).

How some of you say that there is no resurrection (11). Many in Corinth thought that after death the immortal soul goes on living alone, forgetting its past and everything material. Others thought that everything ends with death: see 1 Thes 5:13.

raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures; ⁵ that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. ⁶ Afterwards he appeared to more than five hundred brothers together; most of them are still alive, although some have already gone to rest. ⁷ Then he appeared to James and after that to all the apostles. ⁸ And last of all, he appeared to me also, the one born abnormally. ⁹ For I am the last of the apostles, and I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. ¹⁰ Nevertheless I am, by the grace of God, what I am, and his goodness towards me has not been without fruit. Far from it, I have toiled more than them all, although not I, rather the grace of God in me.

¹¹ Now, whether it was I or they, this we preach and this you believed.

¹² Well, then, if Christ is preached as risen from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is empty and our belief comes to nothing. ¹⁵ And we become false witnesses of God, who have declared that God has raised Christ; yet he did not raise him inasmuch as the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ If

the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith gives you nothing, and you are still in sin. ¹⁸ Also those who fall asleep in Christ have not been saved. ¹⁹ If it is only for this life that we hope in Christ, we are the most unfortunate of all men.

Christ gave us the way

o ²⁰ But no, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first, and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ A man brought death; a man also brings resurrection of the dead. ²² All die for being Adam's, and in Christ all will receive life. ²³ However, each one in his own time: first Christ, then Christ's people, when he visits them.

²⁴ Then the end will come, when Christ delivers the Kingdom to God the Father, after having destroyed every rule, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign and *put all enemies under his feet*. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed will be death, ²⁷ as Scripture say: *God has subjected everything under his feet*.

When we say that everything is put under his feet, we exclude, of course, the Father who subjects everything to him. ²⁸ When the Father has subjected everything to him, the Son, then, will

5. Jn 21, 15	7. Acts 12, 17	8. Acts 9, 3; Eph 3, 8; 1 Tim 1, 14; Gal 1, 13	10. 2 Cor 11, 23
12. Mt 22, 23; Acts 4, 2	15. Acts 1, 8; 1, 22	17. Rom 8, 24	20. Rom 8, 11; Col 1, 18;
1 Thes 4, 14	22. 45-49; Rom 5, 12	23. 1 Thes 4, 16; Col 3, 4	24. Eph 1, 21; Lk 19, 17
25. Ps 110, 1; Rev 20, 14; Heb 2, 8	27. Ps 8, 7; Phil 3, 21	28. Col 3, 11; Eph 4, 6	

o *All die for being from Adam* (22). See commentary on Rom 5:12 about Adam and Christ. Because of sin, death, as we know it, goes against the vocation of man, son of God. If sin did not exist, perhaps there would still be death, but not as we have now, painful and cruel, and not freely accepted.

Christ, the first of those who have fallen asleep (20). Paul, like the first Christians, prefers to say *asleep* rather than "dead," because in using this word he better expresses the hope of resurrection.

The last enemy to be destroyed will be death (26). The victory of humankind goes much further than universal peace and justice.

God will be all in all, and man will enter with Christ into his Glory, that is, he will be transformed, becoming God with God without losing his own, human personality. This surpasses whatever could be dreamed or hoped for.

Why are they baptized for the dead? (29). Perhaps some of them were concerned for the fate of their parents who died without knowing the Gospel, and were baptized in their name. Paul does not give his opinion about this practice. He only takes the opportunity it gives him to argue in favor of the resurrection.

+ *Some of you will ask: How will the dead rise?* (35). We cannot imagine it. Where will they be? Why should we have a body if we are going

place himself under Him who subjects everything. From then on, God will be all in all.

²⁹ Otherwise, what are these people doing who are baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead cannot be raised, why do they want to be baptized for the dead?

³⁰ As for us, why do we risk constantly our life? For death is my daily companion. ³¹ I say that, brothers and sisters, before you who are my pride in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² Was it for nothing more than human interest, that I fought in Ephesus like a lion tamer? If the dead are not raised, *let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die!*

³³ Do not be deceived; bad theories corrupt good morals. Wake up, and do not sin, ³⁴ because some of you are outstandingly ignorant about God; I say this to your shame.

The body after the Resurrection

+ ³⁵ Some of you will ask: How will the dead be raised? With what kind of body will they come?

³⁶ You fools! What you sow cannot sprout unless it dies. ³⁷ And what you sow is not the body of the future plant but a bare grain of wheat or any other seed, ³⁸ and God will give the appropriate body, as he gives to each seed its own body. ³⁹ Now look: not all

flesh is the same; one is the flesh of men; another the flesh of animals, and still others the flesh of birds and of fish. ⁴⁰ There are, likewise, heavenly bodies and earthly bodies but the earthly bodies do not shine as do the heavenly ones. ⁴¹ The brightness of the sun differs from the brightness of the moon and the stars, and the stars differ from one another in brightness.

⁴² It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in decomposition; it will be raised never more to die. ⁴³ It is sown in humiliation, and it will be raised for Glory. They buried it in weakness, but the resurrection shall be with power. When buried, it is a natural body, but it will be raised a spiritual body. ⁴⁴ For there shall be a spiritual body as there is at present a living body.

⁴⁵ Scripture says: *Adam, the first man, was created a living being*, but the last Adam has become spirit that gives life. ⁴⁶ The spirit does not appear first, but the natural life, and afterwards comes the spirit. ⁴⁷ The first man comes from the earth and is earthly, while the second one comes from heaven. ⁴⁸ As it was with the earthly man, so is it with the earthly people. As it is with Christ, so with the heavenly. ⁴⁹ Just as we are bearing the image of the earthly man, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man.

31. 2 Cor 4, 10	32. Is 22, 13	36. Jn 12, 24	42. Phil 3, 21	45. Gen 2, 7	46. 21, 23
47. Dn 7, 13	49. Gen 5, 3; Phil 3, 21; Rom 8, 29				

to live "like angels" (Mk 12:25)?

What you sow is not the body of the future plant (37). Jesus had spoken of the grain that is sown (Jn 12:24). With this example he destroyed those primitive ideas that some people still have nowadays: that angels will come to gather the dust of the dead, that corpses will come out of their tombs. In reality, our present body is the grain and the risen body, the spike or ear, will not be the recombination of the actual body that is put in the earth.

A spiritual body (44). Resurrection comes from inside, like a transfiguration. Each one will have the body he has deserved, the body that

better expresses what he has come to be before God. And because we do hope for such a transformation of our person, let us try from now on to raise our lifestyle.

The other life will be in a certain way a continuation of our present life, as an ear of wheat comes from a grain of wheat. Risen man will be the same person with all his personality, marked by his past actions, by everything that made him mature – not without reason did the risen Christ will to show his glorious body with the wounds of his Passion. And because the human person was not created alone, but has been related and united in life to other persons, we shall be spe-

The day of Resurrection

⁵⁰ This I say, brothers: Flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God; nothing of us that is to decay can reach imperishable life. ⁵¹ So I want to teach you this mystery: Although not all of us will die, all of us have to be transformed, ⁵² in an instant, at the sound of the trumpet. You have heard of the last trumpet. Then in a twinkling of an eye, the dead will be raised imperishable, while we shall be transformed. ⁵³ For it is necessary that our mortal and perishable being put on the life that knows neither death nor decay.

⁵⁴ When our perishable being puts on imperishable life, when our mortal being puts on immortality, the word of Scripture will be fulfilled: *Death has been swallowed up by victory.* ⁵⁵ *Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?*

⁵⁶ Sin is the sting of death to kill, and the Law made sin more powerful. ⁵⁷ But give thanks to God who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

⁵⁸ So then, my dear brothers and

sisters, be steadfast and do not be moved. Improve constantly in the work of the Lord, knowing that with him your labour is not without fruit.

Commendations and greetings

■ 16 ¹ With regard to the collection in favor of the saints, follow the rules that I gave to the churches of Galatia. ² Every Sunday, let each of you put aside what he is able to spare, so that no collection need be made when I come. ³ Once I am with you, you will choose the persons whom I may accredit with letters to take your gifts to Jerusalem. ⁴ And if it seems better for me to go, they will go with me.

⁵ I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I want to go through Macedonia only. ⁶ I would like to stay with you for a while, and perhaps I will spend the winter so that you may help me on my way whenever I go. ⁷ I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I really hope to stay with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸ But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because I have great op-

50. 6, 10; Jn 3, 5	51. 2 Cor 5, 4	52. 1 Thes 4, 15; J1 2, 1; Mt 24, 31	54. Is 25, 8
55. Hos 13, 14; Rev 20, 14	56. Rom 7, 7	57. Jn 16, 33; Rom 6, 25	58. Col 1, 23
1. Gal 2, 10	2. Mt 28, 1; Acts 20, 7; Rev 1, 10	3. Acts 20, 4	5. Acts 19, 21

cially united with those whom we loved on this earth and who helped us to grow.

Not all flesh is the same flesh (39). Paul explains that one same word can express many different things that have some likeness. For example, the word "light" is used to designate the very different ways in which the sun, the moon and stars, each shine with its own special color. During Paul's time the word "body" was used for many things, even to designate the sun and the stars, called "heavenly bodies." So, when it is said that the dead are raised with their own body, this doesn't mean with the same shape (with arms and legs and hair...) or the same life, although it will be the same person.

Not all of us will die (51) Paul thinks that Christ is to return soon. On this supposition, he says that those who are alive when Christ returns will not have to "travel" with him to Heaven (that would be a materialist image), but to be trans-

formed. Resurrection is not simply to live again as happened with Lazarus.

Earthly man... heavenly man... (45-49). Each of us has now a double inheritance: for while we are part of humankind by our nature (this is meant by *Adam*, the earthly man); we are also members of the immense community of the "born again" that is invisibly woven around Christ.

■ With respect to the collection, see Rom 15:25 and 2 Cor ch. 8 & 9.

Sunday, the first day of the Jewish week. See in Acts 2:7. During the time of Paul the Christians had changed the Saturday (or Sabbath) of Moses and of the Jews for the Sunday, the day of the resurrection of Christ.

It can be seen that the Christians of Corinth were forming a real and true Church, because in spite of all their defects, it was a community where all were active members, ready to solve together the problems of their lives "in Christ."

my letter, but only what you can read and understand. ¹⁴I trust that what you now only partly realize, you will come to understand fully, and so be proud of us, as we shall also be proud of you on the Day of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁵With this assurance, I wanted to go and visit you first, and this should have been a double blessing for you.

¹⁶And from there I thought of going to Macedonia, and then from Macedonia, of coming back to you, that you might send me on my way to Judea.

¹⁷Have I planned this without thinking at all? Or do I change my decisions on the spur of the moment, so that I am between *No* and *Yes*?

¹⁸God knows that our dealing with you is not *Yes* and *No*, ¹⁹just as the Son of God, Christ Jesus, whom we – Silvanus, Timothy and I – preach to you, was not *Yes* and *No*; with him it was simply *Yes*. ²⁰In him all the promises of God have come to be a *Yes*, and we also say in his name; *Amen!*, giving thanks to God. ²¹God himself strengthens us, and you, to aim at Christ; he has anointed and marked us ²²with his own seal in a first outpouring of the Spirit.

Paul refers to a scandal

■ ²³God knows, and I swear to you by my own life, that if I did not return to Corinth, it was because I wanted to spare you. ²⁴I do not wish to lord it over your faith, but to contribute to your happiness; for regarding faith, you already stand firm.

2 ¹So I gave up a visit that would again be a distressing one. ²If I make you sad, who will make me happy if not you whom I have grieved? ³Remember what I wrote you: "May it be that when I come I do not feel sad because of you, who should rather make me happy." I trust in everyone and I am sure that my joy will be the joy of you all.

⁴So afflicted and worried was I when I wrote to you, that I even shed tears. I did not intend to cause you pain, but rather to let you know of the immense love that I have for you.

⁵If anyone has caused me pain, he has hurt not me but in some measure, all of you – and I do not wish to exaggerate. ⁶The punishment that he received from the majority is enough for him. ⁷Now you should rather for-

14. Phil 4, 1; 1 Thes 2, 19

17. Mt 5, 37

20. 1 Jn 2, 27; Rev 3, 14

22. 5 5; Eph 1, 13

23. 1 Pet 5, 2

4. 7, 8; Acts 20, 31

7. Col 3, 13

In him all the promises of God have come to be a Yes (v. 20). God fulfilled his promises when he sent his Son among us. But Christ also did only what his Father wanted. Thus, Christ is a 'yes' consenting to the Father's plan. From there, Paul draws the consequences for Christians. In baptism we say the first yes to Christ. At every Eucharist we repeat again the same yes. The "amen" that we say in prayers mean yes, it is true. The opposite of all this is sin which is the same as saying 'no' to Christ.

+ *In a first outpouring (22). Paul actually says: he gave us the first payment of the Spirit. (See com. on Eph 1:14).*

■ Here Paul refers to the letters preceding this one and which we mentioned in the introduction. We referred to this previous letter which is perhaps preserved in chapters 10-13 of this "Second letter." *I do not wish to lord it over your faith (1:24): see 10:5-6. May it be that, when I come, I do not feel sad (2:3): see 12:21.*

It is the fragrance of life and leads them to life. Just as Christ brought division among people, so the Gospel divides them. It is not so much the message which they argue about but the "odor", or, the way of being Christian. Some cling to their own interests and are not ready to take risks: they focus on the demands of Christian life which seems to them like death and a useless sacrifice. Others, on the other hand, become envious of the mysterious power shining through the believer in the midst of his own trials: because they understand that life is there.

Who is worthy of such a mission? In seeing this, the apostle feels inadequate for his mission. He would like everyone to recognize Christ and the radiance of his love through him, but, he is a long way from that! On the contrary, the false apostle does not even think about that but only wishes to be approved and to make money out of the word of God by hiding its demands: such apostles are famous and they are not persecuted by anyone.

give and comfort him, lest excessive sorrow discourage him.⁸ So I beg you to treat him with love.

⁹ This is why I wrote to you, to test you and to know if you would obey in everything.¹⁰ The one you forgive, I also forgive. And what I forgave, if indeed I had anything to forgive, I forgave for your sake in the presence of Christ,¹¹ lest Satan take advantage of us; for we know his designs.

We are the fragrance of Christ

¹² So I came to Troas to preach the Gospel of Christ, and the Lord opened doors to me.¹³ However I could not be at peace because I did not find my brother Titus there, so I took leave of them and went to Macedonia.

¹⁴ Thanks be to God, who always leads us in the triumphant following of Christ and, through us, spreads the knowledge of him everywhere, like an aroma.¹⁵ We are Christ's fragrance rising up to God, and perceived by those who are saved as well as by those who are lost.¹⁶ To the latter, it smells of death and leads them to death. To others it is the fragrance of life and leads to life.

¹⁷ But who is worthy of such a mission? Unlike so many who make money out of the word of God, we speak with sincerity, and announce Christ as sent by God, and in his presence.

The great dignity of Christ's ministers

♦ ¹Am I again commending myself? Or do I need to present to you letters of recommendation as some have done; or should I ask you for those letters? ²You are the letter. We bear it in our heart, yet all can read and understand it.³ Yes, who could deny that you are Christ's letter written by us—a letter written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, carved not in slabs of stones, but in hearts of flesh.

⁴ This is our confidence before God, thanks be to Christ!⁵ We do not dare consider that our work is due to any merit of ours; we know that our ability comes from God.⁶ He has enabled us to be ministers of a new covenant no longer depending on a written law but on the Spirit. The written law kills, but the Spirit gives life.

10. Mt 10, 40	11. Eph 4, 27	12. 1 Cor 16, 9	15. 1 Cor 1, 18	16. Lk 2, 34	17. 1, 12; 1
1 Pet 4, 11	1. 5, 12; 10, 12; Acts 18, 27	2. 1 Cor 9, 2	3. Ex 24, 12; Exk 36, 26;		
Jer 31, 33	5. Jn 3, 27	6. Jer 31, 31; Rom 2, 29			

♦ The preachers who oppose Paul showed letters of recommendation given by some community or some apostle. Paul, on the contrary, relies on a personal authority which does not owe anything to anyone. Christ himself made him an apostle as he said in several places.

The pagans of that time surrounded their priests with honour and esteem, and so did the Jews. Throughout the Bible the honour of teaching the Law of God is highlighted and more so the unique role of Moses who received it from God on Sinai. Yet, an apostle of Christ is much greater than these.

How much more glorious will be the ministry that brings holiness. As Paul showed in Rom 7:1-13, teaching only the Law as the Jewish priests did, was not a great help to men since men, because they are sinners, do not obey it and deserve their punishment. On the

contrary, Paul brings believers into live communion with Christ and his Spirit so that, from then on, they can also share in risen life. The priests and ministers of the Church fulfill a major role if their words and actions are helpful in raising men.

In verses 7-13 Paul refers to the tradition found in the book of Exodus (Ex 34:29-35). These highlighted Moses' glory, but Paul mentions them to prove that Christ's apostles are superior. There is a reference to Moses who returned from his encounter with God with his face radiant; but Paul remarks that it did not last. Moses had to cover his face with a veil because his face was so radiant, but Paul notes that when a veil must be used, God does not yet fully reveal himself. He points out, in passing, to the blindness of the Jews who do not recognize Christ as their promised saviour.

⁷ The ministry of the Law carved on stones brought death; it was nevertheless surrounded by glory and we know that the Israelites could not fix their eyes on the face of Moses, such was his radiance, though fleeting. ⁸ How much more glorious will the ministry of the Spirit be! ⁹ If there was greatness in a ministry which used to condemn, how much more will there be in the ministry that brings holiness? ¹⁰ The ministry of the Law was held as glorious – an imperfect glory; yet it will no longer be so when a glory far more superior appears. ¹¹ The ministry of the Law surrounded by glory, passed away; but ours endures with a lasting glory.

The veil of Moses

¹² As men who have such a great ambition, we are quite confident – ¹³ unlike Moses who covered his face with a veil. Otherwise the Israelites would have seen the fading of his passing radiance.

¹⁴ They became blind, however; until this day, the same veil prevents them from understanding the Old Covenant and they do not realize that

for those in Christ it is nullified. ¹⁵ Up to this very day, however often they read Moses, the veil remains over their understanding ¹⁶ but, for whoever turns to the Lord, the veil shall be removed. ¹⁷ The Lord is spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

¹⁸ So, with unveiled faces, we all must reflect as in a mirror the Glory of the Lord, while we are transformed into his likeness and experience more and more his Glory by the action of the Lord who is spirit.

We carry this treasure in vessels of clay

4 ¹ This is why we do not feel discouraged as we fulfil this ministry mercifully given to us. ² We refuse to stay with half-truths through fear; we do not behave with cunning or falsify the message of God but, manifesting the truth, we deserve the respect of everyone before God.

³ In fact if the Gospel we proclaim remains obscure, it is obscure only for those who go to their own destruction. ⁴ The god of this world has blinded the minds of these unbelievers lest they

7. Ex 32, 16; Ex 34, 29

15. Acts 15, 21

1 Thes 2, 4

13. Ex 34, 34

17. Jn 4, 24; Rom 8, 2; 1 Cor 6, 17

4. 2 Thes 2, 10

14. Mk 4, 12; Acts 28, 27; Rom 10, 4; Heb 8, 13

18. 4, 6; 1 Jn 3, 2

2. Rom 1, 16;

our: the Bible is a closed book until God gives us its true meaning (see Lk 24:27 and Ru 5:1).

Christians, on the other hand, openly contemplate the Glory of the Lord. A Christian is light of Christ: in earlier times, the baptized were called "the enlightened." Christ said: you do not light a lamp to hide it, but instead you put it in a candlestick.

We are quite confident (12). What a daring statement! Moses was the founder of the Jewish people and the supreme authority of the Bible.

The Lord is spirit. This is said twice in verses 17 and 18. Paul is not confusing the Lord Christ with the Holy Spirit but he is making a play on the words spirit and Spirit. The first religion, that of the Jews, consisted in observing a written law. The second, that of Christ, is spirit, that is, a power which leads us to love, a certain way of being free: this new spirit is found in Christ. Jesus the Lord is not a dead man whose voice

reaches us through the centuries. As risen, his Spirit is active in us and is gradually transforming us (see Rom 2:29).

o It is worthwhile underlining some features of the portrait of an apostle as Paul sketches it:

- We do not lose heart.
- We do not proceed with trickery nor do we falsify God's message.
- We are no more than your servants.
- Let men discover in us the glory of God which shines in Christ's face.
- We carry the death of Jesus so that his life may be revealed in us.
- We believe and that is why we speak.

We carry this treasure in vessels of clay (v. 7). Usually, God carries out his plans by using inadequate instruments. Graham Greene became famous for his book, "The Power and the Glory" in which we see a priest achieving heroic things despite his many personal faults.

see the radiance of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is God's image.⁵ It is not ourselves we preach, but Christ Jesus as Lord; and for Jesus' sake we became your servants.⁶ God who said, *Let the light shine out of darkness*, has also made the light shine in our hearts to radiate and to make known the Glory of God, as it shines in the face of Christ.

⁷We carry, however, this treasure in vessels of clay, so that this all-surpassing power may not be seen as ours but as God's.⁸ Trials of every sort come to us, but we are not discouraged.⁹ We are left without answer, but do not despair; persecuted but not abandoned, knocked down but not crushed.¹⁰ We carry everywhere in our person the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us.¹¹ For we, the living, are given up continually to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may appear in our mortal existence.¹² And as death is at work in us, life comes to you.

¹³We have received the same spirit

5. 3, 18; Gen 1, 3; 1 Pet 2, 9; Heb 1, 3 7. 12, 9
13. Ps 116, 10 16. Col 3, 19 17. Mt 5, 11; Rom 8, 17; Heb 12, 11; 1 Pet 1, 6 18. Col 1,
16; Heb 11, 1 1. Job 4, 19; Wis 9, 15; Is 38, 12

We are given up to death (v. 11). The apostle's death is necessary so that his work may live. When a good job has been done in one sector of the church, there has to come the hour of persecution, or of obedience to leaders whose authority we cannot reject, in spite of the fact that they may be unjust or mistaken. Nothing is raised without having died first.

+ Our outer being... our inner man (16). With these two terms, Paul repeats what he already expressed in Rom 8:10-11. There he opposed *the flesh* and *the spirit*, here *the outer being* and *the inner man* to describe the situation of the Christian who already experiences a resurrection of the whole person who is on the way to the other resurrection, that of the dead, even though he must pass through death.

We die because death is part of us from the start of our lives for we belong to sinful humanity. A death which is seen especially in our bodies (*the flesh* or *the outer being*). But *the inner man* (or *the spirit*) continues on the way to a constant resurrection, becoming more open to divine action.

of faith referred to in Scripture than says: *I believed and so I spoke*. We also believe and so we speak.¹⁴ We know that He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and bring us, with you, into his presence.¹⁵ Finally, grace will come more abundantly upon you and great will be the thanksgiving for the glory of God.

We long for our heavenly dwelling

+ ¹⁶Therefore we are not discouraged. On the contrary, while our outer being wastes away, the inner man is renewed from day to day.¹⁷ The slight affliction which quickly passes away prepares us for an eternal wealth of glory so great and beyond all comparison.¹⁸ So we no longer pay attention to the things that are seen, but to those that are unseen, for the things that we see last for a moment, but that which cannot be seen is eternal.

5 ¹We know that when our earthly dwelling, or rather our tent, is destroyed, we may count on a building from God, a heavenly dwell-

One day, after illnesses, old age and the separation from all those who died before us, we, too, shall have to die and leave the part of ourselves which is most external and which cannot enter into risen life.

Why is not our heavenly home placed over the other? We would like to wear the new clothing over the other, namely, to rise without having first to die: death is not normal for a child of God.

In previous letters Paul felt confident that he would be alive to see the coming of Christ and the Resurrection (1 Thes. 4:15). However, with time passing, he begins to doubt: perhaps Christ will come after he and his listeners have had to die. Even when we really long for the *heavenly dwelling* or the glorious body that God reserves for us, we are still quite attached to the *earthly tent* which is the actual body, however cumbersome and temporary it may be.

Compare 5:8 with Phil. 1:23 and Rv 14:13!

We feel confident (6). The fact that we are Christians does not necessarily remove the fear of death. This fear, however, momentarily lessens our growing confidence that we have en-

ing not built by human hands, that lasts for ever.² Therefore we long and groan: Why may we not put on this heavenly dwelling over that which we have?³ (Indeed, are we sure that we shall still be wearing our earthly dwelling and not be unclothed?)

⁴ As long as we are in the field-tent, we indeed moan our unbearable fate for we do not want this clothing to be removed from us; we would rather put the other over it, that the mortal body may be absorbed by true life.⁵ This is God's purpose for us, and he has given us the Spirit as a pledge of what we are to receive.

⁶ So we feel confident always. We know that while living in the body, we wander away from the Lord,⁷ living by faith, without seeing;⁸ but we dare to think that we would rather be away from the body to go and live with the Lord.⁹ So, whether we have to keep this house or lose it, we only wish to please the Lord.¹⁰ For we all have to be brought to light before the tribunal of Christ for each one to receive what he deserves for his good or evil deeds in the present life.

We proclaim the message of reconciliation

■ ¹¹ So we know the fear of the Lord and we try to convince people while we live openly before God. And I trust that you know in your conscience what we truly are.¹² We do not try to win your esteem again; we want to give you a reason to feel proud of us, that you may respond to those who heed appearances and not the reality.¹³ Now, if I have spoken foolishly, let God alone hear; if what I have said makes sense, take it for yourselves.

¹⁴ Indeed the love of Christ holds us and we realize that if he died for all, all have died.¹⁵ He died for all so that those who live may live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them.¹⁶ And so from now on, we do not regard anyone from a human point of view; and, even if before we knew Christ personally, we should now regard him in another way.

¹⁷ For that same reason, he who is in Christ is a new creature. For him the old things have passed away; a new world has come.¹⁸ All this is the

2. Rom 8, 23

3. 1 Cor 15, 33; 1 Thes 4, 15

5. 1, 22

6. 1 Per 1, 1

8. Phil 1, 21

10. Rom 14, 10; Jn 5, 27; Heb 11, 6; Eph 6, 8

14. Rom 5, 18; 6, 11

15. Rom 14, 17

16. 13, 4; Phil 3, 10

17. Gal 3, 28; 6, 15; Eph 4, 24

18. Rom 5, 10

tered life. The Spirit reveals to us the presence of God in us and we understand that no law of death has any power over this presence. Who will separate us from this revelation of the love of God? (Rom 8:35-39).

■ There are many ways of understanding faith: for each one of us, one or other aspect of Christian life makes more of an impact on us. What Paul sees in Christ is the great messenger and artisan of reconciliation.

His first conviction is that, with the death of Christ, a new age has begun for divided humanity. *If he died for all, all have died*, namely the whole history and wisdom of people before him have been surpassed and now God works among us in other ways.

We do not regard anyone from the human point of view (v 16). Christian faith is not only a new way of looking at God; it also includes a plan for a new society and a new life together: it

is the will to dedicate ourselves with all possible means to reconcile people. Nowadays, many Christians are involved in politics with others who do not share their faith, but is that sufficient? They must be able to confront the project of the party with the Christian project concerning man and reconciliation.

He who is in Christ is a new creature. (v 17). First, because the barriers dividing and classifying men no longer exist for him: see Gal 3:28 and Eph 2:14-16. Then, because he is no longer guided by human desires, but by the Spirit of God: Gal. 5:13-21.

In Christ God reconciled the world with himself (v 19). Many people like to say: Jesus is love. This is true, but let us not forget that this love is his response to the love of the Father who wishes to reconcile us: we must do away with the idea of an angry God whom Jesus tries to appease (Rom 3:25).

Entrusting to us the message of reconcil-



work of God who in Christ reconciled us to himself, and who entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ Because in Christ God reconciled the world with himself, no longer taking into account the sins of men, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

²⁰ So we present ourselves as ambassadors in the name of Christ, as if God himself makes an appeal to you through us. Let God reconcile you; this we ask you in the name of Christ. ²¹ He had no sin, but God made him bear our sin, so that in him we might share the holiness of God.

6 ¹ Being God's helpers we beg you: let it not be in vain that you received this grace of God. ² Scripture says: *At the favourable time I listen to you, on the day of salvation I help you.* This is the favourable time, this is the day of salvation.

The trials of an apostle

◆ ³ We are concerned not to give anyone an occasion to stumble or criticize our mission. ⁴ Instead we prove we are true ministers of God in every way by our endurance in so many trials, in hardship, affliction, ⁵ floggings, imprisonment, riots, fatigue, sleepless nights and days of hunger.

⁶ People can notice in our upright life, knowledge, patience and kindness, action of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ sincere love, words of truth and power of God. So we fight with the weapons of justice, to attack as well as to defend.

⁸ Sometimes we are honoured, at other times insulted; we receive criticism as well as praise. We are regarded as liars although we speak the truth; ⁹ as unknown though we are well known; as dead and yet we live. Punishments come upon us but we have not, as yet, been put to death. ¹⁰ We appear to be afflicted, but we remain happy; we seem to be poor, but we enrich many; apparently we have nothing, but we possess everything!

¹¹ Corinthians! I have spoken to you frankly and I have uncovered my inner thought. ¹² My heart is wide open to you, but you feel uneasy because of your closed heart: ¹³ repay us with the same measure – I speak to you as to my children – open wide your hearts also.

Have nothing to do with evil

○ ¹⁴ Do not make unsuitable covenants with those who do not believe: can justice walk with wickedness? Or can light co-exist with darkness ¹⁵ and can there be harmony between Christ and Satan? What union can

19. Col 1, 20

20. Eph 6, 20

21. Is 53, 6; Rom 8, 3; 1 Jn 3, 5; Gal 3, 13; 1 Pet 2, 24

2. Is 49, 8

6. Rom 12, 9; Gal 5, 22

10. 8, 9

13. 1 Cor 4, 14

14. Eph 5, 10

atmosphere (v 19). The Christian's mission is not primarily to sing God's praises, nor to live in peace, but to be actively involved in the task of universal reconciliation, which presupposes denouncing injustice and sin as much as trying to overcome them collectively, with a spirit of courage, love and sacrifice. The Church today has a lot to say in that regard to make us understand this mission which is ours, in this century and in the conflicts and tensions which tear our countries apart.

We present ourselves as ambassadors of Christ. This is not only true of the apostles and Paul. It is also meant for us when we go to visit the sick or the needy; when, overcoming suspicion, we approach our brother to create an

atmosphere of confidence, so that, shortly, we may arrive at fraternal fellowship among men who have the same problems but who, in spite of that, often remained locked in their selfishness.

Christ who did not know sin... (v 21). Paul recalls the mystery of the cross: reconciliation is not achieved without voluntary victims taking upon themselves men's hatred and sins.

If we knew Christ personally before (v 16) Paul says more exactly: *if we knew him in the flesh*, namely, as he was humanly speaking. Here, Paul is referring to some adversaries who believe they are superior to him because the knew Jesus or were his relatives. And he tells them: *we should now regard him in another*

fear! What a longing to see me, to make amends and do me justice!

You have fully proved that you were innocent in this matter. ¹² In reality, I wrote to you not on account of the offender or of the offended, but that you may be conscious of the concern you have for me before God. ¹³ I was encouraged by this.

In addition to this consolation of mine, I rejoice especially to see Titus very pleased with the way you all reassured him. ¹⁴ I had no cause to regret my praise of you to him. You know that I am always sincere with you; likewise my praise of you to Titus has been justified. ¹⁵ He now feels much more affection for you as he remembers the obedience of all and the respect and humility with which you received him. ¹⁶ Really I rejoice for I can be truly proud of you.

The collection for those in Jerusalem

■ 8 ¹ Now I want you to know about a gift of divine grace among the Churches of Macedonia. ² While they were so afflicted and persecuted, their joy overflowed and their extreme poverty turned into a wealth of generosity. ³ According to their means – even beyond their means – they wanted to share in helping the saints.

⁴ They asked us for this favour spontaneously and with much insistence ⁵ and, far beyond anything we

expected, they put themselves at the disposal of the Lord and of us by the will of God. ⁶ Accordingly, I urged Titus to complete among you this work of grace since he began it with you. ⁷ You excel in everything: in the gifts of faith, speech and knowledge; you feel concern for every cause and, besides, you are first in my heart. Excel also in this generous service.

⁸ This is not a command; I make known to you the determination of others to show you the sincerity of their fraternal concern. ⁹ You know well the generosity of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Although he was rich, he made himself poor to make you rich through his poverty.

¹⁰ I suggest this to you: it is fitting for you to act since you were the first not only in co-operating, but in beginning this project a year ago. ¹¹ So complete this work and according to your means, carry out what you decided with much enthusiasm. ¹² When there is a good disposition, everything you give is welcomed and no one longs for what you do not have. ¹³ I do not mean that others should be at ease and you burdened. Strive for equality; ¹⁴ at present give from your abundance what they are short of, and some day, they will repay in abundance what you lack. ¹⁵ Then you will be equal and what Scripture says shall come true: *To him who had much, nothing was in excess; to him who had little, nothing was lacking.*

13. 2, 13

14. 8, 24

1. 1 Cor 16, 5; Gal 2, 10

7. 1 Cor 1, 5

9. Mt 8, 20; Phil 2, 7

12. Mk 12, 44

14. Rom 15, 27

15. Ex 16, 18

■ In the year 48 there was a famine in Judea and in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28) due to the poor harvest of the previous year, a sabbatical year (during which the Jews did not sow so that the earth could rest). To remedy this situation of shortage, economic aid for the Christians of Jerusalem was organized. Later, when the "first council" met in Jerusalem in the years 49-50, Paul promised to keep the Jerusalem brothers in mind during his missions among the pagans (Gal 2:10). Here, Paul exhorts the Churches in

Corinth and in the province to take up this collection which they had agreed upon.

Paul does not use the word *collection* in these chapters. Instead he speaks of the liberality and the greatness of generous giving; of the *blessed work of grace*. It is more a gift for the one who gives than for the one who receives.

Paul takes great care that the collection, involving large amounts, should be duly taken up: It must be taken and controlled by men who have the confidence of the community.

¹⁶ Blessed be God who inspires Titus with such care for you! ¹⁷ He not only listened to my appeal but he wanted to go and see you on his own initiative. ¹⁸ I am sending with him the brother who has gained the esteem of the churches in the work of the Gospel; ¹⁹ moreover they appointed him to travel with us in this blessed work we are carrying on for the glory of the Lord but also because of our personal enthusiasm.

²⁰ We decided on this so that no one could suspect us with regard to this generous fund that we are administering. ²¹ *Let us see to it that all may appear clean not only before God but also before men.* ²² We also send with them another brother who on several occasions has shown us his zeal and, now, is more enthusiastic because of his confidence in you.

²³ You, then, have Titus, our companion and minister to serve you and, with him, you have our brothers, representatives of the churches and a glory to Christ. ²⁴ Show them how you love, and prove, before the churches, all the good things I said to them about you.

More about the collection

9 ¹ It is not necessary for me to write to you about assistance to the saints. ² I know your readiness and I praised you before the Macedonians. I said, "In Achaia they are ready for the collection since last year." And your enthusiasm carried most of them along. ³ So I send you these brothers of ours. May all my praise of you not fall flat in this case! May you be ready, as I said, ⁴ if some Macedonians come with me; let them

not find you unprepared. What a shame for me – and perhaps for you – after so much confidence!

⁵ So I thought it necessary to ask our brothers to go ahead of us and see you to organize this blessed work you have promised. It shall appear as generosity and not as an imposed task.

⁶ Remember: he who sows meagrely will reap meagrely, and there shall be generous harvests for him who sows generously. ⁷ Let each one give what he decided upon personally, and not reluctantly as if obliged. *God loves a cheerful giver.* ⁸ And God is able to fill you with every good thing, so that you have enough of everything at all times, and may give abundantly for any good work.

⁹ Scripture says: *He distributed, he gave to the poor, his good works last for ever.* ¹⁰ God who provides the sower with seed will also provide him with the bread he eats. He will multiply the seed for you and also increase the fruits of your good works. ¹¹ Become rich in every way, and give abundantly. What you give will become, through us, a thanksgiving to God.

¹² For this sacred relief, after providing the saints with what they need, will result in much thanksgiving to God. ¹³ This will be a test for them; they will give thanks because you obey the requirements of Christ's Gospel and share generously with them and with all. ¹⁴ They shall pray to God for you and feel affection for you because the grace of God overflows in you.

¹⁵ Yes, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

19. Acts 20, 4; 1 Cor 16, 3

21. Pro 3, 4

3. 8, 24

6. Pro 11, 24

7. Pro 22, 8

9. Ps 112, 9

10. Is 55, 10; Hos 10, 12

13. Acts 2, 42

◆ Here again Paul speaks of the collection as if he had not done so in the previous chapter. Some think that at the same time Paul was

writing to the Corinthians to invite them to give (chap. 8), he wrote another message for the churches of Achaia, which was the prov-

Paul's defense and admonition

10 ¹It is I, Paul, who by the humility and kindness of Christ appeal to you. The Paul "who is timid among you and bold when far away from you!"

²Do not force me to act boldly when I come, as I am determined and will dare to act against some people who think that human motives lead me. ³Although I live in this world, I do not fight in a human way.

⁴Our weapons are not human weapons but, thanks be to God, they are powerful to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and haughty thoughts ⁵ which oppose the knowledge of God. We compel all understanding to obey Christ, ⁶and I am prepared to punish any disobedience when you should show perfect obedience.

⁷See things as they really are. If anyone is convinced that he belongs to Christ, let him consider that just as he is Christ's, so am I. ⁸Although I may seem too confident in the authority that the Lord gave me for building you up and not for pulling you down, I will not be put to shame for saying this. ⁹Do not think that I can only frighten you with letters. ¹⁰"His letters are severe and strong," some say, "but as he is, he has no presence and

he is a poor speaker." ¹¹To such people I say, "Be careful: what my letters say from afar, is what I will do when I come."

¹²How could I venture to equate or compare myself with people who proclaim their own merits? Fools! they measure themselves with their own measure and compare themselves with themselves. ¹³As for me, I will not boast beyond measure, for I will not go past the limits that the God of true measure has set for me: He gave the measuring stick when he made me set foot in your place.

¹⁴It is not the same when someone goes out of his field to where he has not set foot before. But I am he who first reached you with the Gospel of Christ. ¹⁵I am not making myself important where others have worked. On the contrary, we hope that as your faith increases, so too our area of ministry among you will be enlarged: without going beyond our limit. ¹⁶So we shall bring the Gospel to places beyond yours without entering into the field of others, or boasting and making ourselves important where the work is already done. ¹⁷*He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.* ¹⁸It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

2. Mr 11, 29; 1 Cor 2, 3; Phil 2, 1; 10, 11; 1 Cor 4, 21
8. 13, 3; Jer 1, 10 11. 10, 2; 13, 10 13. Rom 12, 3; Col 1, 25

4. 6, 7; Is 2, 13

5. 1 Cor 1, 12

15. Rom 15, 20

18. Jer 9, 25; 1 Cor 1, 31

ince of Corinth: this message may have been placed here later, at the end of the letter, because the theme is the same (chap. 9).

In 8:18 Paul may be referring to Luke: was his Gospel already written in the years 55-56?

o These chapters 10-13, where violence does not agree with the reconciliation previously expressed, may come from the letter Paul had sent before following the incident in which various members of the Corinthian community rebelled against him.

Those who do not accept Paul's authority say: His letters are strong, but as he is, he has no presence and he is a poor speaker (10:10). This is the only reference to Paul's physical ap-

pearance that we have in the New Testament.

However, his enemies' claim that Paul's personality was weak has no foundation when we think that this man disturbed one city after another.

Do not force me to act boldly (10:2). Paul claims his right and authority as an apostle. If the Corinthians are not convinced that he was sent directly by Christ, they should at least admit that it is from him they received their faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Paul speaks of his power and his weapons: in a threatening way. Surely the "power which destroys strongholds" is the Word of God. The Word of God gave birth to the Christian communities and gives them the power to stay!

11 ¹May you bear with me in some little foolishness! But surely you will. ²I confess that I share the jealousy of God for you, for I have promised you in marriage to Christ, the only spouse, to present you to him as a pure virgin. ³And that is my fear: the serpent that seduced Eve with cunning could also corrupt your minds and divert you from the sincerity which leads to Christ. ⁴Someone now comes and preaches another Jesus different from the one we preach, or you are offered a different spirit from the one you have received, with a different Gospel from the one you have accepted – and you agree!

⁵I do not see how I am inferior to those super apostles. ⁶Does my speaking leave much to be desired? Perhaps, but not my knowledge, as I have abundantly shown to you in every way.

Paul commends the apostle Paul

+ ⁷Perhaps my sin was that I have humbled myself in order to raise you, or that I gave you the Gospel free of charge. ⁸I called upon the services of other churches and served you with the support I received from them.

⁹When I was with you, although I was in need, I did not become a burden to anyone. The brothers from Macedonia gave me what I needed. I have taken care not to be a burden to you in anything and I will continue to do so. ¹⁰By the truth of Christ within me, I will let no one in the land of Achaia stop this boasting of mine.

¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows that I do! ¹²And I will continue to do so to silence any people anxious to compete with me and appear as equal to me. ¹³In reality, they are false apostles, deceivers disguised as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴It is not surprising: if Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, ¹⁵his servants can easily disguise themselves as ministers of salvation, until they receive what their deeds deserve.

¹⁶I say again: Do not take me for a fool, but if you do take me as such, bear with me that I may sing my own praises a little. ¹⁷I will not speak in the language of Christ, but in that of a fool, bringing my own merits to prominence. ¹⁸As some people boast of human advantages, I will do the same. ¹⁹Fortunately you bear rather well with fools, you who are so wise!

2. Jn 3, 29; Eph 5, 26; Rev 21, 2

3. Gen 3

4. Gal 1, 6

6. 12, 11; 1 Cor 2, 1

7. Acts 18, 3; 1 Cor 9, 12

9. Phil 4, 15

13. 2, 17; Phil 3, 2

16. 12, 6

united and alive in the face of opposition. The Gospel is "God's power," and when it is boldly proclaimed, the forces which oppose it collapse.

In this case, however, it is also a question of Paul's spiritual power. Naturally, we think of Paul's conviction, the power of his word, the awareness of his mission, all of which made an impact on the Corinthians. It is also in the nature of apostles and prophets to threaten at times, on behalf of God who intervenes in an obvious way to show they are right. Recall the case with Ananias and Saphira before Peter (Acts 5).

In comparing himself with his enemies and rivals, Paul underlines his authority as an apostle:

- Called by Christ.
- Founder of the community.
- Accredited in terms of all he suffered for Christ.

– Accredited in terms of his spiritual gifts, some of which were manifested among the Corinthians themselves.

– Although he does not mention it, Paul is in communion with the other apostles and with Peter (see Gal. 2:9).

As to the first point, in all his letters Paul says that one does not become an apostle merely through personal choice: one must have been sent by the Church. Today, with the multiplicity of sects and conflicting churches it is quite fitting to ask who gave a mission to their apostles.

+ Paul thinks he must remind them that he did not ask the community to support him. And yet, Christ had said: "The laborer is worth his pay." Paul had followed this saying of Christ on some occasions; at other times he had worked manually not to be a burden to the communities. In Corinth he had worked as a tent maker. About this see Lk 10:6; 1 Cor 9:14 and 1 Tim 5:17.



²⁰ You tolerate being enslaved, and exploited, robbed, treated with contempt and slapped in the face. ²¹ What a shame that I acted so weakly with you!

But if others are so bold, I shall also dare, although I may speak like a fool. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ? (I begin to talk like a mad-man) I am better than they.

Better than they with my numerous labors. Better than they with the time spent in prison. The beatings I received are beyond comparison. How many times have I found myself in danger of death! ²⁴ Five times the Jews condemned me to thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with a rod, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked, and once I spent a night and a day adrift on the high seas.

²⁶ I have been continually in hazards of travelling because of rivers, because of bandits, because of my fellow Jews, or because of the pagans; in danger in the city, in the open country, at sea; in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have worked and often laboured without sleep, I have been hungry and

thirsty and starving, cold and without shelter.

²⁸ Besides these and other things, there was my daily concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Whoever wavers, do I not waver with him? Whoever stumbles, am I not on hot bricks?

³⁰ If it is necessary to boast, let me proclaim the occasions on which I was found weak. ³¹ The God and Father of Jesus the Lord, – may he be blessed for ever! – knows that I speak the truth. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas placed the city under guard in order to arrest me, ³³ and I had to be let down in a basket through a window in the wall. In that way I slipped through his hands.

Extraordinary graces

12 ¹ It is useless to boast; but if I have to, I will go on to some visions and revelations of the Lord.

² I know a certain Christian: fourteen years ago he was taken up to the third heaven. ³ Whether in the body or out the body, I do not know, God knows. But I know that this man whether in the body or out of the body – I do not know, God knows – ⁴ was taken up to Paradise where he heard

22. Phil 3, 4; Gal 1, 13; Rom 11, 1 24. Dt 25, 2; Acts 16, 22 32. Acts 9, 23 2. Ex 33, 20; Rev 1, 17

APOSTOLATE AND CONTEMPLATION

■ In the following text Paul recalls the favours he received from God. These reveal a way of knowing God and being led and transformed by him which is different from what most Christians experience, but that does not make it exceptional.

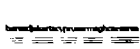
At times, God immediately takes over the spirit of his elect, as was Paul's case. At other times, God's interventions guide a person along a path of growth which, in fact, will lead to the same end, even to ecstasy when the individual no longer belongs to himself. This is the path of *contemplation*.

Oftentimes, we understand *contemplation* as a time dedicated to meditating on the things of God and discovering his presence in our lives. In this sense we oppose contemplation and action, and we say that the two must go to-

gether. But the word *contemplation* also refers – and more accurately – to a new, more direct relationship of our spirit with God.

In this contemplation, it is not we who discover God and love him, but rather it is God who imposes his presence, giving us evidence of the truth and of diverse truths, and elicits from us a return of love. Thus, contemplation is the most effective process of transformation of the person because God takes over our own freedom: see Jer 1:5.

This contemplation is a gift from God which no one can demand. Many people have, at some point, known the first signs of contemplation, but few have been called to enter (or are able to enter) into a way of life and of thought which would enable them to receive more. Let us point out some common stages on this path. First, we have the prayers – called *passive* – in which the



words that cannot be told: things which man cannot express.

⁵ Of that man I can indeed boast, but of myself I will not boast except of my weaknesses. ⁶ If I wanted to boast, that would not be foolishness, for I would speak the truth. ⁷ However, I better give up lest somebody think more of me than he actually sees in me or hears of me. Lest I become proud after so many and extraordinary revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a true messenger of Satan, to slap me in the face. ⁸ Three times I prayed to the Lord that it leave me ⁹ but he answered, "My grace is enough for you; my great strength is revealed in weakness."

Gladly, then, will I boast of my weakness that the strength of Christ may be mine. ¹⁰ So I rejoice when I suffer infirmities, humiliations, want, persecutions: all for Christ! For when I am weak, then I am strong.

¹¹ I have acted as a fool but you forced me. You should have been the ones commending me? Yet I do not feel outdone by those super-apostles, ¹² even though I am nothing. All the signs of a true apostle are found in me: patience in all trials, signs, miracles and wonders.

¹³ Now, in what way were you not treated like the rest of the churches? Only in this: I was not a burden to you – forgive me for this offense!

This is my third visit to you

◆¹⁴ For the third time I plan to visit you, and I will not be a burden to you for I am not interested in what you have but only in you. Children should not have to collect money for their parents, but the parents for their children. ¹⁵ As for me, I am ready to spend whatever I have and even my whole self for all of you. If I love you so much, am I to be loved less?

¹⁶ Well, I was not a burden to you, but was it not a trick to deceive you? Tell me: ¹⁷ Did I take money from you through any of my messengers? ¹⁸ I asked Titus to go to you and I sent another brother with him. But did Titus take money from you? Have we not both acted in the same spirit?

¹⁹ Perhaps you think that we are again apologizing; but no: we speak in Christ and before God, and I do this for you, dear friends, to build you up. ²⁰ I fear that if I go and see you, I might not find you as I would wish, and you in turn, might not find me to your liking. I might see rivalries, envy, grudges, disputes, slanders, gossip, conceit, disorder. ²¹ Let it not be that in coming again to you, God humble me because of you and I have to grieve over many of those who live in sin, on seeing that they have not yet given up an impure way of living, wicked conduct and the vices they formerly practised.

7. Mt 26, 39 9. Is 40, 29 10. Col 1, 24
19, 2, 17; 3, 1 20. Rom 1, 29; Gal 5, 20

12. 1 Cor 2, 4; 1 Thes 1, 5

15. Phil 2, 17

person feels invaded by the delightful sense of the divine presence. Then comes the spiritual union in which God begins to communicate himself without any thought, or felt love, but from spirit to spirit. Then, the ecstasy preparing the person for a total and ongoing union with God.

This divinization of the person by way of God's jealous love goes beyond all we can imagine and it demands very painful purifications which God himself achieves in those he most loves. In fact, it was granted in different degrees to the great apostles.

◆ This page concludes with Paul reasserting his authority.

There is a constant call for self-awareness: *examine yourselves, acknowledge*. When difficulties arise in the Church, it is not enough to resort to arguments. We must also seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Conflicts are not things involving only two persons and which can be solved between the two: they must be faced in the presence of Christ. Paul calls for reflection in common on the Word of God, for reflection alone in the presence of God. Both Paul and his opponents must trust one another and be convinced that others are also capable of sincerely seeking the will of God.

Note the "trinitarian" blessing in 13:14

13 ¹ This will be my third visit to you. *Any charge must be decided upon by the declaration of two or three witnesses.* ² I have said this and I say it again, just as I did on my second visit. Being still far away, I say to you who lived in sin as well as to the rest: when I return to you, I will not have pity. ³ You want to know if Christ is speaking through me? So you will. He is not used to dealing weakly with you, but he acts, rather, with power. ⁴ If he was crucified in his weakness, now he lives by the strength of God; and so we are weak with him, but God will reveal his power to us in making us live with Christ.

⁵ Examine yourselves: you are acting according to faith? Test yourselves. Can you assert that Christ Jesus is in you? ⁶ If not you have failed

the test. I hope you recognize that we ourselves have not failed it.

⁷ We pray God that you may do no wrong, not that we wish to be acknowledged but ⁸ we want you to do right, even if in this we appear to have failed. ⁹ We rejoice if we are weak while you are strong, for all we hope is that you become perfect. ¹⁰ This is why I am writing now, so that when I come I may not have to act strictly and make use of the authority the Lord has given me for building up and not for destroying.

¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, be happy, strive to be perfect, have courage, be of one mind and live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

¹³ The grace of Christ Jesus the Lord, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

1. Dt 19, 15; Mt 18, 16; 1 Tim 5, 19	4. Rom 6, 8	5. 1 Cor 11, 28; Gal 6, 4	8. 4, 10; 1 Cor 13, 6
10. 10, 8; Jer 1, 10	11. Phil 3, 1; 4, 4	12. 1 Cor 16, 20; 1 Thes 5, 26	14. Phil 2, 1

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

We all pretend to be free. But what does it **mean** to be free? Free men are those who, placed before any decision, do not consult their own interest, but are guided instead by a more profound inspiration from the Spirit of God who constantly invites us to be **better**. Every Christian should be "inspired" in that sense. Yet, two things threaten the "freedom that Christ gave us":

- On one hand, we let the enthusiasm we had when we encountered Christ and felt capable of anything for him, grow cold. And we begin to mould our lives according to practices which cannot replace the and authentic love.

- It may also happen that we become impressed by examples from different times or different contexts. And we imitate models of Christian life which do not coincide with what God expects of us, and so we do not come to Christ with all that we are and with all our values.

All of this is evident in the Letter to the Galatians. These pagans converted by Paul, later listened to Jews who thought they were disciples of Christ, but they had not understood the Gospel. The Jews were saying to them: "Faith in Christ, what a nice thing! But what is more



LETTER TO THE GALATIANS



1 ¹Paul, an apostle
sent not by men nor by human
mediation

but by Christ Jesus and by God, the
Father, who raised him from the dead,
to the Churches in Galatia.

²I and all the brothers who are with
me

³pray that you may receive grace
and peace from God our Father and
from Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁴He gave himself for our sins to
rescue us from this evil world, in ful-
filment of the will of God the Father.

⁵Glory to him for ever and ever.
Amen.

There is no other gospel

o ⁶I am surprised at how quickly
you have abandoned God who called
you according to the grace of Christ,
and have gone to another gospel.
⁷Indeed, there is no other gospel, but
some people who are sowing confu-
sion among you want to change the
Gospel of Christ.

⁸But even if we or an angel from
heaven should preach to you the gos-
pel in a way other than we have
preached, may he be cursed! ⁹As I
have said and now say again: if any-
one preaches the Gospel in a way
other than you received it, may he be

1. 1. 11; Rom 1, 1; Acts 20, 24; Acts 16, 16; 18, 23
Acts 15, 24

4. 1 Jn 5, 19; Acts 2, 40

7. 2 Cor 11, 4;

o Most of the Galatians converted to the
Christian faith were of pagan origin and they
had never practised the Jewish religion. How-
ever, they were in contact with other churches.
From these came those Jews, insufficiently con-
verted and unable to confront Paul, and who
started to preach after Paul had left. Some of the
believers listened to them and welcomed their
conservatism about Jewish rites.

Those disturbing Jews did not deny the mira-
cles, nor Jesus' parables, nor his resurrection.

But they did not understand that Jesus had come
to save all men equally; that the Jewish religion
was no longer effective, and that the privilege of
those who had been "the" people of God was
over. Thus, their preaching was not the Good
News for all men: it was another gospel.

*The gospel in a way other than you received
it.* The Gospel must be passed on just as the
apostles understood it and as the Church pre-
serves it. This is why Paul demonstrates that he
did not begin to preach on his own initiative, but

important to God is for people to observe all the religious laws and customs. And, besides,
knowing that Jesus belonged to the Jewish race, you should adopt the way of living, thinking
and praying of the Jews."

Paul wrote this very severe letter: "If you know Jesus crucified and you are guided by his
Spirit, what else do you need?"

Who were the Galatians? This unclear term may refer to the communities of Pisidia and
Galatia. Acts 13:22-14:25 and 16:1-6 deal with their evangelization.

cursed! ¹⁰For are we to please men or obey God? Do you think that I try to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Paul teaches what he received from God

+ ¹¹I want you to know, brothers that the Gospel we preached to you is not a human message, ¹²nor did I receive it or learn of it from man, but through a revelation from Christ Jesus. ¹³You have heard of my previous way of life, when I belonged to the Jewish community; I furiously persecuted the Church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴For I was more devoted to the Jewish religion than many fellow Jews of my age, and I defended the traditions of my fathers more fanatically.

¹⁵But you know that God called me out of his great love, he who *had chosen me from my mother's womb*, and was pleased ¹⁶to reveal in me his Son, that I might make him known among the pagan nations. I did not

seek human advice ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. I immediately went to Arabia, and from there I returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Later, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to meet Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. ¹⁹But I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰I say all this before God, he knows that this is true.

²¹After that I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²²The churches of Christ in Judea did not know me personally; ²³they had only heard of me: "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he tried to destroy." ²⁴And they praised God because of me.

Paul with the apostles

■ 2 ¹After fourteen years, I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and Titus came with us. ²Following a revelation, I went to lay before them the Gospel I was preaching to the pagans – and I had also a private meeting with the leaders – lest I should be working or have worked

10. 1 Thes 2, 4	12. Mt 16, 17	13. 2 Cor 11, 21; Acts 8, 1	14. Phil 3, 6; Acts 26, 4; Mt 7, 3
15. Jer 1, 1; Is 49, 1; Lk 1, 15	18. Acts 9, 26	22. Acts 9, 30; 11, 25	1. Acts 13, 2 2. Acts 15, 19

rather he was sent and his preaching is in agreement with the doctrine accepted by the Church: what we now call *Tradition*.

+ Paul's enemies criticize his authority: he is not an apostle like the ones Jesus selected. What Paul says here corresponds to what is mentioned in Acts 9. *He revealed his Son in me* (16). Paul did not only see Christ, but he discovered him intimately present within him. In the very moment he was called, he also understood the essence of faith in a definitive way.

The case of Paul, called directly by Christ, is special. Yet, we see that Paul did not impose himself in the Church. Christ sent him to Ananias to ask for baptism. After that, he joined Peter, the acknowledged head of the Church, and James, the leader of the Jerusalem church. This "union" or "communion" is indispensable in order to act in the name of the Church. But it is not the kind of obedience found in the army or between boss and subordinates. Paul says: *They acknowledged the graces God gave me* (2:9): that is to say, they admitted that the Holy Spirit was at work in Paul. The leaders of the Church

do not make decisions on their own, but they try to respond to the Holy Spirit who speaks through events.

■ *This meeting in Jerusalem is related in Acts 15 and its commentary is found there.*

When they became Christians, the Jews by race and religion, continued to observe the Law of Moses in which the great commandments (to know God, not to murder...), the rituals of worship, and national customs are combined. When people of different races began to be converted to Christ, Paul demanded that they should not be forced to follow the Mosaic Law. Naturally, they had to respect their neighbor and they were not to steal, but this emerges from the Gospel without having to impose the Mosaic Law.

Otherwise, you would have lost the truth of the Gospel (v 5). Because the Gospel frees men from all that limits their horizon, and their only obligation is to serve and imitate the Son of God.

It does not matter to me what they were before (v 6). Peter, James and John had no titles, or money or culture. They may even have

in a wrong way.³ But they did not impose circumcision, not even on Titus who is Greek and who was with me.⁴ There were some intruders and false brothers who had gained access like spies to see how we live the freedom Christ has given us. They would have us enslaved by the Law,⁵ but we refused to yield even for a moment; otherwise you would have lost the truth of the Gospel.

⁶ The others, the more respectable leaders – it does not matter what they were before: God pays no attention to the status of a person – gave me no new instructions.⁷ They recognized that I have been entrusted to preach the Good News to the pagan nations, just as Peter has been entrusted to preach it to the Jews.⁸ In the same way that God made Peter the apostle of the Jews, he made me the apostle of the pagans.

⁹ James, Peter and John acknowledged the graces God gave me. Those men who are regarded as the pillars of the Church stretched out their hand to me and Barnabas as a sign of fellowship; we would go to the pagans and

they to the Jews.¹⁰ The only thing they asked of us was to keep in mind the poverty of the brethren in Jerusalem; I have taken care to do this.

The conflict with Peter

◆ ¹¹ When later Cephas came to Antioch, I confronted him since he deserved to be blamed.¹² Before some of James' kinsmen arrived, he used to eat with non-Jewish people. But when they arrived, he withdrew and did not mingle anymore with them, for fear of these circumcised people.¹³ The rest of the Jews followed him in this pretence, and even Barnabas was led astray.¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting uprightly in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas publicly: If you who are Jewish agreed to live like the non-Jews, setting aside the Jewish customs, why do you now compel the non-Jews to live like Jews?

ο ¹⁵ We are Jews by birth; we are not pagan sinners.¹⁶ Yet we know that man is not made just and holy by the observance of the Law but by faith in

4. Acts 15, 24; Rom 16, 15	6. Dt 10, 17	7. Rom 1, 5; 15, 15	9. Mk 5, 37; 9, 2
10. Acts 24, 17; 1 Cor 16, 8; 2 Cor 8, 1	12. Acts 10, 28	14. Acts 15, 10	

been despised by more learned believers. Paul did not pay attention to that: he looks upon them only as the leaders of the Church.

◆ *In the church, Paul believes himself authorized to reprimand the supreme leader, the first pope. Jesus promised Peter that his faith would not fail but he did not say that he would never make a mistake.*

Jews did not eat with pagan non-Jews since, for them, it would have been something "impure," a blemish. But, when they had converted and entered the Church, if they had maintained this attitude toward their Christian brothers from another race, they would have kept an inadmissible division between men renewed by Christ.

Peter (or *Cephas*: see Jn 1:42) knows that now all people are equal and he accepts, for himself, not to take the Law into account. Yet, he is afraid of what his friends and his compatriots will think. He does not realize that, in order to please them, he is endangering the evangelization of those who are not Jewish. These people, in

being seen as impure in the Church, are no longer at home and then, they will have to adopt the whole Law of the Jews to be pure, stay away from their background and from their people. If they do not comply, they will be second class citizens in the Church.

We can easily see that this continues to be a problem in our days. At times Church leaders are people of a certain level. That does not mean that the faithful have to imitate their ways since the Church embraces all backgrounds.

The Church must do away with all class differences within it and fight against all discrimination so prevalent in our societies. We can easily observe that people belonging to rural or working classes are despised or marginalized when they cannot follow the ways and customs of well-to-do people. Because of this, many of them are ashamed of what they are: they have not come to authentic freedom.

ο Here Paul says that Jesus saves the Jews as well as other people and he insists on the importance of faith. This is exactly the same out-



Christ Jesus. So we have believed in Christ Jesus that we may receive holiness from faith in Christ Jesus, and not from the practices of the Law, because the observance of the Law does not make any mortal a friend of God.

¹⁷ We expected to receive holiness through Christ; if there were sin in this, Christ would be working for sin. Not so! ¹⁸ But if we first remove the observances and then restore them, we admit we did wrong.

¹⁹ As for me, following the Law, I finally died to the Law, that I may live for God. ²⁰ I am crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. I now live my mortal life through faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ If holiness could be reached through practice of the Law, Christ would have died for nothing.

We are saved by faith

3 ¹ How foolish you are, Galatians! Who has bewitched you even after Jesus Christ has been presented to you as crucified? ² I shall ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by the practice of the Law, or by believing what you heard? ³ How can you be such fools: you begin with the Spirit and end up with the flesh!

⁴ So you have experienced all this in vain! Would that it were not so!

⁵ When God gives you the Spirit and works miracles among you, does he do this because of your observance of the Law or because you believed in his message? ⁶ Remember Abraham: *he believed God who, because of this, held him to be a just man.* ⁷ Understand then that those who follow the way of faith are sons of Abraham.

⁸ The Scriptures foresaw that by the way of faith, God would give holiness to the non-Jewish nations. For God's promise to Abraham was this: *In you shall all the nations be blessed.* ⁹ So now those who take the way of faith receive the same blessing as Abraham who believed ¹⁰ while those who rely on the practice of the Law are under a curse, for it is written: *Cursed be he who does not always fulfil everything written in the Law.*

¹¹ It is plainly written that no one becomes righteous, in God's way, by the Law: *by faith the righteous shall live.* ¹² Yet the Law gives no place to faith, for according to it: *he who fulfils the commandments shall have life through them.*

¹³ Now Christ rescued us from the curse of the Law by becoming cursed himself for our sake, as it is written:

16. Rom 3, 22; Acts 15, 11; Ps 143, 2	19. Rom 7, 1; 8, 11	20. Phil 1, 21; Col 3, 3; Jn 13, 1;
Tit 2, 14	21. 5, 4	1. 1 Cor 2, 2
Rom 7, 7; James 2, 10	11. Heb 2, 4	6. Gen 15, 6; Rom 4, 3
	12. Lev 18, 5; Rom 10, 5	8. Gen 12, 3
		10. Dt 27, 26;
		13. Dt 21, 25; Acts 5, 30

line which Paul will develop four years later in chapters 2-8 of his letter to the Romans. See the commentary there.

If we first remove the observances... (v 18). Paul had taught them to be free from the pagan religion with its prejudices and its customs which they observed out of fear of the gods and of fate. And he was telling them that it was not a sin not to observe the Old Testament practices. But now they were going back to them again in order to feel more secure before a punishing God. It was not much fun to be circumcised and yet, they were doing it out of fear, just in case.

+ Once we have known Christ crucified, how and why could we abandon him? Paul did not know of more powerful arguments than to pres-

ent the crucified Jesus in order to convert pagans.

You begin with the Spirit and end up with the flesh (v 3). This phrase has a double meaning. First the Galatians experienced the working of the Holy Spirit and his miracles and now they want to receive the circumcision in the flesh. In another sense they started with the truth of God which was in Jesus: that is "the spirit." Now, they go back to Jewish observances which, though they come from God, are adapted to men of flesh, that is, unlearned and sinners.

Those who disturbed the Galatians said: you belong to Christ, but Christ is a descendant of Abraham and a Jew. Then, follow Abraham and do as the Jews do: and so, along with Christ, you



there is a curse on everyone who is hanged on a tree.¹⁴ So the blessing granted to Abraham reached the pagan nations – it was in Christ, and we received the promised Spirit through faith.

The Law and the fulfilment of the promise

■ ¹⁵ Brethren, listen to this comparison. When anyone has made his will in the prescribed form, no one can annul it or add anything to it.¹⁶ Well now, what God promised Abraham was for *his descendant*. Scripture does not say: *for the descendants*, as if they were many. It means only one: *this will be your descendant*, and this is Christ.¹⁷ Now I say this: the testament which God made in the prescribed form cannot be annulled by the Law which came four hundred and thirty years later; nor can it make void God's promise.¹⁸ But if the inheritance were now the reward for keeping the Law, it would no longer be a promise. However, Abraham received this promise as a gift from God.

¹⁹ Why then the Law? It came because of sin. But notice that it was something added; that it was only

valid until the descendant to whom the promise was addressed should come; and that it was put into effect by the angels with Moses as their mediator – ²⁰ there would not be a mediator if there were but one party, and God is only one.

²¹ Does the Law then compete with the promises of God? Not at all. Only if we had been given a Law capable of giving life, could holiness have come from the Law.²² But the written Law actually closed out every viewpoint other than that of sin. So the fulfilment of the promise is to be the fruit of faith for whoever believes in Christ Jesus.

We are sons and daughters of God

◆ ²³ Before the time of faith had come, the Law confined us and kept us until the time of faith should come.²⁴ The Law then was like the servant who brings the child to his master. It led to Christ, that we might become holy through faith.²⁵ With the coming of faith, that servant no longer commands us.

²⁶ By faith in Christ Jesus, all of you are sons of God.²⁷ All of you, through baptism in Christ, have put

16. Gen 12, 7

18. Rom 11, 16

22. Rom 3, 9; 11, 32; 2 Cor 3, 7

19. Acts 7, 38; 7, 53; Gal 4, 3; Col 2, 15; Heb 2, 2

24. Col 2, 17; Heb 10, 1

will be children of Abraham. Paul reports that one is not a son of Abraham, or a son of God by race: this is a point which he develops more in Romans 4.

Let us not think that such prejudices have disappeared. There are some who think they are Catholics because they have been baptized at birth: they forget that without faith, baptism is meaningless.

Holiness (3.8) or reconciliation with God. This is the meaning of the word *righteousness* as used by Paul.

■ We know that, in the Bible, *Testament* and *Covenant* mean the same: the Old Testament is the first covenant of God with men. Here Paul compares God with someone making a testament.

First God made a solemn covenant with Abraham. He did not demand anything of him, but he

made a promise to him. All that God expected to save them was that Abraham's children would trust him. After such an important initiative from God, the Law which the Lord gave to Moses later, did not really change the situation. Therefore, Paul says, most of the Jews are wrong when they are so concerned about observing the Law and so little concerned about opening their hearts

◆ In Paul's days, the children of rich families were under the care of a servant called "pedagog," that is: the one who guides the child. He would take the child to school but would not teach him. Here, Paul says: the Law was the servant, while the teacher is Christ. Conclusion: if Christ already taught, what is the use of going back to the Jewish observances?

With this we can understand v. 19: *with Moses as their mediator*. Paul does not consider

on Christ.²⁸ There is no longer any difference between Jew and Greek, or between slave and freedman, or between man and woman; but all of you are one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ And because you belong to Christ, you are of Abraham's race and you are to inherit God's promise.

4 ¹ But listen to me: In a house, the son is already the owner of everything, but as long as he is a child, he has no more power than a slave.² He is subject to those who care for him and who are entrusted with his affairs until the time set by his father comes.³ In the same way we as children were first subjected to the created forces that govern the world.⁴ But when the fulness of time came, God sent his Son. He came born of woman and subject to the Law,⁵ in order to redeem the subjects of the Law and to make us adopted sons and daughters of God.⁶ And because you are sons God has sent into your hearts

the Spirit of his Son which cries out: *Abba!* that is: Father!

⁷ You yourself are no longer a slave but a son, and yours is the inheritance by God's grace.

⁸ When you did not know God, you served those who are not gods.⁹ But now that you have known God – or rather he has known you – how can you turn back to weak and poor created things? Do you want to be enslaved again? ¹⁰ Since you again observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I fear I may have wasted my time with you.

I still suffer for you

¹² I ask you, brethren: do as I do, just as I became like you. You have not offended me in anything. ¹³ Remember that I was sick when I first announced the Gospel to you. ¹⁴ Although I was a trial to you, you did not despise or reject me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

27. Jn 1, 12; Rom 13, 14; Eph 4, 24	28. Rom 10, 12; 1 Cor 12, 13; Col 3, 11; Jn 17, 21
2. 3, 23	3. 3, 19; Eph 2, 21
6. Mk 14, 36; Jn 15, 15	7. Rom 8, 17
Col 2, 16	12. 1 Cor 9, 21; 1 Thes 1, 6
	4. 1 Cor 10, 11; Eph 1, 10; Heb 1, 2; Rom 7, 4
	8. 2 Cor 12, 2; 1 Thes 1, 9
	9. 1 Cor 8, 2; 13, 12;
	13. 1 Cor 2, 3
	14. Mt 10, 40

the Law something divine and eternal, dictated by God himself. He thinks that God let the angels in charge of diverse historical forces conclude with one another this temporary arrangement so that the law should fit a particular time and circumstances; then Moses had to reconcile their diverse demands. The same thought is expressed in 4:3. In short, the Old Testament already contains the divine truth, but it comes down to us through mediators who adapt it to their ways and obscure it.

As long as the son is a child (v 1). God made man to be free, holy, strong, in the image of Christ. But man is not born as an adult; he must be a child first. Similarly humankind has to go through infancy. There was a primitive society, a naive science, a simple culture, a provisional religion. Men remained "among slaves" and were subject to *created forces that govern the world* (Paul says: *the powers and principles*): the invisible forces good and evil as well as the principles and prejudices of primitive men. Now, through Christ, man must come to total truth. First, Christ liberated man from religious superstitions and from the errors of the pagans which prevented him from knowing the Father and from becoming his son.

From then on, man escapes those spiritual forces (or angels) which, for Paul, are almost confused with human institutions and cultures; and he receives the truth from God.

He came born of a woman and subject to the Law (4:4). Christ saves men because he is a man. Christ came first as the saviour of the Jewish people, and to save them, he became one of them. He received his whole background from the Law, namely, from the people and the religion of the Old Testament: this Law was highly positive. But time had passed and it was no longer possible to receive the fulness of the divine truth without *being redeemed from the yoke of the Law*.

We must see in this a fundamental disposition of the plan of salvation: God saves us by becoming one of us. The same is now true of the Church which saves people, rather than giving to them or "being interested in them." And the Church cannot bring them a permanent and transforming salvation if it does not share in their very condition.

This is the reason why the Lord wants the Third World churches to bear the cross of the people of their continents: their marginalization, their sufferings and humiliations, in order

¹⁵ Where is the joy of that time? For I can testify that you would have even plucked out your eyes to give them to me. ¹⁶ But now, have I become your enemy for telling you the truth?

¹⁷ Those who show consideration to you are not sincere; they want you to show interest in them, so that they may separate you from me. ¹⁸ Would that you were surrounded with sincere care at all times, and not only from me when I am with you!

¹⁹ My sons! I still suffer the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. ²⁰ How I would like to be with you now and speak to you personally, for I do not know what to say for the best.

The comparison of Sarah and Hagar

o ²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be under the Law again, do you know the Law? ²² It says that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman, the other by the free woman, his wife. ²³ The

son of the slave woman was born like any other human being; but the son of the free woman was born in fulfillment of God's promise.

²⁴ These two women mean two covenants. The first is the one from Mount Sinai, that gives birth to slaves, and is represented through Hagar, ²⁵ the slave woman (for Mount Sinai is in Arabia, the country of Hagar). On this covenant the present city of Jerusalem is based; she is in slavery with her children.

²⁶ But the Jerusalem above, who is our mother, is free. ²⁷ And Scripture says of her: *Rejoice, barren woman without children, break forth in shouts of joy, you who do not know the pains of childbirth, for many shall be the children of the forsaken mother, more than of the married woman.*

²⁸ Brethren, you are children of the promise, like Isaac. ²⁹ But as at that time the child born according to the flesh persecuted Isaac, who was born according to the spirit, so it is now.

19. 1 Thes 2, 11; 1 Cor 4, 15; Phlm 10
27. Heb 12, 22; Rev 21, 2; Is 54, 1

22. Gen 16, 15

23. Gen 17, 16

25. Jn 8, 33

to give them authentic salvation. When they are only middle-class churches following occidental or Roman patterns. Third World people cannot be saved.

You want to be enslaved again? (v 9). People grow tired of freedom. Some prefer to work without concern at the service of a boss and have no responsibilities in their cooperative. Many do not value a priest who invites them to make a conscientious decision for what is best. They prefer to be told: this is fine or this is sinful. Paul had told the Galatians: "You belong to Christ; let his Spirit guide you." But, to decide for oneself demands personal effort; it forces us to reflect and take responsibilities. Therefore, many Christians preferred to walk along well marked paths: they preferred to celebrate certain days, fulfil certain obligations and then be left alone with their little faith and weak love.

o *In the history of Abraham, the ancestor, Paul discovers the image of the conflict which puts him in opposition to the "Judaizers," that is to say, to those Christians who still hope to be saved by observing the practices of the Jewish religion.*

At the start of Sacred History is Abraham's

faith and the promise God made to him. It should be noted that this promise was not to be inherited in the same way as family goods, which had to be distributed among all the children including Israel *born like any other*. (Paul says: *born according to the flesh*) On the contrary, what God promised was only destined to *the son of promise*, Isaac: the one who was born through a miraculous and free intervention of God. Thus, from the very beginning of the Bible, we see that we do not come to faith and to God's inheritance because we have a right to them, but through grace.

By clinging to their religious observances, the Jews were forgetting that they were above all, *the people of the promise*. Chosen by God in preference over other people, their mission was to announce that there are promises of God for all nations. They were wrong in thinking: since we are chosen by God, let everyone do what we do and observe our practices. Instead they should have shared their hopes with others; they should have taught others to believe in God's promise and not to put their trust in particular religious practices.

Hagar, the slave woman who gave birth to Ishmael, the ancestor of Arabs, is the image of

³⁰ And what does the Scriptures say? *Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave cannot share with the son of the free woman.*

³¹ Brethren, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

+ 5 ¹ Christ freed us to make us really free. So remain firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. ² I, Paul, say this to you: if you receive circumcision, Christ can no longer help you. ³ Once more I remind whoever receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole Law. ⁴ All you who pretend to become righteous through the observance of the Law, you have separated from Christ and you have fallen away from grace.

⁵ As for us, the Spirit imparts to us this hope that we shall be holy through faith. ⁶ In Christ Jesus it is indifferent whether we be circumcised or not; what really matters is to have faith working through love.

⁷ You had begun your race well, whom then hindered you on the way?

Why did you stop obeying the truth?

⁸ This was not in obedience to God who calls you. ⁹ Even a little leaven affects the whole mass of dough.

¹⁰ Although I am personally convinced that you will not go astray, he who confuses you, whoever he may be, shall receive punishment.

¹¹ I myself, brethren, could I not preach circumcision? Then I would no longer be persecuted. But that would mean that I removed the scandal of the cross. ¹² Would that those who confuse you might go as far as mutilating themselves!

True freedom

■ ¹³ You, brothers and sisters, were called to enjoy freedom; I am not speaking of that freedom which covers up the desires of the flesh, but of that which makes you slaves of one another through love. ¹⁴ For the whole Law is summed up in this sentence: *You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* ¹⁵ But if you bite and tear each other to pieces, be careful lest you all perish.

30. 1 Thes 2, 14; Gen 21, 10	1. Jn 8, 36	3. Rom 2, 25; James 2, 10	6. 1 Cor 7, 19; James 2, 14;
1 Cor 13, 13	9. 1 Cor 3, 6	11. 1 Cor 1, 23	12. Phil 3, 2
			13. Rom 6, 15; 1 Pet 2, 16
			14. Mk 12, 31

those who received the Law on Mount Sinai, in Arabia: they did not achieve true freedom and they hold the earthly Jerusalem as their capital.

On the contrary, Sarah, the free woman, with her son Isaac born according to the divine promise, represents God's new covenant with those who believe in his promises. These are the free people, the Christians who wait for the heavenly Jerusalem.

Ishmael persecuted Isaac, and Abraham sent him away. This means: the inadequately converted Jews are disturbing the Galatians; the Church, then, has to send them away.

+ Paul and his opponents believe in the same Christ. Apparently they agree on almost everything. However, there is one point about which they disagree and which ruins everything: Paul does not maintain the obligation of being circumcised.

This is because, for Paul, there is no authentic preaching without openly advocating shocking positions. Since the Gospel is a message of liberation, the apostles must adopt an attitude

which shatters the usual way of living and thinking.

Such is the necessary scandal in all Christian behavior, which will never be as scandalous as was Jesus' death on a cross (see 1 Cor 1:17). To save men means, somehow, making them disloyal cover who they are before God, and then bringing them to confront the forces which kept them subject and alienated. This is why Paul was so aggressive in terms of Jewish practices. Following Paul, we could ask in our days: Who are those who give in to prejudices and alienating powers, and who are the persecuted? (5:11-6:12). Oftentimes, the Gospel is lived more authentically in Christian groups, politically aware and active than in groups limiting themselves to liturgical practices.

■ Once again, the Galatians had locked themselves in barren religious preoccupations since they only wanted to avoid God's reproaches, and that is self-centeredness. Christian life, however, is not like that. When we possess the Spirit of Christ, we are not concerned about sinning, but about loving. What matters to

¹⁶Therefore I say to you: walk according to the Spirit and do not carry out the desires of the flesh! ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh war against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are opposed to the flesh. Both are in conflict with each other, so that you cannot do everything you would like. ¹⁸But let the Spirit lead you, and do not be subject to the Law.

¹⁹You can easily recognize what comes from the flesh: immorality, impurity and shamelessness, ²⁰idol worship and magic, hatred, jealousy and violence, anger, ambition, division, factions, discord ²¹and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. I again say to you what I have already said: those who do these things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy and peace, patience, understanding of others, kindness and fidelity, ²³gentleness and self-control. For such things there is no Law or punishment. ²⁴Yet those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its vices and desires.

²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us be led by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not be conceited; let there be no rivalries or envy of one another.

Various counsels

6 ¹Brethren, in the event of someone falling into a sin, you who are spiritual shall set him aright with the spirit of kindness. Take care for you too may be tempted. ²Carry each other's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. ³If anyone thinks he is something, when in fact he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴Let each one examine his own conduct and he shall not boast before others, but will be zealous for his own progress. ⁵Everyone will answer for his own deeds.

⁶He who receives the teaching of the Word ought to share the good things he has with the one who instructs him. ⁷Do not be fooled. God cannot be deceived. You reap what you sow. ⁸The person who sows for the benefit of his own flesh shall reap corruption and death from the flesh. He who sows in the spirit shall reap

16. Rom 8, 5	19. Rom 1, 29	22. Eph 5, 9; 2 Cor 6, 6; 1 Cor 13, 4	23. 1 Jn 4, 17
24. Col 3, 3; 1 Pet 2, 11	26. Phil 2, 3	1. Mt 18, 15; 2 Thes 3, 14; James 5, 19	2. Jn 13, 14
4. 1 Cor 3, 18; 4, 7	6. 1 Cor 9, 11; Rom 15, 27	7. Pro 22, 8; 2 Cor 8, 6; 1 Cor 15, 35	

God is that we let go of our little problems and let his Spirit give us life. This is what Paul says here.

The believer who is truly free is the one who considers himself the "slave" of Christ. This is the way to "have faith" in daily life: to solve everything by thinking that we belong to Christ and that we are at the service of our brothers. From this attitude we derive joy and peace.

Paul gives a list of the things of the flesh and another of the fruits of the Spirit. Let us remember that *flesh* and *spirit* do not mean the same as *body* and *soul*. See the commentary on Rom 7, 16.

Note the communal aspect of this morality: we must be in solidarity with our brothers.

◆ At the moment of saying good-bye, once again, Paul speaks about the crisis in the community and we understand that it is not just a crisis concerning observance. There are people there *who want to stand out*. We immediately recognize some of the problems of our communities.

Those who want to impose circumcision upon them. These are members of the community itself. They are anxious to make an impression by gathering a group of Christians seemingly more serious and more religious because they are circumcised. As a matter of fact, this rite will enable them to be welcomed in Jewish homes – a good way to obtain connections and money. This will also distinguish them from the "common" Christians whose company is not very interesting.

Thus we see that the apparent search for perfection covers up their desire to feel they are in a better place and better considered in society. *They do not observe the Law, but they feel proud of these external practices which unite them.*

The world has been crucified to me. Paul has chosen a different way. He goes on his way, without a home, persecuted by some, despised by others, feared by those who cannot stand his example of complete abnegation, nor his gathering with so many people whom they consider inferior. This is to follow Christ to the cross.



eternal life from the Spirit.⁹ Let us do good without being discouraged; in due time we shall reap the reward of our constancy.¹⁰ So while there is time, let us do good to all and especially to our brethren in the faith.

I am crucified with Christ

◆ ¹¹ See these large letters I use when I write to you, with my own hand.

Who obliges you to be circumcised?¹² Those who are most anxious to make an impression, instead of risking persecution for the cross of Christ.¹³ Circumcised people indeed! they themselves do not observe the

Law, but they feel proud if you bear this sign in your body!

¹⁴ For me, I do not wish to take pride in anything except in the cross of Christ Jesus our Lord. Through him the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

¹⁵ There is no distinction between the circumcised people and the non-Jews, for a new creation has begun.¹⁶ Let those who live according to this rule receive peace and mercy together with the Israel of God! ¹⁷ Let no one trouble me any longer. For my part, I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ Brethren, may the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord be with your spirit. Amen.

10. 1 Thes 5, 15

11. 1 Cor 16, 21; Col 4, 18

13. Mr 23, 15

14. 2, 19; 2 Cor 12, 9

15. 2 Cor 5, 17; Eph 4, 24

17. 2 Cor 11, 23

18. Phil 4, 23

INTRODUCTION

Our present days are characterized by men's ever more concerted attempts at getting together and, at the same time, by the division of the world in large groups competing with one another. There is a confrontation precisely because, being unable to escape from the necessity to move toward unity, they still have different concepts regarding the final goal. Where does the world come from? Where is humanity going?

When imprisoned in Rome, the Western capital, Paul had the opportunity to listen to and evaluate doctrines coming from every part of the world. And he began answering questions in the letter to the Colossians.

But in the present *letter to the Ephesians*, which written after the one to the Colossians, Paul writes again, and more intensely, on the plan of God. The world has been created for us so that the New Man might emerge, to be a single family in Christ. All of human race will meet one another – each one in his own place – in the divine person able to embrace them all in boundless love.

The letter to the Ephesians takes up again many parts of the letter to the Colossians, but it seems to have been written in different circumstances.

Letter to the *ephesians*





Unlike Romans, Corinthians... Ephesians does not answer the concerns of a concrete community which knows the apostle and is known by him. It is rather a document sent to the churches for the believers to reflect on their own Christian identity. These people, many of whom have not known Jesus nor his apostles personally, must understand the central place of the Universal Church in the plan of God.

Was this letter written by Paul or by one of his assistants? Many persons think that Ephesians answers concerns proper of the first years after the death of the apostles (like the letters to Timothy and Titus). So it would be posterior to Paul's death. However, when we see the poor literary quality of the Christian writings in the first century and their insecure theology, we hardly believe that such a magnificent synthesis of Christian faith could have been made without Paul. In many parts Ephesians completes and counterbalances the genial views exposed in Romans.

1

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
to the saints in Ephesus.

To you who believe in Christ:

² receive grace and peace from God our Father and from Jesus the Lord.

o ³ Blessed be God, the Father of Christ Jesus our Lord,
who in Christ has blessed us from heaven
with every spiritual blessing.

⁴ God chose us in him before the creation of the world
to be holy and without sin in his presence.

⁵ From eternity he destined us in love
to be his adopted sons through Christ Jesus,
thus fulfilling his free and generous will.

This was his purpose: ⁶ that his loving kindness
which he granted us in his Beloved
might finally receive all glory and praise.

1. Rom 1, 1; Acts 9, 13
Jn 1, 12

3. Gal 3, 14

4. Jn 17, 24; 1 Pet 1, 20; 1 Jn 3, 1

5. Rom 8, 29;

o This first page of the letter to the Ephesians is the best global expression of the Christian mystery in the Bible. It also serves to balance Paul's great presentation in his letter to the Romans which could appear to center God's work in the tragedy of sinful man.

Blessed be God! Usually, Paul starts his letters with praises and thanksgiving. Here, however, the prayer is unusually lengthened: Paul gives thanks and at the same time he proclaims God's *mysterious plan* which he understood through a revelation (3:3).

His mysterious design (9). Actually Paul says: *this mystery*; but this word means God's design as to his creation. This design is rooted in God, or more precisely in the mystery of the three divine Persons. We know that from God the Father proceed the Son and the Spirit, and from him they receive his very divinity, the three being one only God. But, besides this communication and effusion of life within God, *from eternity* God the Father, or better expressed, the Divine Council wanted to communicate its

riches outside itself, to created beings: this is the mysterious design to which Paul is referring and which encompasses all of human history, profane as well as sacred. According to this plan, *adoptive sons* of God (5), capable of receiving his Spirit and of returning it to God, must be born and multiply in the universe, children who, in the end, will be gathered into one body (10).

God chose us in Christ (4). Note this expression *in Christ* on which we commented in 1Cor 1:4. Our election by God is twofold.

First, we understand that God creates us as sparks or images of his Son who is his authentic image and brilliance (Heb 1:1). Every creature comes from God through this Son in whom God contemplates his own richness and on whom all his love is lavished. In him, God the Father has known us from the beginning.

God creates us free and he knows that our frail freedom will not easily find the way to the filial answer which would be fitting. This is why he places the cross of Christ in the center of his creative design. All of history will be guided by

⁷ For in Christ we obtain freedom, sealed by his blood,
and have the forgiveness of sins.

In this appears the greatness of his grace,
⁸ which he lavished on us.

⁹ In all wisdom and understanding,
God has made known to us his mysterious design,
in accordance with his loving kindness in Christ.

¹⁰ This mystery was to come to effect in the fullness of time:
by uniting everything in Christ,
in heaven and on earth.

¹¹ God has set us apart in Christ,
we who were waiting for the Messiah.

¹² He who disposes all things as he wills
chose us to be his people
for the praise of his glory.

¹³ You, on hearing the word of truth -
the Gospel that saves you -
have believed in him.

7. Col 1, 13; Rom 3, 24 9. Rom 16, 25 10. Mk 1, 15; Gal 4, 4; Col 1, 16 11. Dr 7, 6 12. Is 46, 10

divine Wisdom according to a mystery of death and resurrection whose only goal is to lead us to perfection through our mistakes and our weaknesses. With the coming of Christ, who is the Wisdom of God, in his own death and resurrection, we have the manifestation of the love of the Father who called us (5).

In Christ, we obtain freedom, sealed by his blood (7). It does not mean that Christ shed his blood to make amends to his Father offended by sin, as if God were resentful as we are and as if he were hurt in his dignity. Paul is referring to a biblical law: the emancipation of slaves used to be signed in blood (Ex 21, 6).

Similarly, to free a person not living in truth, we have to show a genuine love, often in costly ways. To redeem us, the three divine Persons will manifest the vastness of divine love (6 and 8), each in a different way. First, the Son of God will surrender his life to the Father, sacrificing himself for his brothers. And then, the Spirit of holiness will be given.

Sealed with the Spirit (13). The Jews were branded, "sealed" in the flesh by the circumcision ritual which showed they belonged to God. Christians, on the other hand, had received the Holy Spirit who acted in them: from him come faith, hope and love, the many forms of service, the gift of knowledge, the miracles and the healings. These gifts are the most obvious proof that they have become children of God. These gifts are only a foretaste of all the marvels that God has in store for us.

Paul distinguishes something like two insights: God's plan in eternity (1-10) and its realization in time (11-14). The last two stanzas

correspond to two stages in Sacred history:

- *God has set us apart (11).* Paul speaks for himself and in the name of the Jewish people chosen to be the people of God.
- *You now... (13).* Here Paul means the pagan people like the Ephesians whom he is addressing. And so, the fullness of time had come, that is to say the time of the Gospel proclaimed to all men so that they could receive the gifts of the Spirit.

This page clarifies some essential points of faith.

From eternity he destined us (5). *Here the word predestination fits. Many - especially Protestants - have understood this term very differently from the way Paul uses it. While Paul presents a plan of the Father, eager to manifest the infinite love which he already shares with the Son and the Spirit, in all his creatures, such people only think about a stern and cold God who decides gratuitously (or even whimsically) that some will be saved and others will not. For them, many people have been destined to hell and they cannot avoid this fate; while others are chosen for heaven and they will be saved.*

Paul, however, does not have such an arbitrary decision in mind: instead he shows how God bestows a special love on those whom he calls to belong to Christ, a love different from the love he has for the rest of his creatures. The Bible has little to say about God's love for non-believers, but we must understand it in the light of the one he bestowed on us, choosing us to know Christ in his Church.

And, as promised, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit,
¹⁴ the first pledge of what we shall receive.

So God has liberated the people he made his own,
 for the praise of his glory.

God has put all things under the feet of Christ

+ ¹⁵ I have been told of your faith and your affection towards all the believers. ¹⁶ so I always give thanks to God, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ May the God of Christ Jesus our Lord, the Father of Glory, reveal himself to you and give you a spirit of wisdom, that you may know him. ¹⁸ May he enlighten your inner vision, that you may appreciate the things we hope for since we were called by God. May you know the great and glorious inheritance God sets apart for his saints; ¹⁹ may you

understand with what extraordinary power he acts in favour of us who believe.

²⁰ He revealed his almighty power in Christ when he raised him from the dead and had him sit at his right hand in heaven, ²¹ far above all rule, power, authority, dominion, or any other supernatural force that could be named, not only in this world but in the world to come as well.

²² So has God put all things under the feet of Christ and set him above all things, as head of the Church ²³ which is his body. He who fills all in all unfolds his fullness in the Church.

13. 1 Thes 2, 13; 2 Cor 1, 22; Acts 2, 33	14. Rom 5, 5	16. Col 1, 9	17. Jn 17, 3; 1 Jn 5, 20
20. Col 2, 12; 3, 1; 1 Pet 3, 22	21. Phil 2, 9	22. 1 Cor 15, 24; Col 1, 8; Ps 8, 6	

While Luther feels crushed by the justice of the Creator and tortures himself, doubting his own salvation, Paul invites us to see in the sacrifice of Jesus, not a love protecting some sinners from God's justice, but rather the clear manifestation of the love of a Father who created us, and who also called us.

If we cannot really understand how the perfect knowledge of God is reconciled with our own freedom, it is unfitting to entertain the doubts and anxiety of those who believe they are subject to fate or "the will of God" from which no one can escape. We are under the weight of a love and blessings (3) only awaiting our response. Predestination is nothing other than this mysterious plan of the grace of God, poured over all creation, similar to and according to the shared life of the three divine Persons: one God alone and a unique love (see commentary on Rom 9).

God chose us in Christ (4). This statement contradicts an error of those thinking that, at the beginning, God created man without giving thought to his possible fall, and only as a result of sin. God would have sent Christ to save the lost sinner.

It is not so: from the beginning Christ was in God's plan. From the beginning, there was a plan for creation, the coming of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. Therefore, the order of creation, the laws of life and the course of history are mysteriously connected with the order existing in God himself.

Christ... the Beloved (6). The preoccupation to "save ourselves" cannot be the basis of our faith. This would be a self-centered attitude like that of people who practise their religion in order to be healthy. In fact, Christ is not simply the instrument of our redemption, as if he came only to pay for our sins. The Son did not come merely to save us from sin, but primarily, to reveal the glory of the Father. And this is precisely why he went to his death. He gives back to the Father all that he receives from him; why would he come in the incarnation if it was not to be reduced to nothing, to surrender into the hands of the Father until the Father gives everything back to him?

+ I have been told of your faith and your affection. Paul delights in the faith of the Ephesians but, above all, he prays they may have hope which must be the source of their dynamism. He describes the stages of hope this way: to know the Father; to appreciate the inheritance set apart for his saints; to understand the power of God to bring us to realize these hopes.

Now, twenty centuries after Paul wrote, we discover how fruitful is this hope which does not make us forget our world, but which urges us to transform it. Paul lived in a world which looked upon hope as an illness. Every plan to transform men was considered illusory. In those days, the fear of death and the belief in blind fate paralyzed all efforts. On the contrary, believers experienced the power of the risen Christ in their lives,

By grace you have been saved!

2 ¹ You were dead through the faults and sins ² in which you once lived. You conformed to this world and followed the Sovereign Ruler who reigns between heaven and earth and who goes on working in those who resist the faith. ³ All of us belonged to them at one time and we followed human greed; we obeyed the urges of our human nature and consented to its desires. By nature, we were worthy of punishment like the rest of humankind.

⁴ But God who is rich in mercy revealed his immense love and ⁵ gave us life with Christ after being dead through our sins. By grace you have been saved! ⁶ And he raised us to life with Christ, giving us a place with him in heaven.

⁷ In showing us such kindness in

Christ Jesus, God willed to reveal and unfold in the coming ages the extraordinary riches of his grace. ⁸ By the grace of God you have been saved through faith. This has not come from you: it is God's gift. ⁹ This was not the result of your works, so you are not to feel proud. ¹⁰ What we are is God's work. He has created us in Christ Jesus for the good works he has prepared that we should devote ourselves to them.

Christ is our Peace

◆ ¹¹ Since you were born of pagan nations, remember this: the Jews who are called the Circumcised by being physically marked in their flesh, called you Uncircumcised. ¹² At that time you were without a Messiah; you did not belong to the community of Israel; the covenants of God and his

2. Col 2, 13; Jn 12, 31; 2 Cor 4, 4
11. Col 2, 11; Rom 9, 4

4. Ex 34, 6; Rom 5, 8
12. Col 1, 21

5. 2 Tim 2, 12

10. 2 Cor 5, 17

and so they responded. In Christian countries, there arose the conviction that in struggling for justice, overcoming sectarianism, developing culture, we already bring the world closer to "the fulness of Christ".

Far above all power (v 21). In Paul's days, Jews and Christians believed that angels and demons were supernatural powers responsible for ruling the world. They called them: *Rulers, Powers, Authorities, Dominion*, and Paul was saying to them: all these Powers are inferior to Christ. In our days, we express ourselves differently. Nevertheless, we see the universe subject to the laws of nature, to the forces of matter and of life. It is also subject to obscure forces: collective prejudices, vices and fanaticism. These ruled the world, preventing the emergence of man, until the coming of Christ: see Gal 3:23.

God has put all things under the feet of Christ (v 22). This means the same as the words of our Creed: "Jesus is seated at the right hand of God". It means that in rising, Christ, the God-Man became the First in the universe.

All things under his feet except mankind as Paul adds: He made him *head of the Church*. Christ acts differently in two areas: in the world, where he is the invisible center in charge; in the Church, of which he is the head, where he can show the riches of his Spirit.

■ The path of men without Christ leads to death.

By nature, we were worthy of punishment like the rest (v 3): this is the starting point of our lives, what we call original sin. On his own, man cannot reach God, nor deserve his favours. On the contrary, we are all rebels, people who neither follow their conscience nor God's calls, internally divided and at odds with one another. Thus, the death of our bodies which is the end of our lives, expresses our true situation: without Christ's love we are dead.

He raised us up with Christ (v 6). Actually an authentic conversion is experienced as a resurrection. Paul is saying more: while many believe that their lives are subject to blind fate, we, on the other hand, must believe beyond doubts in the fulfilment of God's merciful plan which goes beyond time and which has already raised us up with Christ. We are seated with him in heaven, that is to say, assured of victory.

◆ Before Christ, men were divided and they did not know our common Father. Since they were not mature enough for a quick unification in the true faith, God took that into account when he began to prepare Christ's coming. He chose a people and to avoid their being contaminated by the errors of the pagans, he separated them through a law which forbade their living together with other people. The Jews had to wash their hands when they touched something touched by a pagan. In the Temple, far from the Sanctuary, there was a patio open to the pagans and another one, near the Sanctuary reserved

promises were not for you; you had no hope and were without God in this world. ¹³ But now, in Christ Jesus and by his blood, you who were once far off have come near.

¹⁴ For Christ is our peace, he who has made the two peoples one, ¹⁵ destroying in his own flesh the wall – the hatred – which separated us. He abolished the Law with its commands and precepts. He made peace in uniting the two peoples in him, creating out of the two one New Man. ¹⁶ He destroyed hatred and reconciled us both to God through the cross, making the two one body.

¹⁷ He came to proclaim peace; peace to you who were far off, peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Through him we – the two peoples – approach the Father in one Spirit.

¹⁹ Now you are no longer strangers or guests, but fellow citizens of the holy people: you are of the household of God. You are the house ²⁰ whose foundations are the apostles and prophets, and whose cornerstone is Christ Jesus. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and rises to be a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you too are being built to become the spiritual sanctuary of God.

God's inheritance is for all

3 ¹ For this reason, I, Paul, came to be the prisoner of Christ for you, the non-Jews. ² You may have heard of the graces God bestowed on me for your sake. ³ By a revelation he gave me the knowledge of his mysterious design, as I have explained in a few words. ⁴ On reading them you will

13. 1 Thes 4, 13; Is 57, 19

14. Is 9, 5

15. Ezk 37, 1; 2 Cor 5, 17

17. Is 52, 7

19. Phil 3, 20; Heb 12, 22

20. 1 Cor 3, 9; Mt

16, 18; Rev 21, 14

21. Is 28, 16; 1 Pet 2, 8

22. 1 Cor 3, 16; 2 Cor 6, 16; Jn 2, 21

1. 4, 1;

Col 1, 24

3. Gal 1, 12

for the Jews, and a wall between the two. There came a time when this divisive line became the sign of all the barriers that Christ was going to destroy.

He taught them to practice coexistence, forbidden until then. Christ, put on the Cross by Jews and pagans, overcomes the hatred of all by a love which forgives and, once risen, he gathers all people to himself.

Thus, just as the cross is made of two pieces, one vertical, towards heaven and the other, horizontal, towards the earth, so peace goes in two directions: towards God and towards men. *He has made the two peoples one... and reconciled us both to God.* These are the two sides of only one thing, because violence among men is the other expression of our incapability to meet God.

Christ united them: that is to say, whether we like it or not, the Gospel will destroy all differences between men. And no matter how much segregation emerges in our societies, its laws and its institutions will collapse perhaps through violence, but better by being discredited through the sacrifices of its victims.

In one Spirit. The Spirit alone enables each person to be fulfilled in communion with others. Unity among men often means a single party, a single syndicate, with only one ideology. But the order imposed suffocates the personality of those who become resigned as well as of those who silence their opponents.

Unity in the church is not uniformity: believers do not come from a single mold. It is not a

matter of belonging to the same party or religion or syndicate: membership and opinions may be different as long as we are committed to seek together the truth and fraternal peace. The Spirit grants each person to be true to himself and to continue "in communion" with the brothers. This is how the "new man" is born: not as the work of politics or of any ideology, but as the work of God, since we are dealing with a *new creation* as Paul says.

You are of the house of God. In biblical language this means: to belong to God's family. From there, Paul moves on to another image: *you are the house*, namely, the true temple of God. The community of believers forms the temple, or better, it is being transformed into the temple of God.

United to his community by close bonds, the first century Christians were in danger of being marginalized by the human group among whom they lived. Now, on the contrary, many Christians are more concerned about solidarity with their culture which they want to promote and save: they will only achieve this if there is a Christian community supporting them: solidarity with one's culture cannot replace belonging to Christian community.

o *The prisoner of Christ.* Paul writes this letter from jail in Rome. He is not only prisoner "because of Christ", but also a prisoner of Christ: he cannot do anything other than make him known (1 Cor 9:16). Moreover, in prison Paul



have some idea of how I understand the mystery of Christ.

⁵ This mystery was not made known to past generations but only now, through revelations given to holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ The Gospel makes the non-Jewish people share the same inheritance in Christ Jesus, belong to the same body and receive the same divine promises. As for me, ⁷ I have become the minister of this Good News by the grace and gift of God who has worked in me with all his power.

⁸ Although I am the least among all the believers, this grace was given me: to announce to the pagan nations the immeasurable riches of Christ and ⁹ to make clear to all how the mystery, hidden from the beginning in God, the Creator of all things, is to be fulfilled.

¹⁰ Even the heavenly forces and powers will now discover through the Church the wisdom of God in its manifold resources, as the plan is being fulfilled ¹¹ which God designed from the beginning in Christ Jesus, our Lord. ¹² In him we receive boldness and confidence to approach God.

And finally, may you be filled even with the fullness of God.

¹³ So I ask you not to be discouraged at seeing the trials I endure for you, but rather to feel proud because of them.

+ ¹⁴ And now I kneel in the presence of the Father ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth has received its name.

¹⁶ May he strengthen in you the inner man through his Spirit, according to the riches of his glory.

¹⁷ May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith.

May you be rooted and founded in love.

¹⁸ May you be able to understand with all the believers the width, the length, the height and the depth in a word, ¹⁹ may you know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge.

²⁰ Glory to God who shows his power in us and can do much more than we could ask or imagine: ²¹ glory to him in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations for ever and ever. Amen.

5. Rom 16, 25; Col 1, 25

12. Heb 4, 16; 10, 19

1 Cor 13

8. 1 Cor 15, 9; 1 Tim 1, 15

15. 1, 17; Mt 11, 25

19. Col 2, 9

10. 1 Cor 2, 7; 1 Pet 1, 12; Rom 11, 33

17. Jn 14, 23; Rom 8, 11

18. Col 2, 2;

suffers as Christ (see Col 1:24). Thus, he can say that his suffering is "glory".

Paul emphasizes what he has meditated in jail, what seems most new in the work of Christ: This is the "mystery", or God's plan calling all people into becoming a single body, without any racial distinctions. Jesus had proclaimed this equality (Mt 20) but the early Christians did need several divine interventions to be convinced (Acts 10).

The heavenly forces (v 10): see com. on Gal 3:23 and Eph 1, 21. We would not be distorting Paul's thinking by saying that multinational directors, presidents and the great of this world are going to discover the true face of God who manifests his glory in his poor and his saints (2 Thes 1:10) through the Church.

+ *And now I kneel...* without further delay. Paul moves from his presentation to prayer. Such is the way of the inner man (16) who is not satisfied with thinking about God or talking

about him as if he were an object. The Spirit preserves in him the awareness of this Presence which gives him life. As St. Teresa said: "I carry the heart of my God and the God of my heart everywhere".

The Father from whom... has received its name... (v 15). Let us not forget that the Father is the source of the divine Being and in him are found the order and the mystery of the divine Persons. The Father is also the origin of all that exists, and fatherhood is a basic element of all order, whether in creation or in the Church.

Therefore, the family, with parental authority, is the basis of society, and *fatherhood* is also seen in the Church: the succession of bishops, the authority of the hierarchy not dependent on people's votes, are part of the divine order in the Church. A society which does not acknowledge fathers, and which scorns marriage, as well as "spontaneous" churches, are devious structures:

Which surpasses all knowledge (19). People



We shall become the perfect man

4 ¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of Christ, invite you to live the vocation you have received. ² Be humble, kind, patient, and bear with one another in love.

³ Make every effort to keep among you the unity of Spirit through the bonds of peace. ⁴ Let there be one body and one spirit, for God, in calling you, gave the same Spirit to all. ⁵ One Lord, one faith, one baptism. ⁶ One God, the Father of all, who is above all and works through all and is in all.

⁷ But to each of us divine grace is given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said: *When he ascended to the heights, he brought captives and gave his gifts to men.*

⁹ *He ascended.* What does it mean but that he had first descended to the dead in the lower parts of the world?

¹⁰ He himself who went down, then ascended far above all the heavens to fill all things. ¹¹ To some he gave to be apostles, to others prophets, or even

evangelists, or pastors and teachers. ¹² So he prepared those who belong to him for the ministry, in order to build up the Body of Christ, ¹³ until we are all united in the same faith and the same knowledge of the Son of God. Thus we shall become the perfect Man, upon reaching maturity and sharing the fulness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then no longer shall we be like children tossed about by any wave or wind of doctrine, and deceived by the cunning of men who drag them along into error. ¹⁵ Rather, with sincere love, we shall grow in every way towards him who is the head, Christ. ¹⁶ He gives order and cohesion to the whole body through a network of joints, each of the members performing its own function so that the body may grow and build itself in love.

Put on the new man

◆ ¹⁷ I say to you, then, and with insistence I advise you in the Lord: do not imitate the pagans who live an aimless kind of life. ¹⁸ Their understanding is in darkness and they re-

1. Phil 1, 27	4. 1 Cor 10, 17	6. 1 Cor 8, 6; 12, 4	8. Ps 68, 19	10. Phil 2, 7; Jn 3, 13;
1 Pet 3, 19	12. 1 Cor 18, 28; 1 Cor 14, 26	13. Col 1, 28	14. 1 Cor 3, 1; 14, 20	17. Rom 1, 18

do not come to union with God only through intellectual efforts or transcendental meditation, but through the kind of love of which Christ was the model and the focus.

■ Paul names enthusiastically all that we have in common through Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit. Having so much in common is a call to union, love and peace. There is still more: even particular gifts must be placed at the service of the community in the same way as stones or bricks of a building. And what is being built is not just any building, nor is it simply a temple (see chapter 2: 19-22), it is the *Body of Christ* or the *Perfect Man*, made up of the millions of members now forming humanity and those of the future. Some day, when all are united we will form this "Perfect Man" with countless members.

Jesus of Nazareth lived humbly until his death only once, but having been made the Head of humanity through his resurrection, he suffers everywhere; works in every field of human activity; gives his life in every possible way;

gathers in him every form of love, and lives the whole diversity of human existence in the person of his members.

Then, we will no longer be like children. Paul suggests that the Ephesians are still children, at least from time to time, when they allow themselves to be influenced by some trend of opinions. He invites them to become a mature community, capable of being led by the truth, and of building itself through love. We too will have to see what degree we have passed that age in which we needed the constant drive and direction of another: spiritually speaking, adults are those conscious of their Christian responsibilities because they really know the Son of God.

◆ *The old man and the new man.* This Pauline image opposes two lifestyles: both exist in society today and in each one of us to a certain point. On one hand, we can be carried away by greed to the point of silencing our conscience and hardening our heart in a mortal way; and on the other hand, Christ wants to transform and renew us through his Spirit. We all tend to be one

main in ignorance because of their blind conscience, very far from the life of God. ¹⁹ As a result of their corruption, they have abandoned themselves to sensuality and eagerly given themselves to every kind of immorality.

²⁰ But you did not learn this from Christ, ²¹ assuming that you really heard of him and were taught according to the truth that is in Jesus.

²² You must give up your former way of living, the *old man*, whose deceitful desires bring self-destruction.

²³ Let your mind be spiritually renewed ²⁴ and put on the *new man*, created by God in his likeness, in holiness proceeding from truth.

²⁵ Therefore, give up lying; let everyone speak the truth to his neighbour for we are members of one another. ²⁶ *Be angry but do not sin*: do not let your anger last until the end of day, ²⁷ lest you give the devil a foothold.

²⁸ Let the one who used to steal steal no more, but busy himself working usefully with his hands so that he may have something to share with the needy.

²⁹ Do not let even one bad word come from your mouth, but only good words that will encourage when necessary and be helpful to those who hear.

³⁰ Do not sadden the Holy Spirit of God. This is the seal with which you were marked while you wait for the day of salvation. ³¹ Do away with all quarreling, rage, anger, insults and every kind of malice: ³² be good and understanding, mutually forgiving one another as God forgave you in Christ.

Imitate God

5 ¹ As most beloved children of God, strive to imitate him.

² Follow the way of love, the example of Christ who loved you. He gave himself up for us and became the offering and the sacrificial victim whose fragrance rises to God. ³ And since you are holy, there must not be among you even a mention of sexual immorality or greed, or any kind of impurity: these should not be named among you. ⁴ So too for scandalous words, nonsense and foolishness,

22. Col 3, 9	23. Rom 12, 2	24. Gen 1, 26; Lk 1, 75	25. Zac 8, 16	26. Ps 4, 4	28. Acts 20, 34;
1 Thes 4, 11	29. James 3, 10	30. 1 Thes 5, 19; Is 63, 10	2. Mt 5, 48;	1 Jn 3, 16;	5, 25; Ps 40, 7

of these two persons, the old, ruined man, without hope and a slave to his egotism; or a person transfigured by love.

Which God created in his Likeness. God created man in his image, though the man who truly bears this image is the risen Christ, the victor over sin and death. He is the first of a new race of men. When we let go of the sin which disfigures us, when we follow Christ and live in his Spirit, we also share in this New Man (see also 2:15).

The white garment which is put on the adult at baptism means the change of life which he has undertaken. This renewal can also occur at the end of a retreat, or a seminar when the believer gives up an irresponsible and routine lifestyle "in order to put on Christ" through a more authentic and dynamic Christian life. This change can also be a slow process, day by day.

Old man, new man corresponds to other of St. Paul's formulation: to live according to the flesh, or to the Spirit (Rom. 8:5); to be children

of darkness, or of light (Eph. 5:8); to be slaves of sin, or to be free in Christ (Gal. 5:1). These are the two alternatives in life; the transition from one to other is what makes a Christian. To do so is always to die and to rise with Christ, in a spiritual way (Co. 3:1); to die to evil, to rise to goodness. Therefore, all the moral demands of Paul and the moral guidelines of the Church today are not an arbitrary code of ethics, but the natural and unavoidable consequence of the Christian alternative.

Do not sadden the Holy Spirit. This can be easily understood if we think about the sadness we feel every time we reject a good idea, an impulse to act in a better way under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or when a friend or a child has a mishap because he did not listen to the advice we gave him.

• Here are a few elements of a new way to live, as was already shown in the previous verses.

which are not fitting; instead offer thanksgiving to God.

⁵ Know this: no depraved, impure or covetous person who serves the 'god Money' shall have part in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty arguments for these are the sins which God is about to condemn in people who do not obey. ⁷ Do not associate with such people. ⁸ You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Behave as children of light; ⁹ the fruits of light are kindness, justice and truth in every form.

¹⁰ Train yourselves to do what pleases the Lord, ¹¹ and take no part in futile works of darkness; expose them instead. ¹² Indeed it is a shame even to speak of what those people do in secret. ¹³ but as soon as it is exposed to the light, everything becomes clear. ¹⁴ And what has become clear becomes light. Therefore it is said:

"Awake, you who sleep,
arise from the dead
that the light of Christ may shine
on you."

¹⁵ Pay attention to how you behave. Do not live as the unwise do, but as responsible persons. ¹⁶ Make good use of the present time, because these days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.

¹⁸ Do not get drunk: wine leads to levity; but be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Gather together to pray with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and celebrate the Lord in your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, always and for everything.

²¹ Be subject to one another out of respect for Christ.

Husbands, love your wives

+ ²² Let wives be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ The husband is the head of his wife, as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of whom he is also the Saviour. ²⁴ And as the Church submits to Christ, so let a wife submit in everything to her husband.

²⁵ As for you, husbands, love your

5. 1 Cor 6, 9; Heb 13, 4	6. Col 3, 6	8. 2 Cor 4, 6; 6, 14	13. Jn 3, 20	14. Is 26, 19; 60, 1
15. Col 3	20. 1 Thes 5, 18	21. 1 Pet 5, 5	24. Col 3, 18; 1 Pet 3, 1; 1 Cor 11, 3	

To imitate God (Rom 5:6-11) who loves everyone, the good and the bad (Mt 5:48). In a more tangible way we have a model in Christ, the Son of God, who gave himself out of love for us: as the way, the light and life.

To reject everything which shames us and is done only in darkness, or better, to be aware of the light which was given to us and to let it shine through our behavior.

To be more sensible and responsible in our lives. *Because these days are evil* (16): that means that if we cannot judge, choose, make a personal decision, the very current of daily events will keep us in mediocrity or will lead us to evil. Everything changes when a believer, a couple, a group 'awakens' and takes daily or weekly time out to discover what is God's will for them, in the time and circumstances in which they live, and then review what they accomplished and what they left undone.

Do not get drunk (18). Men need enthusiasm, happiness and strength: if they wish they can experience the enthusiasm, the happiness and the strength which the Holy Spirit gives. But

it is not possible to feel at the same time the elation coming from the Spirit and that which comes from alcohol, drugs and dangerous diversions.

Sing... giving thanks (19) and thus we shall also experience the consolation of the Spirit and find the same faith and the same experiences in others.

We can easily see that in the passage 5:21-6:9, Paul more or less repeats what he had written, shortly before, in the Letter to the Colossians (3:18-4:1). Nevertheless, when he speaks of everyone's "submission" to others, and especially the woman's submission to her husband's authority, he finds new thoughts, which he develops, about marriage.

+ *Wives be subject...* Paul does not emphasize that women must be submissive, but rather that they submit to their husbands as to the Lord. Given the fact that the society of the time kept a wife subject to her husband, Paul tells her: "Be submissive as to the Lord". Paul's language reflects the culture of his time with regard to marriage: if he wrote today he would phrase

wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.²⁶ He washed her and made her holy by baptism in the Word.²⁷ As he wanted a radiant Church without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless, he himself had to prepare and present her to himself.

²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ And no one has ever hated his body; he feeds and takes care of it. That is just what Christ does for the Church,³⁰ because we are a part of his body.

³¹ Scripture says: *Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother to be united with his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*³² This is a very great mystery, and I refer to Christ and the Church.

³³ As for you, let each one love his wife as himself, and let the wife respect her husband.

Children, parents, servants and masters

6¹ Children, obey your parents for this is right: ²*Honour your father and your mother.* And this is the first commandment that has promise: ³*that you may be happy and enjoy long life in the land.* ⁴ And you, fathers, do not make rebels of your children, but educate them by correction and instruction which the Lord may inspire.

⁵ Servants, obey your masters of this world with fear and respect, with simplicity of heart, as if obeying Christ. ⁶ Do not serve only when you are watched or in order to please men, but become servants of Christ who do God's will with all your heart. ⁷ Work willingly, for the Lord and not for men, mindful that the good each one has done, ⁸ whether servant or free, will be rewarded by the Lord.

⁹ And you, masters, deal with your servants in the same way, and do not

27. 1, 4; Tit 3, 5; 1 Cor 6, 11; 2 Cor 11, 2; Rev 21, 12; 19, 7
2. Col 3, 20; Ex 20, 12 4. Pro 13, 24

31. 1 Cor 12, 12; Gen 2, 24; Mt 19, 5

5. Col 3, 22; Tit 2, 9; 1 Pet 2, 18; Rom 6, 15

things differently. So the "feminist issue" in this long text about matrimony is irrelevant.

Paul is pointing out the essentials: the primacy of mutual love and respect in marriage; the mystical sense of marriage as embodiment (or sacrament) of Christ's love for the Church (for us). This New Testament doctrine on marriage should inspire Christians everywhere and of all cultural backgrounds.

In fact, there have been, there are and will be different cultural models of the place of men and women in marriage. Even nowadays the "model" differs in the West and in the East; in the "first" and the "third world"; in the middle classes and popular classes...

So, every couple must find its own balance and manage according to the capacities and natural authority of each party. Among Christians there is not room for the male prejudice of having women submit, nor must one feel inferior in adapting to the wishes of the other, since the ideal for everyone is to *serve others* (5:21).

As Christ loved the Church. He was the one who loved us freely, in spite of the fact that we were not better than others, the same way as a man and a woman choose each other, over others perhaps more gifted.

He gave himself up for her. Christ finds us in

our sins and he takes us in charge, even to the ultimate consequences: he gives his life to *purify* us. This is the way to show the main quality of Christian love, which is faithfulness. The self gift of the spouse is definitive and from that moment on, each will do his best to save the other, that is, to help the other grow and be better. The perfect couple is not the one that lives without problems and accepts mediocrity, but the two who compel each other to give one's best.

He washed her by the baptism in the Word (see Jas 1:18-21 and Jn 15:3). If the ritual is important, what is even more important is for us to welcome the Word of God which gives us life.

A man shall leave... (v 31). Paul refers this phrase to the union, beyond our understanding, of God and humankind in Christ: the bridegroom (Mk 2:19). But marriage also involves a *mystery*, that is, a divine wealth which could not be understood before Christ came. When we say that marriage is a *sacrament*, it does not only mean that we have a ceremony in a church: it means that marriage is going to be an image of Christ's love. The mystery of God's love is shown, in the midst of men, by couples who live love "according to Christ". Thus marriage is a "sacrament" or the image and presence of something holy. See Gen 1:16 and 2:22.

threaten them, since you know that they and you have the same Lord who is in heaven, and he treats all fairly.

Be strong in the Lord

◆ ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord with his energy and strength. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God to be able to resist the cunning of the devil. ¹² Our battle is not against human forces but against the rulers and authorities and their dark powers that govern this world. We are struggling against the spirits and supernatural forces of evil.

¹³ Therefore put on the whole armour of God, that in the evil day, you may resist and stand your ground, making use of all your weapons. ¹⁴ Take truth as your belt, justice as your breastplate, ¹⁵ and zeal as your shoes to propagate the Gospel of peace. ¹⁶ Always hold in your hand the shield of faith to repel the flaming arrows of the devil. ¹⁷ Finally, use the

helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of God.

¹⁸ Pray at all times as the Spirit inspires you. Keep watch together with sustained prayer and supplication for all the brothers. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, I may be given words to proclaim bravely the mystery of the Gospel. ²⁰ Even when in chains I am an ambassador of God; may he give me the strength to speak as I should.

²¹ I also want you to know how I am and what I am doing. Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. ²² I am sending him precisely to give you news of us and comfort you all.

²³ May peace and love with faith from God the Father and from Christ Jesus the Lord, be with the brothers and sisters. ²⁴ And may his blessing be with all who love Christ Jesus, our Lord, with undying love.

12. 2 Cor 6, 7; 10, 4 16. 1 Thes 5, 8; Is 59, 17
19. Rom 15, 30; Phil 1, 14 20. 2 Cor 5, 20

17. Heb 4, 12; Rev 1, 16 18. Col 4, 2; Lk 18, 1

The husband is the head of his wife. We already mentioned that Paul was referring to a predominantly male culture. But even so, a man had to fulfill his responsibilities as head of the household and he had to love his wife. Thus, this was a condemnation of men who let their wives bear the responsibility for the home, and then want to dominate them by force: such demanding and jealous attitudes are unworthy of a mature man and of a Christian.

Paul teaches that the model of married love is the love that Christ has for everyone, as well as for all gathered into one body. Thus, married people are invited not to lock themselves in their married love: they must find a way to help, promote and save their environment and the world, by radiating their authentic love and also through their commitment to the service of others.

■ It is obvious that Paul dislikes disorder and lack of discipline within families and also in communities. He gives parents solid principles of education: be patient, try to know and understand your child, and educate him in a Christian

way, according to the spirit of the beatitudes: without tyranny or laxity, the two pitfalls of formation. See com. on Sir 30:1-2.

Paul reminds the slave of his nobility and begs him to live with dignity, without servility: this is the first step toward genuine liberation.

◆ If so many youths and generous people abandon what they think is Christianity, could it not be because it seems to them that Christianity does not provide them with goals of action to match their energies? A faith which would cost nothing, justifying everything, would offer nothing about which to be excited and it would cease to be of interest. We must recover the fighting spirit of Christianity.

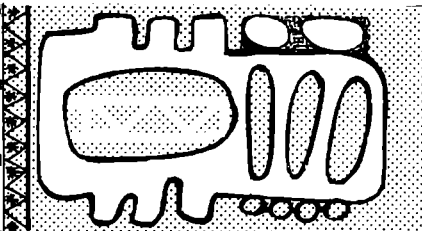
In following Christ who came to overthrow the "Prince of darkness", Christians know they will have to fight against this defeated king until the second coming of Christ. Persecutions, corruption in the Church, temptations to lose heart and betray, all come from the devil present everywhere. To fight against the devil, only the weapons Christ left us work: *truth, justice, zeal for the kingdom of God, faith, Word of God.*

letter

to

the

PHILIPPIANS



1 From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to the saints in Philippi, with their bishops and deacons;

to you all in Christ Jesus:

² May grace and peace be yours from God, our Father, and Christ Jesus the Lord.

³ I give thanks to my God each time I remember you, ⁴ and when I pray for you, I pray with joy. ⁵ I cannot forget all you shared with me in the service of the Gospel, from the first day until now. ⁶ Since God began such a good work in you, I am certain that he will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷ This is my hope for you, for I carry you all in my heart: whether I am in prison or defending and confirming the Gospel, you are with me and share the same grace.

⁸ God knows that I love you dear-

ly with the love of Christ Jesus, ⁹ and in my prayers I ask that your love may lead you each day to a deeper knowledge and clearer discernment, ¹⁰ that you may have good criteria for everything. So you may be pure of heart and come blameless to the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of holiness which comes through Christ Jesus, for the glory and praise of God!

Christ is my life

+ ¹² I want you to know, brothers and sisters that what has happened to me has served to advance the Gospel.

¹³ Actually, the whole praetorian guard, and even those outside the palace, know that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And what is more, my condition as prisoner has encouraged most of our brothers who are now emboldened to proclaim the Word of God more openly and without fear.

1. Acts 9, 13; 16, 1; 16, 12
James 5, 18; Jn 15, 8

6. 1 Cor 1, 8; 1 Thes 5, 24

10. Heb 5, 14

11. Heb 12, 11;

Reading this letter to the Philippians will be restful for us after the previous pages in which Paul taught and argued so forcefully. This is a real letter, more personal, considerate and tender than Paul, while in prison, wrote to the community which always showed him the most love. He gives them news about himself and asks them to live more united.

It is here that he wrote the very famous page: *Have the same feelings that Christ Jesus had.*

Paul accepted their material help, thus showing his great confidence in them. Usually, to avoid being called selfish, he refused to receive money and preferred to earn his living through his work while he was preaching.

Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. We do not know for sure if it was in Rome in the year 62 (when he wrote to the Ephesians and to the Colossians), or if he was imprisoned in Ephesus in 56.



¹⁵ Some, it is true, are moved by envy and want to challenge me, but others preach Christ with a good intention. ¹⁶ These latter are moved by love and realize that I am here to defend the Gospel. ¹⁷ The others announce Christ to challenge me. They do not act with a pure intention but think they are making my prison more unbearable. ¹⁸ But in any case, whether sincerely or not, Christ is proclaimed and because of this I rejoice and have no regrets.

¹⁹ I know that all this will be a grace for me because of your prayers and the helps given by the Spirit of Christ. ²⁰ I am hopeful, even certain that I shall not be ashamed. I feel as assured as I have been at any time that Christ will be exalted through my person, whether I live or I die.

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and even death is profitable for me. ²² But

if I am to go on living, I shall be able to enjoy fruitful labour. ²³ So I feel torn between the two. I desire greatly to leave this life and to be with Christ, which will be better by far, ²⁴ but it is necessary for you that I remain in this life. ²⁵ And because I am convinced of this, I know that I will stay and remain with you for your progress and happiness in the faith. ²⁶ I will surely come to you again, and give you more reason for being proud of belonging to Christ Jesus.

Stand firm in faith

■ ²⁷ Try, then, to adjust your lives according to the Gospel of Christ. May I see it when I come to you, and if I cannot come, may I at least hear that you stand firm in the same spirit, striving to uphold the faith of the Gospel with one heart. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of your opponents; your unity fore-

18. Job 13, 16 20. 1 Cor 6, 20 22. Gal 2, 20
 27. Eph 4, 3; Col 2, 5 28. 2 Thes 1, 4

23. 2 Cor 5, 6 26. 1 Thes 2, 19; 2 Cor 1, 14

o *With their bishops and deacons.* In Acts, we saw how the apostles used to establish a community, a church in every city where they had proclaimed the Gospel. They did not leave without having established a Council of leaders, called *presbyters* or *elders*, according to Jewish customs. After a few years, *bishops*, or, *super-visors* stood out: they may have been the leading members of the Council of Presbyters. They were not then, like today's bishop.

As to the *deacons* they were in charge of various services in the community. They may have done missionary work in areas which did not yet have a community.

Grace and peace! The Jews greeted one another with 'Peace!' and the Greeks did the same saying: 'Rejoice.' Now Paul addresses a community of Greeks and Jews, and he invents a new greeting to both of them by putting: *Grace* which sounds almost like 'rejoice' in his language.

God who began such a good work in you, will complete it (v 6). Such is Paul's hope, expressed in several of his letters (see 1 Cor 1:8).

Enabling you to recognize what is best (v 9). Believers know that faith does not solve everything. God calls them to find new roads through the problems coming up every day. In order to make progress, we need to reflect, to be attentive, what we call "revision of life" to discover what is positive and negative in what makes up

daily life, in our work relationships, social duties and entertainments. This is why Paul prays for them that they may have love and generosity, but also clarity and understanding.

+ We see the eminent apostle surrounded by envious people. Not only is he persecuted by the Jews, but in the Church itself the "false brothers," delighted to know that he is in jail, see in that very fact the possibility of becoming famous. All this can be compared to the situation of militants working unselfishly, but surrounded by others who have not overcome mediocrity.

I am hopeful and I am certain that I shall not be ashamed (v 20). Paul's concern is that his trial and his appearances serve to reveal Christ's message to the authorities.

For me to live is Christ. It is very fashionable to emphasize that Christians must "understand the world" and be "fully human." But this is only a part of the truth. Christians are not of this world and as soon as the love of God grows in them, they feel alien to this world because longing for Christ and for Eternity has taken root in them.

Paul longs to see them but has no desire to linger and have a good time sharing friendly meals with them. He longs rather for meeting Christ in his glory: see 2 Cor 4:16 and Phil 3:10.

I desire to be with Christ (v 23). Thus, those who say that a person ceases to exist at the time

tells their defeat and your victory. All this comes from God, ²⁹for through Christ you have been granted not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him. ³⁰And you now share the same struggle that you saw I had and that I continue to have, as you know.

Imitate the humility of Jesus

2 ¹If I may advise you in the name of Christ and if you can

hear it as the voice of love; if we share the same spirit and are capable of mercy and compassion, then I beg of you ²make me very happy: have one love, one spirit, one feeling, ³do nothing through rivalry or vain conceit. On the contrary let each of you gently consider the others as more important than yourselves. ⁴Do not seek your own interest, but rather that of others. ⁵Let what was seen in Christ Jesus be seen in you:

⁶ Though being divine in nature,
he did not claim in fact equality with God,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking on the nature of a servant, made in human likeness,
and in his appearance found as a man.
⁸ He humbled himself by being obedient to death,
death on the cross.
⁹ That is why God exalted him
and gave him the Name which outshines all names,
¹⁰ so that at the Name of Jesus all knees should bend
in heaven, on earth and among the dead,
¹¹ and all tongues proclaim that Christ Jesus is the Lord
to the glory of God the Father.

1. 2 Cor 13, 13	3. 1 Cor 1, 10; Rom 12, 3; Jn 13, 14	6. Jn 1, 1; Col 1, 15; Heb 1, 3
7. 2 Cor 8, 9; Mt 20, 28	8. Gal 4, 4; Heb 2, 17; Rom 5, 19; Acts 5, 8	9. Mt 23, 12; Jn 10, 17;
Eph 1, 20; Acts 5, 41	10. Eph 4, 10	11. Is 45, 23; Rom 10, 9; Acts 2, 36

of death and only recovers life in the resurrection, are wrong. See 2 Cor 5:8 also.

■ *Be united and speak boldly.* This is the advice Paul gives to the churches facing a strong opposition. Persecutors always try to divide us in order to be able to eliminate a few, accused or abandoned by their own brothers.

◆ In spite of their generosity and their faith, the Philippian believers are divided. Paul does not enter into the controversy but instead, he addresses everyone and gives them the secret of Christian life together: humility, not doing anything *through rivalry or vain conceit*.

In a hymn which is a sort of creed, Paul proposes the example of Christ: his path from God to man, from rich to poor, first to last, from master to servant.

The Lord Jesus desired to identify with the most humble, the most afflicted, the most despised. Such were Jesus' attitudes and they must be those of his followers, the Christians. Our desire to identify with the most humble, to share with them, is the guideline of a truly evangelical life.

In this, we must be different from most peo-

ple whose primary concerns are personal realization or apparently good ambitions which, in choosing the opposite path, Christ underrated.

He did not claim equality with God: the mystery of God's Son who becomes a mortal man and gives up God's Glory although he could have preserved it even in his human life. Since Christ was going to be the New Man, glorified by God and placed above everything, his being subject to misery and limitations was a way of being reduced to nothingness.

God exalted him. The humiliation and obedience of Christ were the condition of his glory; *He gave him the Name* (of God), that is, he made him fully enjoy in his human nature the divine Power (or Name).

◆ *Continue working out your salvation with fear and trembling.* It is not a matter of being afraid of God. Paul has just urged his readers to rejoice, since they no longer have a *spirit of slaves to make them fearful, but the spirit of sons* (Rom 8:15).

Paul, in fact, has just recalled Christ's sacrifice and he draws this conclusion: take your life very seriously (this is the meaning of fear and

o ¹² Therefore, my dearest friends, as you always obeyed me while I was with you, even more now that I am far from you, continue working out your salvation "with fear and trembling."

¹³ It is God who makes you not only wish but also carry out what pleases him. ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling, ¹⁵ so that without fault or blame, you will be children of God without reproach among a crooked and perverse generation. You are a light among them, like stars in the universe, ¹⁶ holding to the Word of life. I shall feel proud of you on the day of Christ on seeing that my effort and labour have not been in vain. ¹⁷ And if I have to pour out my blood as an offering to celebrate your faith, I rejoice and continue to share your joy; ¹⁸ and you likewise should rejoice and share my joy.

Paul's messengers

+ ¹⁹ The Lord Jesus lets me hope that I may soon send you Timothy, and have news of you. With this I will feel encouraged. ²⁰ For I have no one so concerned for you as he is. ²¹ Most follow their own interest, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But Timothy has proved himself, as you know. Like a son at the side of his father, he has

been with me at the service of the Gospel. ²³ Because of that I hope to send him to you as soon as I see how things work out for me. ²⁴ Nevertheless the Lord lets me think that I myself shall be coming soon.

²⁵ I judged it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, who worked and fought at my side and whom you sent to help me in my great need. ²⁶ In fact, he missed you very much and was still more worried because you had heard of his sickness. ²⁷ He was indeed sick and almost died, but God took pity on him and on me, sparing me greater sorrow. ²⁸ And so I am eager to send him to you, so that on seeing him you will be glad and I will be at peace. ²⁹ Receive him then with joy, as it is fitting in the Lord. Consider highly persons like him, ³⁰ who almost died for the work of Christ; he risked his life to serve me on your behalf when you could not help me.

Do not turn back to the Jewish law

3 ¹ Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord

■ It is not a burden for me to write again the same things, and for you it

12. 2 Cor 7, 15 13. Eph 2, 10; 3, 20; Heb 13, 2
17. 2 Tim 4, 6; Rom 12, 1; 15, 6 25. 4, 18

15. Dt 32, 5; Mt 5, 14; 1 Pet 4, 4
29. 1 Cor 16, 16 1. 1, 4; 2 Cor 13, 11

trembling: as does the one carrying with care a precious load). Be aware that God is at work in you through these good desires coming to you. Live in the presence of God.

+ Paul usually deals with personal matters at the end of his letters. Here he seems to interrupt the theme of the letter: the same happens in 3:1. Paul announces two visits to the Christians of Philippi.

Timothy is Paul's assistant; he is entrusted with several missions to the communities. It seems that Timothy did not have much authority and he could be easily humiliated by those disliking Paul's direction.

As to Epaphroditus, he was a Christian from Philippi who had left his family, spent his money and faced risks in order to go and visit Paul. The

community of believers must pay attention to its most committed members, with few means, in order to assist them. The Church sometimes presents as examples, militants from the working classes or peasants who were quite forgotten by their brothers in the faith during their lives.

■ *The discourse of Paul seems to be interrupted here. Paul begins a violent polemic against ill-converted Jews who keep repeating that one must first be faithful to the laws and customs of the Old Testament, in order to be a good Christian.*

Beware of the dogs...! (v 2) Paul applies to the Jews, proud of being the chosen people, the very insults which they reserved for non-Jews. Jews were sealed by the circumcision, but they mocked people of other religions who incised

is safer. ² Beware of the dogs, beware of the bad workers; beware of the circumcised. ³ We are the circumcised people since we serve God according to the spirit, and our confidence is in Christ Jesus rather than in our merits.

⁴ I myself do not lack those human qualities in which people have confidence. If some of them seem to be accredited with such qualities, how much more am I! ⁵ I was circumcised when eight days old. I was born of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; I am a Hebrew, born of Hebrews. With regard to the Law, I am a Pharisee, ⁶ and such was my zeal for the Law that I persecuted the Church. As for being righteous according to the Law, I was blameless.

⁷ But once I found Christ, all those things that I might have considered as profit, I reckoned as loss. ⁸ Still more, everything seems to me as nothing compared with the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake I have let everything fall away and I now consider all as garbage if instead I may gain Christ. ⁹ May I be found in him, without merit or holiness of my own for having fulfilled the Law, but with the holiness which comes

through faith in Christ, the holiness given by God which depends on faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁰ I want to know him; I want to experience the power of his resurrection and share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. ¹¹ May I attain the resurrection from the dead!

¹² I do not believe I have already reached the goal, nor do I consider myself perfect, but I press on till I possess Christ Jesus, since I have been pursued by him. ¹³ No, brothers and sisters, I do not claim to have reached my goal yet. I say only this; forgetting what is behind me, I race forward and run towards the goal, ¹⁴ my eyes on the prize to which God has called us from above in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let all of us who claim to be perfect have the same way of thinking, but if there is something on which you differ, God will make it clear to you. ¹⁶ In the meantime, let us hold on to what we have attained.

¹⁷ Unite in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and look at those who walk in our way of life. ¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. I have said it to you many times, and:

2. Rom 16, 17; Gal 6, 12

3. Col 2, 11; Jer 4, 4;

2 Cor 11, 21

5. Gen 17, 10; Acts 23, 6; Gal 1, 14

9. Mt 5, 20; Rom 10, 3; Gal 2, 16

10. 2 Cor 4, 11; 2 Tim 2, 11

12. 1 Jn 4, 10

13. Lk 9, 62;

1 Cor 9, 25

18. 2 Thes 3, 7; 1 Cor 4, 16

their skin.

Through what Paul says concerning his faithfulness to Judaism, we know something of his past. He was born in Tarsus to a Jewish family who had left their country and had settled there, in "Greek" territory, where they dedicated themselves to business. His parents were wealthy and well thought of since they had the dignity and the rights of Roman citizens (see Acts 22:28). Along with Greek culture, Paul received the religious education of the Bible and the Jewish people. He saw first hand the pagan feasts and sacrifices and he was proud of belonging to God's people, of being circumcised and instructed in God's promises to his race. His parents sent him to Jerusalem to study Scripture and the Law with the great masters of his time (see Acts 22:3).

He was a model strict Pharisee. He did not meet Christ but he did meet the early Christians. Because he was faithful to the religion of

his fathers, he believed it was necessary to persecute, imprison and even kill those men preaching a new doctrine, and deceiving – so he thought – the people, since they proclaimed a false, defeated and crucified Messiah.

Men who feel sure of themselves and who believe they are just before God are hard to convert to faith. Paul was such a man and he accepted *losing everything, considering it as garbage* (v 8).

Forgetting what is behind me (v 13). Differently from the Pharisee who feels secure before God in recalling his merits, because he belongs to the holy people and to the group of the good ones, because he observes the Law and does good deeds, Paul only wants to *forget*. Forget his worth and gains (according to men's judgment) to be a better recipient of the free grace of God; forget what he already knows about God; thus being open to new experience.

now I repeat it with tears: ¹⁹ they are heading for ruin; their belly is their god and they feel proud of what should be their shame. They only think of earthly things.

²⁰ For us, our citizenship is in heaven, from where we await the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Lord. ²¹ He will transfigure our lowly body, making it like his own body, radiant in Glory, through the power which is his to submit everything to himself.

Agree with one another and be happy

◆ ¹ Therefore, my brothers whom I love and long for, you my glory and crown, be steadfast in the Lord. ² I beg Evodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ And you, Sycyus, my true companion, I beg you to help them. Do not forget that they have laboured with me in the service of the Gospel, together with Clement and my other fellow-workers whose names are written in the Book of Life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice ⁵ and may everyone

experience your gentle and understanding heart. The Lord is near: ⁶ do not be anxious about anything. In everything resort to prayer and supplication together with thanksgiving and bring your requests before God. ⁷ Then the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, pure, lovely and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. ⁹ Put into practice what you have learned from me, what I passed on to you, what you heard from me or saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul's thankfulness

○ ¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord because of your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me before, but you had no opportunity of showing it. ¹¹ I do not say this because of being in want; I have learned to manage with what I have. ¹² I know what it is to want and what it is to have plenty. I am trained for both: to be hungry or satisfied, to have much or little. ¹³ I

19. Mt 6, 19; Col 3, 2

20. Eph 2, 6; Heb 12, 22

21. Rom 8, 19; 1 Cor 15, 51; Tim 2, 13

1. 1 Thes 2, 19
Lk 18, 1

3. Dn 12, 1; Rev 20, 12
7. Jn 14, 27; Col 3, 15

5. 3, 1; 1 Cor 16, 22
8. Rom 12, 2

6. Rom 13, 11; Eph 6, 18;

I want to know him. The greatest thing for Christians is not to perform miracles, or to speak in tongues, but to know Christ and to grasp the secret of his humiliation for our sakes. *I want to experience the power of his resurrection.* There are some people who would like to feel the presence of God and to see him in some way, but the way to experience his power which transfigures us, is by sharing in Christ's sufferings (2 Cor 1:3-5).

All of us who claim to be perfect (v 15). See what was said in 1 Cor 2:6. Paul speaks ironically again about those who believe they belong to a superior class of Christians, while he would not dare consider himself to be perfect (v 12).

Finally, he insists on the resurrection. Because we know that our bodies (or persons) will be raised and that the universe will be renewed, we must put passing things in their place: food, wine, sex, stop being idols.

◆ *Once again the theme is interrupted; this passage seems to be the continuation of 2:19-3:1*

The Book of Life (v 3) is among the Jews, a common image to mean those who will be saved (Rv 20:12).

Fill your minds with whatever is truthful (v 8). Paul said again and again that it is not enough to focus on the commandments to avoid what is forbidden. Instead, the Spirit teaches us constant creativity in daily life. In paying attention to all that is true, noble, ... we discover what we can do better. We focus on all that is good, wherever we find it, even among unbelievers.

○ Paul thanks the Church of Philippi for their help. He, who is so jealous of his independence and anxious not to seem to take advantage of others, under the pretext of religion, accepts what his real friends give him.



can do all things in him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ However you did right in sharing my trials. ¹⁵ You Philippians, remember that in the beginning, when we first preached the Gospel, after I left Macedonia you alone opened for me a debit and credit account, ¹⁶ and when I was in Thessalonica, twice you sent me what I needed.

¹⁷ It is not your gift that I value out rather the interest increasing in your own account. ¹⁸ Now I have enough and more than enough with every-

thing Epaphroditus brought me on your behalf and which I received a "fragrant offerings pleasing to God. ¹⁹ God himself will provide you with everything you need, according to his riches, and show you his generosity in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Glory to God, our Father, for ever and ever: Amen.

²¹ Greet all who believe in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me greet you. ²² All the believers here greet you, especially those from Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of Christ Jesus, the Lord, be with your spirit.

12. Heb 13, 5	13. 2 Cor 12, 9; Col 1, 29	15. Acts 16, 2	16. Acts 17, 1	18. 1 Cor 9, 11;
2, 17; Gen 8, 21; Heb 13, 16	22. 1, 13			

INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

Around the year 62, Paul, imprisoned in Rome, writes to the Colossae Christians who, without realizing it, are minimizing Christ.

They no longer feel secure in their belief in Christ and they want to add religious practices from the Old Testament: depriving themselves of eating certain foods, perhaps, of drinking wine, in order to be more perfect. Moreover, they begin to pay homage to "angels"; this is what they called the hidden forces which, according to them, determined men's destiny. They resembled some modern believers who trust in devotion to souls, or believe in astrology, or consult their horoscopes in order to know their destiny. And so, they no longer look upon Christ as the only Saviour and they prefer to trust in their efforts and sacrifices or in practices which do not belong to the Church.

The crisis of the Church in the first century gave us this letter where Paul explained the absolute supremacy of Christ. Is not something similar happening in our days? From burning issues as violence and peace are today, the message of Christ becomes deeper and clearer.

The letter to the Colossians, like other letters of Paul, mentions Timothy at his side (1:1). We know that from the beginning Paul chose him as his assistant and considered him as his "true son in Christ." Perhaps Timothy had a great part in the writing of this letter. This could explain at the same time that the style is very different from Paul's in his most authentic letters, and that, nevertheless, the content is so rich and so constantly faithful to the genuine pauline inspiration.

letter to the colossians



1 ¹ Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy our brother,

² to the saints in Colossae, our faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

³ Thanks be to God, the Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord!

We constantly pray for you, ⁴ for we have known of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints. Indeed you await in hope the inheritance reserved for you in Heaven, ⁵ of which you have heard through the word of truth. This Gospel ⁶ already present among you is bearing fruit and growing throughout the world as it did among you from the day you accepted it and understood the gift of God in all its truth.

⁷ He who taught you, Epaphras, our dear companion in the service of Christ, faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ has reminded me of the love you have for me in the spirit.

⁹ Because of this, from the day we received news of you, we have not ceased praying to God for you, that you attain the full knowledge of his will through all the gifts of wisdom and spiritual understanding.

¹⁰ May your lifestyle be worthy of the Lord and completely pleasing to him. May you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God.

¹¹ May you be strengthened with all the strength God is able to give you according to his glorious power, so that you may have great endurance and perseverance in joy.

¹² Constantly give thanks to the Father who has prepared us to receive our share in the inheritance of the saints in his kingdom of light. ¹³ He rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. ¹⁴ In him we are redeemed and forgiven.

1. 1 Cor 1, 1 3. Eph 1, 15 5. 1 Pet 1, 3
12. 1 Pet 2, 9; Acts 26, 18; Dt 33, 3; Wis 5, 5

7. 4, 12; Phlm 23 10. 1 Thes 2, 12
14. Eph 1, 7; Rom 3, 24

+ Paul, as usual, praises his readers. Actually, the reason for his writing is the information Epaphras gave him about the Colossians' concerns.

Epaphras, about whom Paul speaks, is a man from Colossae. When Paul was organizing the evangelization of the province of Ephesus (see Acts 19:26 and 20:4), he did not go to every city, but he would send his assistants. Epaphras of Colossae had announced the Good News and he had started to form communities in Colossae, and then in the neighbouring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (see Col 4:13). He was the man

who came to Rome to inform Paul of the difficulties.

Your faith... your love... in hope... Paul always joins these three Christian forces: to believe, to love and to hope.

The three either go together or are lacking. Here, Paul insists more on the fact that hope is the power which encourages us to believe and to love. The believers whom Paul was addressing, especially those who had been bored with paganism, became very enthusiastic when they discovered that life leads to great things and they were created to receive the very life of God.

Christ is the beginning of everything

- ¹⁵ He is the image of the unseen God,
the first born of all creation,
¹⁶ for in him all things were created,
visible and invisible:
thrones, rulers, authorities, powers...
All was made through him and for him.
- ¹⁷ He is before all
and all things hold together in him
- ¹⁸ And he is the head of his body, the Church;
he is the beginning
and was the first raised from the dead to be the first in everything,
- ¹⁹ for God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him.
- ²⁰ Through him God willed to reconcile all things with himself,
and through him, through his blood shed on the cross,
God establishes peace,
on earth as in Heaven.

15. Jn 1, 1; Wis 7, 26; Gen 1, 26

Phil 2, 6; Heb 1, 3; 1, 6; Rom 8, 29

19. 2, 9; Eph 1, 23; Jn 1, 16

16. Jn 1, 3; Heb 1, 2; 1 Cor 8, 6; Eph 1, 10; Pro 8, 22; 2 Cor 4, 4;

17. Jn 8, 58

20. Rom 5, 10; 2 Cor 5, 18; Eph 2, 14

18. Eph 1, 22; 4, 15; 5, 23

He transferred us to the kingdom of his Son. While the Colossians, following questionable preachers, are preoccupied with an invisible world of supernatural powers (see Eph 1:21), Paul simplifies the situation from the start: there is nothing other than the *power of darkness and the kingdom of Christ*.

■ Paul, then, shows that angels or invisible rulers (16) are of no account compared with Christ; he is not just any ordinary human saviour, since, before he came to save us, he was in God the creator. See the same in Hebrews 1.

Problems change through the years. Today, people do not believe that they are subject to *invisible rulers*, but to the multinationals: Christ is not compared with the angels, but with the great revolutionaries. But Christ is above them all.

He is the image of the unseen God. Let us not think that God is in human form beyond the clouds and that Jesus would be his image... Let us leave these fantasies to the Mormons for whom there is not a God, but each one of their gods has been a man before being glorified by a god before him. We know that God does not have a body and that he is Spirit.

However, Christ was in our midst as the image of the Father and of his mercy. His actions will teach us about God's way of thinking and doing.

Still more, we must add that before becoming man, the Son of God existed in God, as the eternal and invisible image of the eternal and invisible God, the Reflection of the Father (Heb 1:3), the Expression or the Word of God (Jn 1:1).

The firstborn of all creation. Christ is a creature through his human nature, a man born as a descendant of David. But his person is rooted in God and thus he appears among us as the model and the *Firstborn*, not of men, but of all creation. God *was pleased to let fullness dwell in him* who is like a bridge between God and the universe. The fullness of God is in him to be communicated to the universe; and the fullness of the universe will be found in him when all human beings are reconciled and reunited in him.

All was made through him: Jn 1:1 and Heb 1:2.

He was the first raised from the dead. Jesus did not die only to obtain the forgiveness of our sins. Being the Only Son, his vocation was to offer himself and to give up everything in order to receive back from the Father the glory which corresponds to him.

God willed to reconcile. Once again the work of Christ is presented as reconciliation: reconciliation between men (2 Cor 5:17-21) and reconciliation of the whole creation.

◆ *The body of Christ* is the place where the peace of all men with God, and peace between men can be achieved (Eph 2:11).

That you may be holy and blameless before him (22): see commentary on Eph 5:26.

I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. After Christ's death, something would be lacking in the salvation of the world, if Jesus followers and apostles did not, in their turn, meet with trials and sufferings. Working for the Church means suffering for the Church; to work

◆ ²¹ You yourselves were once estranged and opposed to God because of your evil deeds, ²² but now you have been reconciled. God reconciled you by giving up to death the body of Christ, so that you may be without fault, holy and blameless before him. ²³ Only stand firm, upon the foundation of your faith, and be steadfast in hope. Keep in mind the Gospel you have heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

²⁴ At present I rejoice when I suffer for you; I complete in my own flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church. ²⁵ For I am serving the Church since God entrusted to me the ministry of bringing into effect his design for you. ²⁶ I mean that mysterious plan that for centuries and generations remained secret and which God has now revealed to his holy ones.

²⁷ God willed to make known to them the riches and even the Glory that his mysterious plan reserved for the pagan nations: Christ in you and the hope of God's Glory.

²⁸ This is our preaching. We warn

and teach everyone true wisdom, aiming to make everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ For this cause I labour and struggle with the energy of Christ working powerfully in me.

Let Christ Jesus be your doctrine

ο 2 ¹ I want you to know how I strive for you, for those of Laodicea and for so many who have not met me personally. ² I pray that all may be encouraged. May you be established in love, that you may obtain all the riches of a full understanding and know the mystery of God, Christ himself. ³ For in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴ So let no one deceive you with persuasive arguments. ⁵ Although I am far from you, my spirit is with you and I rejoice in recalling how well disciplined and how firm you are in the faith of Christ.

⁶ If you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, let him be your doctrine. ⁷ Be rooted and built up in him; let faith be your principle, as you were taught, and your thanksgiving overflowing.

⁸ See that no one deceives you with

21. Eph 4, 18; 2, 1

22. Eph 5, 21

23. 1 Cor 15, 58; Mk 16, 15; 1 Tim 3, 16

24. Acts 9, 16; 2 Cor 4, 10

25. 2 Cor 3, 6

26. Mk 13, 10; Acts 20, 24; Eph 3, 3; Rom 16, 25

27. Eph 1, 18; Rom 5, 2; 8, 19

29. Phil 4, 13; Eph 3, 7

1. Rev 1, 11 2. Is 45, 3

5. 1 Cor 5, 3

8. Eph 5, 6; 2 Tim 4, 3; Mt 15, 6; Gal 4, 3

for the rule of justice is to suffer for the sake of justice.

His mysterious plan: see Eph 3:5. We must not forget that in those days, no one even thought of the common destiny of men: they did not even speak of humanity. Moreover, neither the Greeks nor the Romans looked beyond their actual existence. Paul is amazed by the generosity of God whose promises are for all people, without distinction (27). And we are offered nothing less than a share in the *Glory of God*, that is to say, all the riches found in him.

ο *I want you to know I strive for you.* Paul is referring to the difficulties of apostolic labour when you evangelize people in such a way that the Gospel frees them. On the contrary, it is quite easy to make Christianity into a religion accepted and blessed by everyone, a religion which does not transform believers nor attack the roots of evil present in the life of society. This

struggle means as much labour (1:28-29) as it does praying (4:2 and Rom 15:30).

So let no one deceive you. Paul already said that in Gal 1:7 and he will repeat it in his last letter (2 Tim 4:3). There are many ideologies passing through the world. Even people who know nothing of philosophy are influenced by trends of modern thought. Philosophies and ideologies are not necessarily bad: on the contrary, they always have some truth to them. The danger, however, is that they appear to give a total answer to our problems and, in so doing, they necessarily fail, because from the start, they ignore what there is in man: Christ alone reveals to us who we are.

What Paul is condemning is our accepting the *lights of this world* as definitive truth. Those ideologies are human doctrines and so, they are fallible, even when they want to replace science as is the case with Marxism: all of them are the

philosophy or any hollow discourse; these are merely human doctrines not inspired by Christ but by the wisdom of this world.⁹ For in Him dwells the fulness of God in bodily form.¹⁰ He is the head of all cosmic power and authority, and in him you have every-thing.

Baptized and risen

+¹¹ In Christ Jesus you were given a circumcision but not by human hands, which removed you completely from the carnal body.¹² I refer to baptism. On receiving it you were buried with Christ; and you also rose with him for having believed in the power of God who raised him from the dead.

¹³ You were dead. You were in sin and uncircumcised at the same time. But God gave you life with Christ. He forgave all our sins.¹⁴ He cancelled the record of our debts, those regulations which accused us. He did away with all that and nailed it to the cross.¹⁵ He stripped the rulers and authorities of their power, humbled them before the eyes of the whole world and dragged them as prisoners in the triumphal march of his cross.

Useless doctrines

■¹⁶ Let no one criticize you in matters of food or drink or for not observing festivals, new moons or the sabbath.¹⁷ These things were only shadows of what was to come, whereas the reality is the person of Christ.¹⁸ Do not let yourselves be robbed of him by those people who offer you a religion of fear and the worship of the angels. In fact, they only appreciate their own visions and are puffed up with their idle notions,¹⁹ instead of holding strongly to the head, Christ. It is he who nourishes and gives unity to the whole body by a complex system of nerves and ligaments, making it grow according to the plan of God.

²⁰ If you have really died with Christ, and are rid of the principles of the world, why do you now let yourselves be taught as if you belonged to the world? ²¹ "Do not eat this, do not taste that, do not touch that..."

²² These are human rules and teachings, referring to things that are perishable, that wear out and disappear.

²³ These doctrines may seem to be profound because they speak of religious observance and humility and of disregarding the body. In fact, they

9. 1, 16; Jn 1, 14; Eph 1, 21

14. Eph 2, 15; 1 Pet 3, 22

17. Heb 8, 5; 10, 1; Mt 11, 13

23. Mt 15, 9; Is 29, 13

11. Phil 3, 3; Rom 2, 25; Jer 4, 4

15. 2 Cor 2, 14

18. 1 Cor 8, 1

12. Rom 6, 4; 10, 9; Eph 2, 6

16. Rom 14; 1 Cor 8, 8; Gal 4, 10

19. Eph 4, 15

22. Cor 6, 13

products of their time and they disappear with time.

+ Paul does not want the Colossians to feel obligated to be circumcised and to live according to the Law of Moses. Since he himself was circumcised and lived under the Law, he knew from experience that these had not saved him.

It is not enough to remove a piece of flesh in circumcision: what must be removed is the whole *carnal body*. According to Paul, this does not mean to kill oneself, but it does mean to destroy egotism, meanness, greed, excessive self-confidence, where sin is found. For Christians, baptism replaces circumcision and it means the death of the carnal body. We choke the sinner within us and we emerge "risen" with Christ, from the water. Obviously, this death and resurrection are definitively achieved if we live

and die according to what takes place in baptism.

In some countries many people are baptized; but, in fact, baptism does not change anything in their lives. Generally speaking, these Christians do not belong to renewing communities. They still need to awaken, to experience a change in depth: they were baptized, but they were not raised.

He cancelled the record of our debt (14). In Jesus' crucified flesh the tyranny of the forces of evil ended: they were frustrated because violence exhausted its power against the one who refused to respond with violence.

Those regulations: the Law became useless (see Rom 6 and 7). The sacrifice of Christ opens a new age in which people are going to be liberated from all that weighs upon their destiny (Gal 4:3).

are useless in overcoming selfishness.

Seek the things that are above

◆ 3 ¹ So then, if you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things that are above, not on earthly things. ³ For you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, reveals himself, you also will be revealed with him in Glory.

⁵ Therefore, put to death what is earthly in your life, that is immorality, impurity, inordinate passions, wicked desires and greed which is a way of worshipping idols. ⁶ These are the things that arouse the wrath of God.

⁷ For a time you followed this way and lived in such disorders. ⁸ Well then, reject all that: anger, evil intentions, malice; and let no abusive words be heard from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to one another.

Put on the new self

o You have been stripped of the old self and its way of thinking ¹⁰ to put on

the new, which aims at perfect knowledge and is being renewed according to the likeness of its creator. ¹¹ There – no distinction between Jew and Greek, between circumcised and uncircumcised. There are no strangers, barbarians, slaves or free men, but Christ is all and is in all.

¹² Clothe yourselves, then, as is fitting for God's chosen people. Since you are holy and beloved of him, put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

¹³ Bear with one another and forgive whenever there is any occasion to do so. As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another. ¹⁴ Let all this be done with love; through it everything is united and made perfect. ¹⁵ May the peace of Christ overflow in your hearts; for this end you were called to be one body. And be thankful.

¹⁶ Let the word of God dwell in you in all its richness. Teach and admonish one another with words of wisdom. With thankful hearts sing to God psalms, hymns and spontaneous praise. ¹⁷ And whatever you do or say, do it in the Name of Jesus, the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1. Mt 6, 20; Phil 3, 20; Jn 3, 1

Gal 5, 24; Mk 9, 43

7. Eph 2

4. Gal 2, 20; 1 Thes 4, 17; 1 Pet 1, 7; 1 Jn 3, 2

8. James 1, 21; 1 Pet 2, 1

10. 2 Cor 4, 6; Gen 1, 26

11. Gal 3, 27; 1 Cor 12, 13

12. Eph 4, 1; Phil 2, 1

13. Jn 15, 12; Rom 5, 7

14. 1 Cor 13

15. Eph 3, 4

16. 1 Thes 5, 11; Eph 5, 18

17. Rom 14, 7; 1 Cor 10, 31

■ *Let no one criticize you.* Who is going to criticize us for celebrating Sunday with the Resurrection of the Lord instead of Jewish Sabbaths?

These doctrines may seem to be profound. People who are not freed from fear before God are always impressed by what is forbidden. But instead of being liberated and brought to the trust of God's children, these bans make their spirit gradually more narrow-minded.

Because they disregard the body. Our self-imposed penances and sacrifices can be a source of self-pride and of feeling superior to others.

◆ Here we have what was said about baptism (2:12) which joins us to Christ and makes us share in all his wealth. Since Christ left this earth, we leave it too: what is best in our lives, what makes us undertake is neither visible, nor is it of

the earth. God alone knows the riches of the believer's heart, even when his life seems tarnished by various faults and weaknesses: one day God will manifest the goodness, the "glory" which we do not yet see (see Mt 25:31-46).

o *See Ephesians 4:20-24 where Paul develops the same idea of the new man created in Christ and of the old man which must be abandoned.*

While the old self is self-centered, enslaved by passions, the new self is characterized by a communal attitude, a constant concern for others. He lives with a thankful heart.

+ Paul would not accept the attitude of many Christians who say: religion has nothing to do with what I do in my home, my work, my rest, or in politics. On the contrary, Paul insists,



On obedience

+ ¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as you should do in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not get angry with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, because that pleases the Lord. ²¹ Parents, do not be too demanding of your children, lest they become discouraged.

²² Servants, obey your masters in everything; not only while they are present, to gain favour with them, but with sincerity, because you fear the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly, working for the Lord, and not for men. ²⁴ You well know that the Lord will reward you with the inheritance. You are servants, but your Lord is Christ. ²⁵ Every evildoer will receive his due, for God does not make exceptions in favour of anyone.

4 ¹ As for you, masters, give your servants what is fair and reasonable, knowing that you yourselves have a Master in Heaven.

18. Eph 5-6	22. 1 Cor 7, 21; Tit 2, 9; 1 Pet 2, 18	25. Rom 2, 11; 1 Pet 1, 17	3. Eph 6, 18
5. 1 Cor 5, 12; 1 Thes 4, 12	6. 1 Pet 3, 15	9. Phlm	10. Acts 12, 12; 2 Tim 4, 11; 1 Pet 5, 13

Christians live all of this before the Lord, for the Lord and in the Lord.

This is why Paul preaches the same ethics to everyone: men, women, slaves (we would say to bosses and workers); all must be just, loyal and very respectful of others, even when they have faults. In the long run, these principles have had extraordinary consequences: the elimination of slavery, the decrease of polygamy even in non-Christian countries, the emancipation of young people in the choosing of a marriage partner, etc. We must struggle to obtain changes and to defend rights. Nevertheless, it is important that union or political militants be first competent and honest in their work, and moreover, just and fair in their struggle and faithful in their commitments. If not, they should not call themselves Christians.

■ All this is commented on in *Ephesians*, chapter 6:18-21.

Onesimus is a runaway slave who returns to Colossae with Tychicus after Paul converted him to the faith (see Letter to Philemon).

The evangelist Mark, now reconciled with

Further instructions

■ ² Be steadfast in prayer and even spend the night praying and giving thanks. ³ Pray especially for us and our preaching. May the Lord open a door for us that we may announce the mystery of Christ. Because of this I am in chains; ⁴ pray then that I may be able to reveal this mystery as I should.

⁵ Deal wisely with those who do not belong to the Church; take advantage of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be pleasing with a touch of wit. Know how to speak to everyone in the best way.

⁷ Tychicus will give news about me. He is our dear brother and for me a faithful assistant and fellow worker for the Lord. ⁸ I am purposely sending him to give you news about me and to encourage you. ⁹ With him I am sending Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of yours. They will inform you about everything that is happening here.

¹⁰ My companion in prison, Aristarchus greets you, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you

Paul (see Acts 15:38) is with him. Luke (14) mentioned here is the author of the Gospel and Acts.

We can see there was a lot of communications between churches of different places. Each one was not locked in its own community: had this been the case, within a short time, there would have been as many religions as there were churches. Quite to the contrary, they were conscious of being the Church of Christ, established in various places, but with one testimony concerning Christ, and that explains the interest the believers had to stay in close contact. At a time in which it seemed difficult to preserve unity due to the distances and differences among the peoples, the power maintaining unity – more than a rigid organization – was the profound sense all the people had that the church was a "community or a community enlivened by the Spirit of Christ."

Nowadays when we attempt to form "basic Christian Communities", we must also be careful to remain in contact and in harmony with other communities.



have already received instructions. If he goes to you, receive him warmly. ¹¹ Jesus, called Justus, likewise greets you. They are the only Jewish people working with me for the kingdom of God, and because of that they have been a solace for me.

¹² Greetings from your countryman Epaphras, a good servant of Christ Jesus. He constantly battles for you through his prayer that you be perfect and firm in whatever God asks of you. ¹³ I assure you that he is deeply concerned about you, as he is for the Laodiceans and those of Hierapolis.

¹⁴ Greetings from Luke, our dear doctor and from Demas. ¹⁵ Greet the brothers and sisters of Laodicea, not forgetting Nympha and the church gathering in her house.

¹⁶ After reading this letter, see that it is read in the church of the Laodiceans, and have the letter they received read in yours. ¹⁷ And tell Archipus, "Do not forget the ministry given to you in the Lord."

¹⁸ Greetings in my own hand, Paul. Remember that I am in chains. Grace be with you.



+ ¹ From Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and from our brother Timothy to Philemon, our friend and fellow worker, ² to our dear sister Apphia, to Archippus faithful companion in our

soldiering, and to all the Church gathered in your house.

³ Grace and peace be with you from God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lord.

12. 1, 27; Rom 15, 30 Gal 6, 11	14. 2 Tim 4, 11 Philemon 1. Col 4, 10; Phil 1, 7	16. 1 Thes 5, 27; Rev 1, 3 2. Rom 16, 5; 1 Cor 16, 19	17. Phlm 2 1 Cor 16, 19	18. 1 Cor 16, 2;
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Philemon from Colossae has a slave named Onesimus; a typical name for a slave since Onesimus means "useful" (see 11). Onesimus escapes and gets to Rome where he expects to disappear in the crowds. Accidentally or luckily, he meets Paul whom he had known in his master's house. At this point, Paul is imprisoned in Rome, but he enjoys certain privileges enabling him to go out in the company of a policeman. Onesimus is converted and baptized; then Paul makes him go back to his former master with the letter of recommendation that we read here.

Paul asks that the slave be seen as a brother and he even suggests that the slave be freed (v. 21).

We have already seen the advice Paul gives to slaves in Col 3:22. In those first years of the Church, obtaining God's life in Christ seemed such a tremendous privilege, providing such

inner freedom, that being a slave or being free did not matter greatly (see 1 Cor 7:17).

At that time no one thought that a change of social structure was feasible: there were slaves and there would always have to be slaves. The Christians were few and without any influence. Thus, they were not concerned about reforming society, nor about laws to eliminate slavery. But even before the time it became necessary to think about changing the laws, faith was already against treating slaves as "objects" or inferiors: because they were Christians, an increasing number of masters – in the church – spontaneously renounced their rights and granted freedom to their slaves.

Many people think that the Christian community has nothing to say concerning their responsibilities in society. Here, on the contrary, we see how Paul involves the whole community in Philemon's problem.

⁴ I never cease to give thanks to my God when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ for I hear of your love and faith towards the Lord and all the holy ones. ⁶ And I pray that the sharing of your faith may make known all the good that is ours in Christ. ⁷ I had great satisfaction and comfort on hearing of your charity, for you have cheered the hearts of our brothers.

⁸ Because of this, although in Christ I have the freedom to command what you should do, ⁹ yet I prefer to request you in love. The one talking is Paul, the old Paul, now prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ And my request is on behalf of Onesimus, whose father I have become while I was in prison.

¹¹ This Onesimus has not been helpful to you, but now he will be helpful both to you and to me. ¹² In returning him to you, I am sending you my own heart. ¹³ I would have liked to keep him at my side, to serve me on your behalf while I am in prison for the Gospel, ¹⁴ but I did not want to do anything without your agreement, nor impose a good deed upon you without your free consent.

¹⁵ Perhaps Onesimus has been parted from you for a while so that you may have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but better than a slave. He is a very dear brother to me, and he will be even dearer to you. ¹⁷ And so, because of our friendship, receive him as if he were myself.

¹⁸ And if he has caused any damage, or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this and sign it with my own hand: I will pay it... without further mention of your debt to me, which is you yourself. ²⁰ So, my brother, please do me this favour for the Lord's sake. Give me this comfort in Christ.

²¹ Confident of your obedience I write to you, knowing you will do even more than I ask. ²² And one thing more, get a lodging ready for me because, thanks to the prayers of you all, I hope to return to you.

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings. ²⁴ So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my assistants.

²⁴ May the grace of the Lord Christ be with you. Amen!

10. 1 Cor 4, 15; Col 4, 9	16. 1 Cor 7, 22; 1 Tim 6, 2	23. Col 4, 12	24. Col 4, 14
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INTRODUCTION TO THESSALONIANS

In the year 50, Paul arrives in Thessalonica, a major city and the capital of the province of Macedonia (see Acts 17:1). There, after being rejected by the Jews, he addresses his preaching to the pagans and he succeeds in forming a community. After barely three months, a riot caused by the Jews forces him to leave.

What is going to happen to these recent converts to whom Paul had taught the mere bases of Christian life?

Paul is quite concerned and he sends Timothy to see them and to strengthen their church. Timothy comes back with optimism and Paul, reassured, sends this letter at the beginning of 51.

This is the oldest writing of the New Testament.

1. letter to the THESSALONIANS

1 ¹From Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy to the church of Thessalonica which is in God the Father and in Christ Jesus.

May the peace and grace of God be with you.

²We give thanks to God at all times for you and remember you in our prayers. ³We constantly recall before God our Father the work of your faith, the labours of your love and your endurance in waiting for Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁴We remember, brothers and sisters, the circumstances of your being called. ⁵The gospel we brought you was such not only in words. Miracles, Holy Spirit and plenty of everything were given to you. You also know how we dealt with you for your sake.

⁶In return, you became followers of us and of the Lord when, on receiv-

ing the word, you experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit in the midst of great opposition. ⁷And you became a model for the faithful of Macedonia and Achaia, ⁸since from you the word of the Lord spread to Macedonia and Achaia, and still farther. The faith you have in God has become news in so many places that we need say no more about it. ⁹Others tell of how you responded to us and turned from idols to the Lord. For you serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and you wait for his Son from Heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who frees us from impending punishment.

The beginning of the church of Thessalonica

+ 2 ¹You well know, brothers and sisters that our visit to you was not in vain. ²We had been ill

1. Acts 15, 40; 16, 1; 17, 1

6. Phil 3, 17

8. Rom 1, 8

3. 5, 8; 1 Cor 13, 13

9. Acts 14, 15; Jn 17, 3

5. 1 Cor 2, 4; 2 Cor 12, 12

10. Mt 3, 7; 1 Cor 1, 7; Tit 2, 13

2. Acts 16, 20; 17, 1

o *Faith, endurance, love.* For us, sometimes hope (or, endurance) goes unnoticed between faith and love. For Paul it has two important meanings

- The person who hopes bears the trials and persecutions challenging his faith patiently and steadfastly. This is why Paul says: faith, endurance, love.
- The person with hope looks forward to the glorious coming of Christ who will judge this world and take us to the other. *He frees us from impending punishment.* In those years, all believers were convinced that judgment was imminent and that they would witness Christ's coming.

The gospel we brought you was not only in words (5). There were numerous signs, mira-

cles, and other revelations in Thessalonica: perhaps God planned it so because there were not competent people to assure the formation of believers.

In fact, we cannot preach the Gospel if Christian communities are not the place where people experience God's liberating power and concern for freeing all men. If this vitality of the Christian community were lacking, our "evangelization" would be merely preaching.

You became followers of us. The preacher's attitude confirms the truth of the message. Paul will come back to this point several times in this letter: he appeared as the holy, good, honest messenger, ready to give his own life (2, 8).

+ *Like a mother who feeds and cuddles her baby (7):* Paul's tenderness. But then, Paul re-

treated and insulted in Philippi, but, trusting in our God, we dared announce to you the message of God, and face fresh opposition. ³ Our warnings did not conceal any error or impure motive, nor did we deceive anyone. ⁴ But, as God had entrusted his Gospel to us as to faithful ministers, we were more anxious to please God who sees the heart, rather than men. ⁵ We never pleased you with flatteries, as you know, nor did we try to earn money, as God knows. ⁶ We did not try to make a name for ourselves among men, either you or anybody else, ⁷ although we were messengers of Christ and we could have made our weight felt.

On the contrary, we were gentle with you, as a nursing mother who feeds and cuddles her baby. ⁸ And so great is our concern that we are ready to give you, as well as the Gospel, even our very lives, for you have become our beloved brothers.

⁹ Remember our labour and toil; when we preached the Gospel, we worked day and night so as not to be a burden to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses with God that we were holy, just and blameless with all of you who now believe. ¹¹ We warned each of you as a father warns his son; ¹² we encouraged you and urged you to adopt a way of life worthy of God who calls you to share his own glory and kingdom.

¹³ This is why we never cease giving thanks to God for, on receiving our message, you accepted it, not as human teaching, but as the word of God. That is what it really is, and as such it is at work in you who believed.

¹⁴ Brothers and sisters, you followed the example of the churches of God in Judea, churches of Christ Jesus. For you suffered from your countrymen the same trials they suffered from the Jews ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and who persecute us. They displease God and harm all people ¹⁶ when they prevent us from speaking to the pagans and trying to save them. By doing so they are heaping up their sins but, in the end Judgment is coming upon them.

¹⁷ We are for a time deprived of your presence, but not in heart, and we eagerly long to see you. ¹⁸ For we have wanted to visit you, and I Paul, more than once; but Satan prevented us. ¹⁹ In fact, who but you are our hope and our joy? Who will be our glorious crown before Jesus, our Lord, when he returns? ²⁰ Yes, indeed, you are our glory and our joy.

Paul's concern

3 ¹ As I could no longer bear it, I decided to go alone to Athens, ² and send you Timothy, our brother and servant of God in the Gospel of Christ. I wanted him to en-

4. Gal 1, 10 6. Jn 5, 41 7. Gal 4, 19 9. 4, 11; 2 Thes 3, 7 12. 1 Cor 4, 15; Acts 20, 31
13. Jn 14, 10; Heb 4, 12 14. Acts 17, 23; Mt 23, 32 16. Gen 15, 16; Rom 1, 18 19. Phil 2, 16; 2 Cor 1, 14

calls the work and energy he spent to convince, to call each one personally. The conversion of a single person demands perseverance, weariness and struggles from the apostle.

All the Christians of Paul's time know that the mother Church in Jerusalem was the first in suffering heavy persecution. For the Thessalonians, it is also an honour to have remained steadfast in the face of persecutions. Some people will find Paul's words concerning the Jews harsh and exaggerated. Yet, they reflect his experience, verified in chapters 15-28 of the book of Acts.

■ *May the Lord increase your love for each other and for all people* (v 12). Love manifests itself first within the community and then it must be expanded to all people.

Also note Paul's constant preoccupation: his apostolic mission does not allow him to remain in any community. He is always moving, leaving his work unfinished, but he entrusts his converts to the grace of God which does not suppress their freedom of the recent converts nor the work of the Tempter in the world.

You know that such is our destiny (v 3). There is no church, nor Christian life without

courage you in the faith and strengthen you ³ so that none of you might turn back because of the trials you are now enduring. You know that such is our destiny. ⁴ I warned you of this when I was there: "We shall have to face persecution"; and so it was, as you have seen. ⁵ Therefore I could not stand it any longer and sent Timothy to check your faith and see if the Tempter had tempted you and made our work useless.

⁶ But now Timothy has just returned with good news of your faith and love. He told us that you remember us kindly and that you long to see us as much as we long to see you. ⁷ What a consolation for us, brothers in the midst of our troubles and trials, this faith of yours! ⁸ It is a breath of life for us when you stand firm in the Lord. ⁹ How can we thank God enough for all the joy that we feel before God because of you? ¹⁰ Day and night we beg of him to let us see you again, that we may complete the instruction of the believers.

¹¹ May God, our Father, and Jesus, our Lord prepare the way for us to visit you. ¹² May the Lord increase more and more your love for each other and for all people, as he increases our love for you. ¹³ May he strengthen you interiorly to be holy and blameless before God, our Father, on the day that Jesus, our Lord will come with all his saints.

A call to a life of purity and work

♦ 4 ¹ For the rest, brothers and sisters, we ask you in the name of Jesus, the Lord, and we urge you to live in a way that pleases God, just as you have learned from us. This you do, but try to do still more. ² You know the instructions we gave you on behalf of the Lord Jesus: ³ the will of God for you is to become holy and not to have unlawful sex.

⁴ Let each of you behave towards his wife as a holy and respectful husband, ⁵ rather than being led by lust, as are pagans who do not know God. ⁶ In this matter, let no one offend or wrong his brother. The Lord will do justice in all these things, as we have warned and shown you. ⁷ God has called us to live, not in impurity but in holiness, ⁸ and those who do not heed this instruction disobey, not man, but God himself who gives you his Holy Spirit.

⁹ Regarding brotherly love, you do not need anyone to write to you, because God himself taught you how to love one another. ¹⁰ You already practise it with all the brothers and sisters of Macedonia, but I invite you to do more. ¹¹ Consider how important it is to live quietly without bothering others, to mind your own business, and work with your hands, as we have charged you. ¹² In obeying these rules you will win the respect of outsiders and be dependent on no one.

4. Mt 10, 24; Heb 10, 32	5. Acts 14, 22; 15, 36	6. 2 Cor 7, 13	12. 5, 15; Gal 6, 10
13. 5, 23; 1 Cor 1, 8; Zac 14, 5	1. 1 Cor 11, 2	3. Mt 6, 10; Eph 1, 4	4. 1 Cor 6, 13
6. Dt 32, 35	7. Jn 17, 19	8. 1 Cor 6, 10; Lk 10, 16; Is 63, 12	11. 2 Thes 3, 6; Acts 18, 3

trials and persecutions.

♦ Once we believe in Christ, we must live by imitating him. The Jews who were baptized had the moral teachings of the Old Testament. On the contrary, the only moral guide the pagans had were the prevailing social rules. To them chastity seemed to be the strangest point. For them occasional sexual relations coincided with a biological need and had nothing to do with the demands of conscience. In all his writings Paul repeats: have no sexual activity outside of mar-

riage. It is in 1 Cor 6 that he insists the most by showing that our whole person is consecrated to Christ. In sexual relations the whole person surrenders and thus sins seriously in illicit unions.

Then, Paul touches a point which he will underscore at the end of this letter: let everybody work. The community is disturbed by men more inclined to show their enthusiastic faith than to work. They live off the church and they discredit the church in the eyes of the pagans. Paul does not approve a life of idleness.



Do not grieve as do the others

o ¹³ Brothers we want you not to be mistaken about those who are already asleep, lest you grieve as do those who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose; it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus. God will bring them together with Jesus and for his sake.

¹⁵ By the same word of the Lord we assert this: those of us who are to be alive at the Lord's coming will not be ahead of those who are already asleep. ¹⁶ When the command by the archangel's voice is given, the Lord himself will come down from Heaven, while the divine trumpet call is sounding. Then those who have died in the Lord will rise first; ¹⁷ as for us who are still alive, we will be brought along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the celestial world. And we will be with the Lord forever.

You are citizens of the light

+ 5 ¹ You do not need anyone to write to you about the delay and the appointed time for these events. ² You know that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When people feel secure and in peace, the disaster will suddenly come upon them as the birth pangs of a woman in labour, and they will not escape.

⁴ But you brothers, are not in darkness; so that day will not surprise you like a thief. ⁵ All of you are citizens of the light and the day; we do not belong to night and darkness. ⁶ Do not, therefore, fall asleep as others do, but remain alert and sober.

⁷ Night is the time to sleep for those who sleep and for those who get to be drunk. ⁸ Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and let the

13. Eph 2, 12; Col 1, 27

2. Mt 24, 36; 2 Pet 3, 10; Rev 3, 3

6. 1 Pet 1, 13; 5, 8

15. 1 Cor 15, 51

3. Jer 6, 14;

8. Is 59, 17; 1 Cor 13, 13

16. Mt 24, 30; Jn 5, 28

Lk 21, 36

17. Jn 17, 24

1. Acts 1, 7

5. Rom 13, 12; Eph 5, 9

o *Lest you grieve as do those who have no hope.* The Thessalonian community is made up of Christians who are all recent converts with little experience. For years they had accepted the fate of men who are born to die. Now, on the contrary, they awaken each day with the assurance of overcoming death: Christ will come soon and take them to the heavenly Kingdom. But they are grieved over their dead relatives whom Christ will not be able to save. This is the way they thought because people steeped in Greek culture had difficulties believing in a resurrection of the dead.

Those who are already asleep. Those who have died are not dead, but they are asleep, waiting for the time of the resurrection, the time of rising as new persons transformed by Christ: we will all be transformed. The word "cemetery" comes from a word meaning *sleeping place*.

We will be brought along with them in the clouds. Paul presupposes that he and his readers will still be alive when Christ comes and he describes the event in the thought patterns of his days: they believed that God was above.

We will be with the Lord forever. Paul goes to the heart of the matter: we will share Christ's destiny. We will enjoy intimacy with God because the whole person will have been purified and transformed by the power emerging from

the risen Christ. See 1 Cor 15 on that point: there Paul gives us a hint of what the resurrection of the body – or better, of the whole person – will be like.

Comfort one another. The way to celebrate funerals in the Church must comfort the dead person's relatives and strengthen their faith in the resurrection. There is no room for expressions of despair and sadness which Jesus himself scorned (see Mk 5:40): these are peculiar to people who consider the separation to be final. A funeral mass without any spectacular display, when the fervent prayer of the community is experienced produces a great impact on people who are indifferent.

+ Christ comes at night and believers are children of the light. These words are rich in teachings. Those who follow their evil desires are people of darkness, hiding to do evil. On the contrary, children of the light are beyond reproach, transparent before God and with nothing to hide from him. The unbeliever sleeps and is off-guard while the believer keeps watch and stays awake: he likes to pray all night along until dawn as if waiting for the day to welcome Christ. As for those who have died, they are not dead: they are only "asleep", ready to rise when the Lord comes.

Encourage one another and build up one



hope of salvation be our helmet. ⁹ For God has not willed us to be condemned but to win salvation through Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹⁰ He died for us so that we might enter into life with him, whether we are still awake or already asleep. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, as you are doing now.

¹² Brothers and sisters, I want you to be thankful to those who labour among you, who counsel you and lead you in the way of the Lord. ¹³ Esteem them highly and love them for what they are doing. Live in peace among yourselves.

¹⁴ We urge you to warn the idle, encourage those who feel discouraged, sustain the weak, have patience with everyone. ¹⁵ See that no one repays evil for evil, but try to do good, whether among yourselves or towards others.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing ¹⁸ and give thanks to God at every moment. This is the will of God, your vocation as Christians.

■ ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit, ²⁰ do not despise the prophets' warnings. ²¹ Put everything to the test and hold fast to what is good. ²² Avoid evil, wherever it may be.

²³ May the God of Peace make you holy and bring you to perfection. May you be completely blameless, in spirit, soul and body, till the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord; ²⁴ he who called you is faithful and will do it.

²⁵ Brothers and sisters, pray for us. ²⁶ Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I order you in the name of the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers.

²⁸ May the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord be with you.

12. Heb 13, 17; 1 Tim 5, 17

13. Gal 6, 6

15. Mt 5, 44; Rom 12, 17

24. 1 Cor 1, 9

another (v 11). Here the Church appears as the true community needed by believers to grow in faith and to overcome trials. In very difficulty, the help of the brothers will be the proof that we are surrounded by the love of God and of Christ, as was said in the first line of the letter.

According to verse 12, after only three months of evangelization, this community already had people in charge.

■ *Do not quench the Spirit* (v 19). A community like that, with few traditions and written teachings, relied on the help of the Spirit. Surely some Christians received communications during the assemblies about the Eucharist. This is why Paul tells them to take advantage of these spiritual messages and teachings, but with the

advice of examining everything as he will express in more detail in 1 Cor 14.

May you be blameless in the spirit, soul and body (v 23). In Paul's days, in man, many saw besides the 'soul' which gives life to the body and deals with material activities, a more personal aspect, the *spirit*, able to discover Truth and Justice.

When Paul speaks of the in-depth life of the believers, he does not use the word "soul" but "spirit", which is where the Spirit of God dwells and acts, as this Spirit permeates the spirit. In the most hidden part of conscience, the love and light of the Spirit make our spirit grow and mature. But it is only with the coming of Christ that we will know who we are.

2 letter to the Thessalonians

1 From Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians which is in God, our Father and in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

² May grace and peace be yours from God the Father and Christ Jesus, the Lord.

³ Brothers and sisters, we should give thanks to God at all times for you. It is fitting to do so, for your faith is growing and your love for one another increasing. ⁴ We take pride in you among the churches of God because of your endurance and your faith in the midst of persecution and sufferings. ⁵ In this the just judgment of God may be seen; for you must show yourselves worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are now suffering.

The judgment and the coming of Christ

+ ⁶ Indeed, it is just that God repays with affliction those who persecute you, ⁷ but to you who suffer, he will grant rest with us when the Lord Jesus will be shown in his Glory, coming

from heaven and surrounded by his court of angels. ⁸ *Then with flaming fire will be punished those who do not recognize God and do not obey the Gospel of Jesus, our Lord.*

⁹ They will be sent to eternal damnation far away from the face of the Lord and his mighty glory. ¹⁰ On that day the Lord will be glorified in the midst of his saints, and reveal his wonders through those who believe in him, that is through you who have received our testimony.

¹¹ This is why we constantly pray for you; may our God make you worthy of his calling. May he by his power bring to effect your good purposes and your work prompted by faith. ¹² In that way, the name of Jesus our Lord will be glorified through you, and you through him, according to the loving plan of God and of Christ Jesus the Lord.

2 ¹ Brothers, let us speak about the coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord, and our gathering to meet him. ² Do not be easily unsettled. Do not be alarmed by what a prophet says:

1. 1 Thes 1, 1	3. 1 Thes 3, 6	5. 1 Thes 2, 12	8. Is 66, 15; Rom 1, 5	9. Is 2, 10
12. Is 66, 5; Jn 17, 22	1. 1 Cor 15, 23; 1 Thes 4, 15	2. Mt 24, 31		

Reading the first letter to the Thessalonians taught us the importance that looking forward to the coming of Christ had in Paul's preaching.

The hope for the Day of Christ was a powerful incentive to preserve the faith of the first Christians. Yet, it could lead to an unhealthy nervousness. The church of Thessalonica was the first example of those minorities and persecuted groups in whom the expectation of the end of the world distorts the normal development of Christian life.

In this letter, written a few months after the first one, Paul tries to reassure the community

or by any report, or by some letter said to be ours, saying the day of the Lord is at hand. Do not let yourselves be deceived in any way.

³ Apostasy must come first. Then the man of Sin will appear, ⁴ that instrument of evil who opposes and defiles whatever is considered divine and holy, even to the point of sitting in the temple of God and claiming to be God.

⁵ Do you not remember I spoke of it when I was still with you? ⁶ But you also know what prevents him from appearing until his due time. ⁷ The mystery of sin is already at work, but he who restrains it at present has to be taken out of the way. ⁸ Then the wicked one will appear, whom the Lord is to sweep away with the breath

of his mouth and destroy in the splendour of his coming. ⁹ This lawless one will appear with the power of Satan, performing miracles and wonderful signs at the service of deception. ¹⁰ All the deceits of evil will then be used for the ruin of those who refused to love truth and be saved. ¹¹ This is why God will send them the power of delusion, that they may believe what is false. ¹² So all those who chose wickedness instead of believing the truth will be condemned.

Persevere in faith

◆ ¹³ But we have to give thanks for you at all times, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord. For God chose you from the beginning that you be saved through true faith and be made holy

3. Rev 13 Is 6, 10; 2 Cor 2, 16	4. Dn 11, 36 12. Jn 3, 19; 9, 39	8. Is 11, 4; Ps 33, 6	9. Mt 24, 24	10. 1 K 22, 22;
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○ We again encounter the same ideas we have explained in 1 Thes. A persecuted community. The basis of Christian life: faith, hope (or endurance), love. The day of Christ.

• *It is just that God repays with affliction.* When the apostles were addressing pagans, they insisted upon God's judgment. In fact, these pagans had never thought that they would be judged at the end of their lives. Knowing there is good and evil and that God judges men was a prerequisite for Christian life.

Coming from heaven... to punish. In the early apostolic days, it was believed that the Day of the Lord would come soon and there was a lot of talk about the condemnation of evil people when the final Kingdom would begin (Final Judgment). Now, we often believe that it is not imminent and thus, we think preferentially of the judgment that will occur at the end of each person's life (Particular Judgment).

■ *Do not be alarmed.* What happens in the church of Thessalonica is normal in a persecuted community: people tend to withdraw from real life. There are rumors that the Coming of the Lord is imminent, and hope can turn to hysteria. Paul reminds them of some truths.

The apostasy must come first. Before Christ's return, there must be a "general apostasy", or a world-wide religious crisis. An *antichrist* must come. It is true that there are antichrists in all times (see 1 Jn). Yet, at the end, there will be a more typical antichrist than all the previous ones. Christ will return in glory at the time the church seems crushed.

You know what prevents him from appearing (v 6). Paul may have two convictions in mind: everything happens at the time planned by God and every person in history lasts long enough to carry out all the good and all the bad that he carries within. For Paul, the *apostasy* must be that of the nations previously converted to the Gospel and the power of evil is already at work in them (v 7). But, there can be no apostasy nor antichrist while the role of the two previous actors is not fulfilled: on one hand, the Gospel must be announced to all nations; on the other hand, the Jewish people must unload their aggressiveness on the Church. These two factors restrain the coming of the antichrist.

Paul certainly had no idea that the *time of the nations* mentioned by Luke (21:24) was going to last so many centuries; for him it was a matter of years.

God will send them the power of delusion. That does not mean that God planned evil; he only leaves those who rejected the light, helpless against errors. The same people who do not take into account the decisive arguments in favor of the faith, later follow doctrines and opinions without foundations.

Paul invites the church, as he did in 1 Thes, to follow his instructions and rules. He is more severe in insisting that they have an obligation to work: if everybody works, their faith will be more peaceful.

◆ Note the word *traditions* used by Paul. The traditions are the customs, rites and teachings which men pass down from one generation to another. They are also the usages and life-styles

by the Spirit. ¹⁴ To this end he called you through the gospel we preach, for he willed you to share the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹⁵ Because of that, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions that we taught you by word or by letter. ¹⁶ May Christ Jesus our Lord who has loved us, may God our Father who in his mercy gives us everlasting comfort and true hope strengthen you. ¹⁷ May he encourage your hearts and make you steadfast in every good work and word.

3 ¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of the Lord spread rapidly and be honoured as it was with you. ² May God guard us from wicked and evil people, since not everyone has faith. ³ The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and keep you safe from the Evil One. ⁴ Besides, we have in the Lord this confidence that you do and will continue to do what we order you. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and perseverance for the sake of Christ.

Let everyone work

⁶ Brothers, we command you to stay away from any brother who is

living in idleness contrary to the traditions we passed on to you. ⁷ You know how you ought to follow our example: we worked while we were with you. ⁸ Day and night we laboured and toiled so as not to be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We had the right to act otherwise, but we wanted to give you an example.

¹⁰ Besides, while we were with you, we said clearly: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ However we heard that some among you live in idleness – busybodies, doing no work. ¹² In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord we command these people to work and earn their own living. ¹³ And you, brothers, do not weary in doing what is right.

¹⁴ If someone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take note and do not have anything to do with him, so that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ However, do not treat him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

¹⁶ May the Lord of peace give you his peace at all times and in every way. May the Lord be with you all.

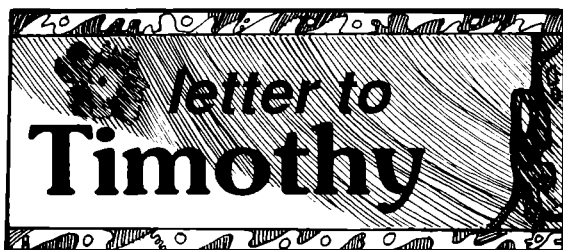
¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is my signature in all my letters. This is how I write.

¹⁸ May the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord be with you.

15. 1 Cor 11, 2 3. Mt 6, 13 8. 1 Thes 2, 9; 4, 11 9. Mt 10, 10 14. 1 Cor 5, 9 15. Mt 18, 15

which are adopted upon joining a community. Jesus had condemned the exaggerated importance the Pharisees gave to their own traditions, to the point that they prevailed over God's commandments (see Mk 7:5). Yet, Jesus him-

self, while he was with his apostles, taught them a certain way of praying, of doing, and of living in fellowship. These, then, are the traditions which the apostles were preserving in the Church.



PASTORAL LETTERS TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS

The cultural change taking place in all aspects of life also concerns the church. In the beliefs and practices which we were taught, not everything comes from Christ, and therefore, a lot can be changed. However, in doing this, we run the risk of adulterating genuine faith. What is the rule of faith to which we must submit our own opinions?

This problem already occurred in the early church when, in the years 64-67, both Peter and Paul died in Rome as martyrs for Christ. Since the church no longer had the witnesses to Christ in its midst, some felt free to *teach their own doctrine*. There is nothing easier than to replace the following of Christ by *religious discussions and discourses!*

Thus, the successors of the apostles had to defend *the doctrine they had received* from them and, at the same time, they were looking after the election and formation of ministers worthy of their mission. These are the concerns which stand out in the present letters to Timothy and Titus.

Several passages of these letters deal with Paul's advice to his assistants, Timothy and Titus. But, it is also quite certain that other passages were added at a later date, as in 90 or 100 after Christ, placing the teaching of the church of that time under the authority of Paul.

These three letters to Timothy and Titus are called "pastoral" because they are addressed to "pastors of souls". Concerning Timothy, see Acts 16:1: how Paul met him. See also 1 Cor 16:10 and Phil 2:19.

1 From Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by a command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, ²to Timothy, my true son in the faith.

May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy and peace.

False teachers

o ³When I left for Macedonia I urged you to remain in Ephesus to warn certain persons not to teach false doctrine ⁴or to concern themselves with fables and endless genealogies.

These give rise to discussions rather than promote a better service of God through faith. ⁵The aim of our warning is love which comes from a pure mind, a good conscience and sincere faith.

⁶Some have turned away from such a motivation and have strayed into useless discussions. ⁷They claim to be teachers of the Law when, in fact, they understand neither what they say nor the things they speak about.

⁸We know that the Law is good, as

2. Acts 16, 1; Tit 1, 4

4. Tit 1, 14; 3, 9

8. Rom 1, 20

o In this first chapter we have a mixture of various topics: they practically repeat what Paul said in other letters where the commentaries have already been given.

We will note only what refers to false prophets. Since the apostles who had seen Christ were dead, some people forgot that all of faith is based on what Christ taught. Instead of meditating on



long as it serves its purpose.⁹ The Law is not for the righteous, but for the lawless and for the wicked and sinful, for those who do not respect God and religion, for those who kill their parents, for murderers,¹⁰ for those who indulge in unlawful sex and homosexuality, for kidnappers and exploiters, for liars and perjurers and for all that is contrary to sound doctrine,¹¹ to the Gospel of the God of glory and happiness, which was entrusted to me.

¹² I give thanks to Christ Jesus, our Lord, who is my strength, who has considered me trustworthy and appointed me to his service,¹³ although I had been a blasphemer, a persecutor and a rabid enemy. However he took mercy on me because I did not know what I was doing when I opposed the faith;¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant together with faith and Christian love.

¹⁵ This saying is true and worthy of belief: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first.¹⁶ Because of that I was forgiven; Christ Jesus wanted to display his greatness in me so that I might be an example for all who are to believe and obtain eternal life.¹⁷ To the King

of ages, the only God who lives beyond every perishable and visible creation – to him be honour and glory forever. Amen!

¹⁸ Timothy, my son, I command you to fight the good fight, fulfilling the prophetic words pronounced over you.¹⁹ Hold on to faith and a good conscience, unlike those who, ignoring conscience, have finally wrecked their faith.²⁰ Among them are Hymeneus and Alexander whom I have delivered to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

+ 2 ¹ First of all I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone,² for rulers of states and all in authority, that we may enjoy a quiet and peaceful life in godliness and respect.³ This is good and pleases God.⁴ For he wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth.⁵ As there is one God, there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus, true man,⁶ who gave his life for the redemption of all. This is the testimony, given in its proper time, and⁷ of this God has made me apostle and herald. I am not lying, I am telling the truth: He made me teacher of the nations regarding faith and truth.

9. 1 Cor 6, 9; Gal 5, 23	11. 2 Cor 4, 4	13. Acts 9, 15; Gal 1, 15	14. Rom 5, 20; 1 Cor 15, 20
15. Lk 15, 2; 19, 10	17. 6, 16; Rom 16, 27	18. 2 Tim 4, 7	20. 2 Tim 2, 17; 1 Cor 5, 5
5. 2. Rom 13, 1; Tit 3, 1	4. Rom 3, 29;	2 Pet 3, 9; Jn 17, 3	6. Mt 20, 28; Is 53, 11; Gal 1, 4, 4
7. Acts 9, 15; Gal 2, 7;	Eph 3, 1		

the teaching of the apostles, on tradition, some began to discuss and work out religious theories.

The aim of our warning is love from a pure mind (5). Timothy must be firm in eliminating the discussions which weaken the church and prevent the development of the love which saves people. Even bloody wars came out of sterile religious arguments. To overcome divisions, we need a pure mind, a good conscience and sincere faith (v 5).

+ Heading the rules concerning every category of believers, we find what refers to the community assemblies with two outstanding points:

- Praying for rulers.
- The attitude of women in church.

I urge that petitions be made ... (1). Paul

wants Christians to be in solidarity with their compatriots, loyal towards their nation and pray for them. In spite of its sins and superstitions, the pagan world was religious. Religion went with their every action. This explains why, some years later, Christians were persecuted as rebels and traitors because they did not worship the emperor, nor his gods.

Faithfulness to Christ does not prevent being loyal to the nation until the nation becomes an idol, and this happens when in the name of a nation, people are asked to obey its rulers blindly. We cannot give up criticizing their errors, we stop considering as our brothers those who do not agree with us.

We should *pray for rulers*. Does that mean that we cannot look for more honest and better



⁸I want men in every place to lift pure hands in prayer to heaven without anger and dissension.

⁹Let women dress with simplicity and modesty, not adorned with fancy hair styles, gold, jewels and expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good works, as is fitting for women serving God. ¹¹Let a woman quietly receive instruction and be submissive. ¹²I allow no woman to teach or to have authority over men. Let them be quiet. ¹³For Adam was created first and then Eve. ¹⁴Adam was not deceived but it was the woman who was deceived and she fell into sin. ¹⁵But woman will be saved through maternity, provided that her life be orderly and holy, in faith and love.

Regarding overseers and deacons

3 ¹If someone aspires to the overseer's ministry, he is without a doubt looking for a noble task. ²It is necessary that the overseer (or bishop) be beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, responsible, judicious, of good manners, hospitable and skillful in teaching. ³He must not be addicted to wine or quarrelsome, but gentle and peaceful, and not a lov-

er of money, ⁴but a man whose household is well managed, with obedient and well-mannered children. ⁵If he cannot govern his own house, how could he lead the assembly of God?

⁶He must not be a recent convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the same condemnation as the devil. ⁷Moreover he must enjoy a good reputation among the outsiders, lest people speak evil about him and he fall into the snare of the devil.

⁸The deacons, likewise, must be serious and sincere men and moderate in drinking wine, not greedy for money, ⁹men who keep the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰Let them be first tried and if found blameless, be accepted as deacons. ¹¹In the same way the women must be conscientious, not given to gossip, but reserved and trustworthy.

¹²The deacons must be husbands of one wife. ¹³Those who serve well as deacons will win honourable rank, with authority to speak of Christian faith.

◆ ¹⁴I give you these instructions, although I hope I will see you soon. ¹⁵If I delay, you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the household of God, that is the Church

9. 1 Pet 3, 2	12. 1 Cor 14, 34	13. Gen 2, 18; 1 Cor 11, 8	14. Gen 3, 6	1. Tit 1, 6
2. 3, 12; Tit 2, 6; 2 Tim 2, 24	8. Phil 1, 1	9. Rom 16, 25	11. Tit 2, 3	15. Eph 2, 19

rules? Of course, we can: see commentary on Rom 13.

Verses 9-14 concern women, and to understand why the letter is so strict, we must recall that there was a lot of talk about freedom in the church, and living together among the brothers was very simple, and so at times, there were abuses.

On the other hand, we always have a hard time accepting the demands of the Gospel when society teaches us differently. Jesus' attitude regarding women was revolutionary and liberating, and at the beginning, the church followed his example (see 1 Cor 7). But, before long, they went back to the usual way of giving a very limited place to women in society, and that applied also to their religious assemblies.

In the whole history of the Church there was a great respect for the dignity of women and

there were many initiatives favouring them; yet, there were few periods when women enjoyed equality with men. In many places, women were more emancipated during the Middle Ages than closer to our times. In the 19th century. Likewise, in urban societies dealing with business, in the world and in the Church women occupied a place without comparison with the place granted them in more closed societies.

In fact, the Church alone does not change the world and society as long as these have not learned to know human reality better.

This passage, reminding us of 1 Co 11:1-10 and 14:34, opposes women's emancipation with the same biblical arguments commonly used by the Jewish masters.

■ Here, Paul deals with leaders, bishops and deacons (see commentary on Titus 1:6 and Phil 1:1).

of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶How great indeed is the mystery of divine blessing!

*He was shown in the flesh
and sanctified by the Spirit;
presented to the angels
and proclaimed to all nations.
The world believed in him:
He had been taken up in glory!*

o 4 ¹The Spirit tells us clearly that in the last days some will defect from the faith and follow deceitful spirits and devilish doctrines, ²led by lying hypocrites whose conscience has been branded with the stamp of infamy.

³These persons forbid marriage and condemn the use of certain foods which God created for those who know the truth, and which the believ-

16. 1 Jn 1, 14; 16, 10; Rom 1, 4; 1 Pet 1, 12; Mk 16, 19;
2. 2 Tim 3, 1; 1 Jn 2, 18 3. Col 2, 16
7. 2 Tim 2, 16 10. 2, 3

◆ This short paragraph reminds us that, if indeed we are in charge of the Church of God, we are neither its founders nor its masters. The Church was born through a merciful intervention of God, when he decided that his Son should identify with the human race, as is expressed in this short poem.

Here, we use *divine blessing* (16) for a word which we translated elsewhere by "piety" or "religion" (see 2:2; 4:7; 6:3; 6:5; 6:6; 2 Tim 3:5 and Titus 1:1). In those years, the word was mostly used to mean the loving attitude toward the Father and neighbours, characteristic of true believers who simply imitate God's example.

The Church is the *pillar and foundation of the truth*. We must understand this phrase as referring to the concepts of that time: from above, from a world in which everything is truth. God lowers his Truth to the earth, as a column or a visible sign on which men can lean. In spite of all the infidelities of the Church, God uses it to preserve the true knowledge of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the world. Without this knowledge, people cannot be free, nor can humanity reach its maturity.

● After the death of the apostles, new masters who tamper with the faith appear in the Church.

Among a number of errors, these men despise everything concerning the body: they condemn marriage, forbid eating meat and drinking wine at meals. Their scorn for the body and the

ers receive with thanksgiving. ⁴Everything created by God is good, an all food is lawful; nothing is to be rejected if we receive it with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is blessed with the word of God and prayer, and made holy.

⁶If you explain these things to the brothers and sisters, you will prove to be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the teachings of faith and the sound doctrine which you have followed. ⁷Reject irreligious fables and old wives' tales.

Train yourself in godliness ⁸Physical training is of limited value; godliness, instead, is useful in every way, holding promises for the present life and for the life to come. ⁹Here you have a sure doctrine you can trust ¹⁰We toil and endure because we trust in the living God, the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe

Acts 1, 9 1. Mt 24, 23; Acts 20, 29
4. Gen 1, 31; 1 Cor 10, 31; Rom 14, 14; Mt 15, 11

good things created by God is totally unchristian and the church fights against it: see Co. 2:23

In the last days (v 1): these are the days beginning with Jesus' resurrection and stretching to his second coming (Heb 1:2; Jas 5:3).

The Spirit tells us clearly. The prophets of the church were often predicting that people would come to preach their own theories, and not authentic faith.

The believers receive with thanksgiving. From the beginning, it was the custom of the Christian family to give thanks to God at the family meal.

Train yourself in godliness (v 7). Here we have another danger. Contrary to the teachers who despise life and want us to live as strange characters, there are others who are totally absorbed by external things. In the Greco-Roman world, there was a lot of enthusiasm for sports and races. Without despising the body obviously, we are asked to check if we give each thing the importance it deserves and the time corresponding to it.

+ Before all these false teachers, Timothy must be the example of a true apostle.

Let not one reproach you on account of your youth. Usually, in the Christian communities and in the Jewish ones, the leaders were older men. This is why they were called "elders" or "presbyters" (which means the same thing). Timothy, who is visiting the church on behalf of Paul, has authority over these elders, even

Advice to Timothy

+ ¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one reproach you on account of your youth. Be a model to the believers in the way you speak and act, in your love, your faith and purity of life. ¹³ Devote yourself to reading, preaching and teaching, until I come.

¹⁴ Do not neglect the spiritual gift conferred on you with prophetic words when the elders laid their hands upon you. ¹⁵ Think about it and practise it so that your progress may be seen by all. ¹⁶ Take care of yourself and your teaching. Be steadfast in doing this and you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The widows in the Church

■ 5 ¹ Do not rebuke an older man; on the contrary, advise him as if he were your father. Treat the young as your brothers, ² the elder women as mothers and the young girls as your sisters, with great purity.

³ Take care of widows who are really widows. ⁴ If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should first learn their family duties and give

their parents financial help. This is correct and pleases God.

⁵ A true widow is one who, in being left alone, has set her hope in God, praying day and night to God and asking him for help. ⁶ On the contrary, a widow who lives as she pleases, is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Warn them about this that they be blameless. ⁸ Those who do not take care of their own, especially those of their household, have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers.

⁹ Let no one be put on the list of widows unless she is sixty years old and has been married only once. ¹⁰ She must be commended for her good works and the education of her children. Has she shown hospitality and humbly served the saints, helped the suffering and practised other good deeds?

¹¹ Do not accept younger widows; they may have other desires than for Christ and want to marry; ¹² then they deserve condemnation for breaking their former commitment. ¹³ Besides they form the habit of being idle, going from house to house. And it is

12. Tit 2, 7 14. 2 Tim 1, 6 1. Lev 19, 32 5. Lk 2, 37 6. Rev 3, 1 10. Jn 13, 14; Heb 13, 2 13. 2 Thes 3, 11

though he is much younger than they are. The example of his sincere faith and his profound knowledge of the Bible will be his strength.

Do not neglect the spiritual gift (14). If someone was named to a ministry, or an official position in the church, this was considered to be a spiritual gift: for example, presbyters, deacons, bishops, prophets. But, while other gifts such as healing the sick, came directly from the Holy Spirit, ministries were received through a laying on of hands. An apostle or a prophet would lay his hands on the candidate to transfer upon him the authority which he had received in a similar way. Thus, in the Church, every leader receives his authority from Christ through a succession of people going back to the apostles.

On this occasion, the prophets present would also address the candidate with exhortations and warnings (see 1:18). Timothy was consecrated with prophetic words: it was Paul himself who laid his hands over him (2 Tim 1:6). Other prophets and presbyters also participated in this.

■ From the beginning, women had their own unique role in the Church. Some of them, called widows, occupied an official position.

Paul sees three kinds of widows: some did not need help from the church because they had relatives; others did need the church assistance. Finally, there were some, with or without the help of the church, who were in charge of certain functions.

They deserve condemnation... (v 12). This means that by leaving her position and marrying the "widow" of the third category broke a commitment she had made publicly. The "widows" were dedicated to the service of Christ in the same way as religious women of today.

A true widow is she who has set her hope in God. We should read what Paul says in 1 Cor 7, concerning the greater freedom celibates have to serve the Lord. Every baptized person is called to belong totally to Christ. If, through circumstances of life, we are alone again and free from family responsibilities, this may be an invitation from God to dedicate ourselves com-

not just idleness! They become gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

¹⁴So I want young widows to marry, to have children and rule their household and give adversaries no grounds for criticism. ¹⁵Some have already strayed to follow Satan. ¹⁶If any Christian woman has widows in her family, let her assist them; in this way the church will not be burdened and may assist those who are truly widows.

Regarding the presbyters

◆ ¹⁷Let the elders who rule well receive double compensation, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸Scripture says: *Do not muzzle the ox while it threshes grain, and: The worker deserves his wages.*

¹⁹Do not accept accusations against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰If he continues to sin, rebuke him in the presence of the community, as a warning to the rest.

²¹I urge you, in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and of the holy angels, to obey these rules with im-

partiality, without making distinctions. ²²Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, so becoming an accomplice in the sins of others. Keep yourself free from blame. ²⁴The sins of some people are plain to see, even before they are examined; the sins of others are known only later on. ²⁵Likewise good deeds are conspicuous; even when they are not, they cannot remain hidden.

²³Do not drink only water but take a little wine to help your digestion, because of your frequent illness.

6 ¹Let those who are slaves always show respect to their masters, so that no one may speak ill of God and his teaching. ²Those whose masters are Christians should not show less respect under the pretext that they are brothers. On the contrary, they must give a better service since they are doing good works on behalf of believers and dear friends.

Love of money

Teach and stress these things: ³Whoever teaches in some other way, not following the sound teaching of

14. Tit 2, 8
Mt 18, 16
Rom 2, 24

17. 1 Thes 5, 12
21. 2 Tim 1, 6
3. Gal 1, 8; 2 Tim 1, 13

18. 1 Cor 9, 9; Dt 25, 4; Lk 10, 7
24. Mt 5, 16; 10, 26
1. 1 Cor 7, 21; Col 3, 22; Tit 2, 9;

19. Dt 17, 6; 2 Cor 13, 1;

pletely to the service of the church and to constant prayer.

◆ Once again, Paul deals with the "elders" or "presbyters" who are in charge of the local community.

Let the elders receive double compensation. Paul wants the community to help its leaders morally and financially.

But, they must fulfil their duties. *Rebuke him in the presence of the community so that the rest might stand in fear*: the first Christians were no angels. Once in a while their enthusiastic and sincere faith needed strong discipline in order for them to remain faithful to their commitments.

See Col 3:22 and Titus 2:9 regarding the responsibilities of servants.

At the beginning and at the end of the chapter, the author insists on faithfulness to the tradition. Faith is not a doctrine which can be adapted to one's tastes. Leaders are required to

have a respectful and humble attitude towards this treasure entrusted to them to be transmitted to others. We can already see two faults:

– Instead of deepening faith, some multiple words.

– Some replace the surrender to God's Word by a critical attitude which attempts to judge faith and decides if it agrees with their ideas.

Money is mentioned twice (6:10 and 6:17; 19). After the first years with the predominance of an enthusiastic faith, the church finds that even for believers, everything is lost when the love for money persists. Attachment to money makes us lose our trust in God (6, 10), and separates us from the rest. Rich people will have to seek God in authentic prayer and in sharing with their brothers.

Paul calls Timothy to avoid all those dangers (6, 11), remaining true to faith and free from greed. By doing so, he will be "a man of God": witness of Christ – as Christ was a witness of the living Father (6:13).

our Lord Christ Jesus and true religious instruction, ⁴is conceited and understands nothing. He is crazy about controversies and discussions which result in envy, insults, ⁵blows and constant arguments, between people of depraved minds and far from the truth. For them, religion is merely financial gain.

⁶In reality, religion is a treasure if we are content with what we have. ⁷We brought nothing into the world and we will leave it with nothing. ⁸Let us then be content with having food and clothing. ⁹Those who strive to be rich fall into temptations and traps. A lot of foolish and harmful ambitions plunge them into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰Indeed, the love of money is the root of every evil. Because of this greed, some have wandered away from the faith, bringing on themselves afflictions of every kind.

¹¹But you, man of God, shun all this. Strive to be holy and godly. Live in faith and love, with endurance and gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith and win everlasting life to which you have been called when you made the good profession of faith in the presence of so many witnesses.

¹³Now, in the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who gave the good testimony before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴I command you to keep the commandment. Keep yourself pure and blameless until the glorious coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord, ¹⁵which God will bring about at the proper time, he, the magnificent sovereign, King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶To him, alone immortal, who lives in unapproachable light and whom no man has ever seen or can see, to him be honour and power for ever and ever. Amen!

¹⁷Command the rich of this world not to be arrogant or to put their trust in the uncertainty of wealth. Let them rather trust in God who generously gives us all we need for our happiness. ¹⁸Let them do good, be rich in good deeds and be generous; let them share with others. ¹⁹In this way, they shall heap up a sound capital for the future and gain true life.

²⁰Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you; avoid useless and profane words, as well as discussions arising from false knowledge. ²¹Some have lost the faith in accepting such knowledge.

The grace of God be with you all.

6. Phil 4, 11

7. Heb 3, 5; Ecl 5, 14

13. Jn 18, 36

15. Dt 10, 17; Ps 136, 3; Rev 17, 14

16. Ex 33, 20; Jn 1, 18

17. Lk 12, 16

18. Mt 6, 20

21. 2 Tim 2, 18

2 letter to

T

imothy



This second letter to Timothy, which Paul wrote from his Roman jail, is like a goodbye at a



time he feels very lonely and even abandoned by believers. Foreseeing that his condemnation to death is approaching, he calls Timothy.

At that point, Paul shows his total trust in the Lord and he attempts to communicate his spirit to Timothy.

1 ¹ From Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of his promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus, ² to my dear son Timothy.

May grace, mercy and peace be with you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

God did not give us a spirit of bashfulness

o ³ I give thanks to God whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my fathers did, as I remember you constantly, day and night, in my prayers. ⁴ I recall your tears and I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, ⁵ so like the faith of your grandmother Lois and of your mother Eunice, which I am sure you have inherited.

⁶ For this reason I invite you to fan into a flame the gift of God you received through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God did not confer on us a spirit of bashfulness, but of strength,

love and good judgment. ⁸ Do not be ashamed of testifying to our Lord, nor of seeing me in chains. On the contrary, take your share in labouring for the Gospel with the strength of God. ⁹ He saved us and called us – a calling which proceeds from his holiness. This did not depend on our merits, but on his generosity and his own initiative. This calling given to us from all time in Christ Jesus ¹⁰ has just been manifested with the glorious appearance of Christ Jesus, our Lord, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light in his Gospel. ¹¹ Of this message I was made herald, apostle and teacher.

¹² For its sake I now suffer this trial, but I am not ashamed, for I know in whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is capable of taking care of all I have entrusted to him until that day.

¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound doctrine which you have heard from me concerning faith and love in

3. Phil 3, 5; Acts 26, 4	5. Acts 16, 1	6. 1 Tim 4, 14	7. Rom 8, 15	9. Eph 2, 8; Tit 3, 5
10. Tit 2, 11	11. Heb 2, 14; 1 Tim 2, 7	12. 1 Tim 6, 20		

o *Fan into a flame the gift you received.* See 1 Tim 4: 14. Paul tries to give his own energy to Timothy and he reminds him of God's love and promises.

The sound doctrine... the precious deposit... which you have heard it (13-14): see 1 Tim 1:3. The doctrine of the Gospel cannot be revised, but it cannot be preserved either without the help of the Holy Spirit who increases its value day by day.

He saved us and called us: see Eph 2:8-10.

He is capable of taking care of all I have entrusted to him (12). Such is the assurance of the believer. The man of faith is not impressed by the promises of the world, instead he spends his life in an often thankless task, and he perseveres as if he could see what cannot yet be seen (Heb 11:27).

+ *Entrust to reliable people everything...* (2). From Paul's first missions we saw his concern to leave the communities with their own leaders (Acts 14:23). See also Titus 1:6. Here: Paul insists that they must be able to preserve the faith integrally.

Then, Paul invites Timothy to surrender completely, with the assurance that his efforts will be rewarded.

With the firm hope of faith. Christ's witness must be courageous and strong as the messenger of the victorious Christ. His own conviction will convince others. He must avoid the many ways of wasting his time and getting off track in his mission: idle conversations devoid of interest. Also things that do not promote a better service of God (1 Tim 1, 4): false religious problems unrelated to real life.



Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Keep the precious deposit with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

¹⁵You know that all from the province of Asia have deserted me, especially Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶May God bless the household of Onesiphorus, for he often came to visit me and was not ashamed of my chains. ¹⁷On the contrary, on arriving in Rome he searched for me until he found me. ¹⁸May the Lord grant that he find mercy from the Lord on that day. You well know all the services he rendered at Ephesus.

Labour like a good soldier of Christ

+2 ¹You, my son, be strong with the grace you have in Christ Jesus. ²Entrust to reliable people everything you have learned from me in the presence of several witnesses, that they may instruct others.

³Labour like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No soldier lets himself be involved in civilian trade; it is enough for him to please his commanding officer. ⁵No athlete is crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶And again, he who

tills the land is the first to enjoy the fruits of the harvest. ⁷Think over what I am telling you; the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

⁸Remember Christ Jesus, risen from the dead, Jesus, son of David, as preached in my Gospel. ⁹For this Gospel I labour and even wear chains like an evildoer, but the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰And so, I bear everything for the sake of the chosen people, that they, too, may obtain the salvation given to us in Christ Jesus and share eternal glory. ¹¹This statement is true:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;

¹²If we endure with him, we shall reign with him;

If we deny him, he will also deny us;

¹³If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself.

Do not fight over words

ⁿ ¹⁴Remind your people of these things and urge them in the presence of God not to fight over words, which does no good, but only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵Be for God an active and proved minister, a blameless worker

15. 4, 16	4. 1 Cor 9, 7; 9, 25	8. Acts 13, 30; Rom 1, 4	9. Eph 3, 1; Phil 1, 12
12. Rom 8, 17; Mt 10, 33	13. 1 Cor 1, 9; Num 23, 19	15. Tit 2, 7; 1 Tim 4, 7	

No soldier... (2. 4). At certain times Paul wanted to earn a living while he was preaching (2 Cor 11. 9; 2 Thes 3. 7), but now he is preoccupied by those who waste their time in seeking a living, when the community has the obligation to look after them.

Paul comes back to the experiences of apostolic work. With time converts are tested: some grow and others are lost. The apostle must not be surprised: no fall nor scandal can shake the solid foundations laid by God (2. 19) and the Church will not fall apart.

■ *In the last days* (3. 1): namely, the time beginning with the coming of Christ. The presence of evil in the church itself must not surprise us.

They will give you wisdom (15). The meditation on Scripture is the great means of growing in faith (15-17). Obviously, Paul is referring

to the Old Testament, the only existing Scripture at the time. The Old Testament becomes alive and reveals God's message to us today when it is enlightened by the Holy Spirit (2 Pt 1:20). The key to Scripture is the witness that the apostles gave to Jesus and which the Church transmits to us: *what has been entrusted to you, knowing from whom you received it.*

All Scripture is inspired by God and thus, in Scripture we must seek God's message to his people as opposed to taking it as the basis of personal speculations. The same Spirit who leads the Church inspired the biblical authors.

They say that resurrection has already taken place (2. 18). The Greeks found it very difficult to believe in the resurrection. These people may have said that a spiritual resurrection had been achieved through baptism and that there was no other resurrection to hope for, after death.

correctly handling the word of truth. ¹⁶Do not take part in useless conversations, alien to the faith. This leads to a greater lack of faith. ¹⁷Such teaching spreads like gangrene: I am thinking of Hymeneus and Philetus. ¹⁸They strayed from the truth, holding that resurrection has already taken place; and with this they upset the faith of some. ¹⁹But the solid foundations laid by God are not shaken; on them it is written: *The Lord knows those who are his, and: Let him who confesses the name of the Lord turn away from evil.*

²⁰In a great house we find not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some are reserved for special uses, other for ordinary ones. ²¹If anyone cleanses himself of what I speak of, he will become a noble vessel, useful to the Lord, prepared for any holy purpose.

²²So shun the passions of youth and seek righteousness, faith, love and peace together with those who call upon the Lord with a pure heart.

²³Avoid stupid and senseless discussions, since such are the cause of misunderstanding. ²⁴God's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, always teaching and patient with those who do not understand. ²⁵Let him gently correct his opponents; perhaps God may grant them to repent and discover the truth, ²⁶withdrawing them from the snare of the devil who held them captive to his own will.

■ 3 ¹Be quite sure that there will be difficult times in the last days. ²People will become selfish, lovers of money, boastful, conceited, gossips, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy. ³They

will be unable to love and to forgive; they will be slanderers, without self-control, cruel, enemies of good, ⁴traitors, shameless, full of pride, more in love with pleasure than with God. ⁵They will keep the appearance of piety, but rejecting its demands. Keep away from such people.

⁶Of the same kind are those who enter the houses and captivate weak women, full of sins, swayed by all kinds of passion, ⁷who are always learning but never grasping knowledge of the truth. ⁸These people of corrupt mind and falsified faith oppose the truth just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses. ⁹Yet they may not go very far, for their folly will be clear to all, as in the case of those two.

¹⁰You, instead, have followed closely my teaching, my way of life, my projects, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions and sufferings. You know what happened to me at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. How many trials I had to bear! Yet the Lord rescued me from them all. ¹²All who want to serve God in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil persons and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

¹⁴As for you, continue with what you have learned and what has been entrusted to you, knowing from whom you received it. ¹⁵Besides, you have known the Scriptures from childhood; they will give you the wisdom that leads you to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, refuting error, for correcting and training in Christian life. ¹⁷Through Scripture the man of God is made expert and thoroughly equipped for every good work.

18. 1 Tim 6, 21

19. Num 16, 5; 16, 26

20. Rom 9, 21

24. 1 Tim 3, 2

1. 1 Tim 4, 1

2. Rom 1, 29

5. Mt 7, 15

11. Acts 13, 50; 14, 3; 14, 19

12. Jn 15, 20; 1 Thes 3, 4; Acts 14, 22

Preach the Word

◆ **4** ¹In the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by the hope I have of his coming and his kingdom, I urge you ²to preach the Word, in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking or advising, always with patience and providing instruction. ³For the time is coming when people will no longer endure sound doctrine but will be so eager to hear what is new, that they will never have enough teachers after their own liking. ⁴And they will abandon the truth to hear fables. ⁵So be prudent, do not mind your labour, give yourself to your work as an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

⁶As for me the time of sacrifice has arrived, and the moment of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness with which the Lord, the just judge, will reward me on that day; and not only me, but all those who have longed for his glorious coming.

Final greetings

⁹Do your best to come to me quickly. ¹⁰You must know that Demas has deserted me for the love of this world: he returned to Thessa-

lonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke remains with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is a useful helper in my work. ¹²I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

¹³Bring with you the cloak I left at Troas, in Carpos' house and also the scrolls, especially the parchments. ¹⁴Alexander the metalworker has caused me great harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵Distrust him for he has been very much opposed to our preaching.

¹⁶At my first defense no one supported me; all deserted me. May the Lord not hold it against them. ¹⁷But the Lord was at my side, giving me strength to proclaim the Word fully, and let all the pagans hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will save me from all evil, bringing me to his heavenly kingdom. Glory to him for ever and ever. Amen!

¹⁹Greetings to Prisca and Aquila and to the family of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus remained in Corinth. I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

²¹Try to come here before the winter. Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters send you greetings. ²²The Lord be with your spirit.

May grace be with you all.

16. 2 Pet 1, 21; Rom 15, 4	3. 1 Tim 4, 1	6. Phil 2, 17	8. 1 Tim 1, 18; 6, 12; 1 Cor 9, 25;
Phil 3, 14; 1 Pet 5, 4; Rev 2, 10	10. Col 4, 14	11. Col 4, 10	14. 1 Tim 1, 20
17. Mt 10, 19; Phil 1, 19	18. Dn 6, 23	19. Acts 18, 2	20. Acts 19, 22; 20, 4


◆ *Preach the Word* (2): this is Paul's last advice. It must be the first concern of the church and of any church leader.

Paul knows that he will not be freed and that he will be condemned to death. He assumes his

own sacrifice just as Jesus did.

We find the comparison of the soldier and the athlete which Paul liked so much. In those days athletes received a crown of laurels as a symbol of immortality.

letter to titus



Like Timothy, Titus is one of Paul's assistants, officially consecrated to the service of the Gospel and who visited the churches with the very authority of Paul.

The commentary will be brief since this letter is very similar to the two letters to Timothy.

1 ¹ From Paul, servant of God, apostle of Christ Jesus, at the service of God's chosen people, so that they may believe and reach the knowledge of truth and godliness.

² The life we are waiting for was promised long ago by God who never lies, ³ and as the appointed time had come, he made it known through the message entrusted to me by a command of God, our Saviour.

⁴ Greetings to you, Titus, my true son in the faith we share. May grace and peace be with you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

On the elders of the church

o ⁵ I left you in Crete because I wanted you to put right what was de-

fective and appoint elders in every town, following my instructions. ⁶ They must be blameless, married only once, whose children are believers and not open to the charge of being immoral and rebellious. ⁷ Since the overseer (or bishop) is the steward of God's house, he must be beyond reproach: not proud, hot-headed, over fond of wine, quarrelsome or greedy for gain.

⁸ On the contrary he must be hospitable, a lover of what is good, wise, upright, devout and self-controlled. ⁹ He must hold to the message of faith just as it was taught, so that, in his turn, he may teach sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

¹⁰ You know that there are many

2. 2 Tim 2, 13	5. 1 Tim 3, 2	8. Heb 3, 2; 1 Per 5, 2	9. 1 Tim 1, 10	10. 1 Tim 4, 1
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o Titus had to organize the churches of Crete with leaders in every city.

We do not know if the title Bishop (meaning supervisor) was given to all these elders or presbyters, or if the title was reserved for those whose work was carried out most efficiently. After a while, there was only one bishop in charge of the entire community. After the apostles' death, bishops served as their representatives and they ruled the church with their same authority.

What Paul says here about the prerequisites to be presbyter or bishop is the same as what we have in 1 Timothy. We may note the following:

– *Married only once.* Obviously, it is not necessary to be married; only to have been

married only once. Men of a certain age – usually married – were consecrated. But there were number of Christians who had divorced and re-married several times while they were still pagans.

– *He must be blameless,* not only as a person, but in his family and his past reputation. This requirement justifies the following ones.

– *He must be hospitable.* More than organization, the church is communion. Everyone must be welcomed and feel at home in the house of the presbyter and of a bishop; on the other hand he must be hospitable with the brothers and leaders coming from other areas in terms of assuring unity and mutual understanding between the various communities.

rebellious minds, talkers of nonsense, deceivers, especially the party of the circumcised. ¹¹ They have to be silenced when they go around disturbing whole families, teaching for low gain what should not be taught. ¹² Even Cretan, one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans: always liars, wicked beasts and lazy gluttons." ¹³ This is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply if you want them to have a sound faith ¹⁴ instead of heeding Jewish fables and practices of people who reject the truth.

¹⁵ To the pure everything is pure; to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure: their minds and consciences have been defiled. ¹⁶ They pretend to know God but deny him with their deeds. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Live as responsible persons

+ 2 ¹ Let your words strengthen sound doctrine. ² Tell the older men to be sober, serious, wise, sound in faith, love and perseverance.

³ The older women in like manner must behave as befits holy women, not given to gossiping or drinking wine. ⁴ but as good counsellors, be able to teach younger women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be judicious and pure, to take care of their households, to be kind and submis-

sive to their husbands, lest our faith be attacked.

⁶ Encourage the young men to be self-controlled. ⁷ Set them an example by your own way of doing. Let your teaching be earnest and sincere, ⁸ and your preaching be beyond reproach. Then your opponents will feel ashamed and will have nothing to criticize.

⁹ Teach slaves to be subject to their masters, and to give satisfaction in every respect, instead of arguing. ¹⁰ They must not steal from them but be trustworthy. In this way they will draw everyone to admire the doctrine of God our Saviour.

¹¹ For God Saviour has revealed his loving plan to all, ¹² teaching us to reject an irreligious way of life and worldly greed, and to live in this world as responsible persons, upright and serving God, ¹³ while we await our blessed hope – the glorious manifestation of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ He gave himself for us, to redeem us from every evil and to purify a people he wanted to be his own and dedicated to what is good.

¹⁵ Teach these things, encourage and reprove with all authority. Let no one despise you.

o 3 ¹ Remind the believers to be submissive to rulers and au-

15. Mt 15, 11; 23, 25; Rom 14, 14	2. 1 Tim 5, 1	3. 1 Tim 3, 11	5. Eph 5, 22; Col 3, 18
8. 1 Pet 2, 15	9. Eph 6, 5; 1 Tim 6, 1	12. 1 Jn 2, 16	13. 1 Cor 1, 7; Phil 3, 20
14. Ex 19, 5; Eph 5, 25	15. 1 Tim 4, 12	1. Rom 13, 1; 1 Pet 2, 13; 1 Tim 2, 2	

+ The first paragraph recalls the responsibilities of the diverse groups forming the community. Faithfulness and constancy in the "sound doctrine" must produce such fruits as goodness, modesty and good sense.

God has revealed his loving plan to all (2, 11). Here Paul returns to the essence of the Christian message: it is a gift of God and so it must produce the fruits of goodness and reconciliation and draw people away from the self-centeredness which paralyzes them.

He gave himself for us (14). As in Eph 5, 25 and 1 Cor 11, 25, Jesus sacrifice is primarily to

purify those who become his people. In fact, it is by looking at Jesus that, little by little, we let go of what is evil and violent in us.

Teaching us to reject an irreligious way of life (v. 12). God brings us to purify our motives and our hearts.

– *Responsible*, because the practice of Christian living brings us to a more serious attitude.

– *Just with others* by being primarily just with regard to God.

– *Serving God* because the believer is dedicated to God.



thorities, to be obedient and to take the initiative in doing good. ² Tell them to insult no one; they must not be quarrelsome but gentle and understanding with everyone.

³ We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient and misled. We were slaves of our desires, seeking pleasures of every kind. We lived in malice and envy, hated and hating each other. ⁴ But God revealed his eminent goodness and love for humankind ⁵ and saved us, not because of good deeds we may have done but for the sake of his own mercy. He gave us rebirth in baptism and renewed us by the Holy Spirit ⁶ poured over us through Christ Jesus our Saviour. ⁷ By the grace of God we were made holy and now we hope for everlasting life, our inheritance.

■ ⁸ This is the truth. I want you to insist on these things, for those who believe in God must excel in good deeds; that is what matters and is

profitable to us. ⁹ Avoid stupid arguments, discussions about genealogies and quarrels about the Law, for they are useless and unimportant.

¹⁰ If anyone promotes sects in the church, warn him once and then a second time. If he still continues, break with him, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is misled and sinful; he is self-condemned.

¹² When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, try to come to me at Nicopolis, as soon as possible for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³ Do your best to put Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see to it that they have everything they need. ¹⁴ Our people must learn to outstand in doing good works and to face urgent needs, instead of remaining idle and useless.

¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

3. Eph 2, 5; 5, 8
10. Mc 10, 15

5. 2 Tim 1, 9; Eph 2, 8; 5, 26

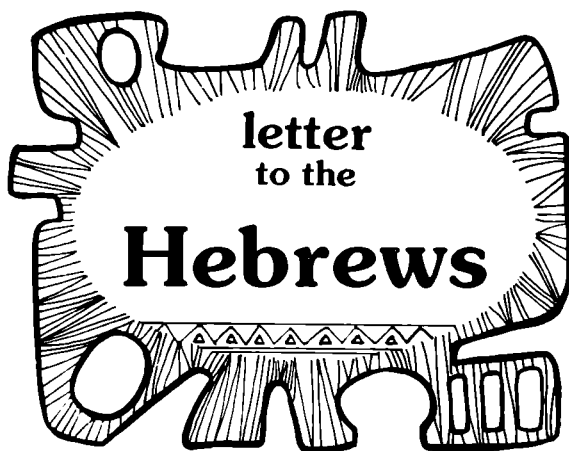
6. Rom 3, 24; 8, 17

9. 2 Tim 2, 14

• Speaking to the first Christian generation, Paul had underscored the transformation of the one who has been converted: becoming Christian involved breaking away with the past. But, in the following generation, while the church was being established in the various provinces of the Roman Empire, the hope of an imminent return of Christ was declining. Thus, if the Church is called to last, it is important for the Christian to appear before all as a model of ordered and just life. Since obedience then was the pillar of family and social life, Paul insists that the believer must obey from the heart in every aspect which is not opposed to his faith.

The same point is stressed in 2:5 and 2:10, and also in 1 Tim 2:2 and 2:11.

■ The word *sects* which Paul uses (v. 10) is very similar to the word *heresy*. Instead of accepting the faith as the Church transmits it, a heretic chooses what seems most important to him and what he likes the most. He rejects part of the message and at the same time, he leaves the Church with his own disciples to form his own group. In preferring his own judgment to the doctrine of the Church, he loses the in-depth faith attitude, he breaks the unity and condemns himself even though he keeps a major part of the message.



"Hebrews" was the name given to the Jews who lived in Palestine, unlike the most of them who had emigrated to other countries. This letter is addressed to the first Christian communities of Palestine, formed by Jews – by race – who had been persecuted and punished and whose possessions had even been confiscated, all of this because they became followers of Christ. They no longer had anything in this world and they had to encourage one another with the assurance that, at the conclusion of their exile, they would find the true Home where Jesus went after his suffering. In this way they were like their Hebrew ancestors who had lived in the desert, in the hope and search of the Promised Land.

It is helpful to know that this letter is addressed to men familiar with the Old Testament: they may well have been Jewish priests converted to Christ who were going through a serious crisis. Indeed, up until then, the Temple had been their whole lives since they were priests: they would offer sacrifices and they would receive part of the sacrificed animals in payment. But now, not only had they been excluded and removed from the temple by the Jews, but Christ had replaced them. For he had come as the New Temple and the perfect victim, pleasing to God, as the only Priest capable of putting men in touch with God.

So Christ had taken their work away from them as well as their reason for being. At times, these men who had known Jesus the man were doubting: had everything really changed because of him?

To confirm their faith, this letter shows them that the Jewish religion, with its splendid sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple, was only the figure of something greater: the authentic Priest for all humanity is Jesus, the Son of God, and now there is only his sacrifice, which begins on the cross and ends in the Glory of Heaven.

Are there not many "Hebrews" in today's world? The sick who no longer have hope, the persecuted Christians, the people who do not accept the injustice and the mediocrity of the society in which we live. Although many of them may not understand all the premises and the biblical quotations of this letter, these people will feel encouraged in their faith.

This letter was written from Rome, perhaps in the year 66, when the war in which Jerusalem was destroyed was approaching. These were the last months of Paul's life; he was imprisoned in Rome for the second time. This letter reflects Paul's thoughts, but he did not write it. It is quite possible that the author is Apollos, mentioned in Acts 18:24-28, "a man well versed in Scriptures" and who "proved from the Scriptures (the Old Testament) that Jesus is the Messiah".

1 God has spoken in the past to our fathers through the prophets, in many different ways, although never completely; ²but in our times he has spoken definitively to us through his Son.

He is the one God appointed heir of all things, since through him he unfolded the stages of the world.

³He is the radiance of God's Glory and bears the stamp of God's hidden being, so that his powerful word upholds the universe. And after taking away sin, he took his place at the right hand of the divine Majesty in Heaven.

⁴So he is now far superior to angels just as the name he received sets him apart from them. ⁵To what angel did God say: *You are my son, I have begotten you today?* and to what angel did he promise: *I shall be a father to him and he will be a son to me?* ⁶On sending his First-born to the world, God says: *Let all the angels adore him.* ⁷Whereas about angels we find words like these: *God sends the angels like wind, makes his servants flames of fire.*

⁸But of the Son we read this: *Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever; a rule of justice is your rule.*

You loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness, above your fellow kings.

¹⁰And also these words: *Lord, in the beginning you placed the earth on its foundation and the heavens are the work of your hands.* ¹¹*They will disappear, but you remain. They will be for you like an old garment;* ¹²*you will fold them like a cloak and change them. You, on the contrary, are always the same and your years will never end.*

¹³God never said to any of his angels: *Sit here at my right side until I put your enemies as a footstool under your feet.* ¹⁴For all these spirits are only servants, and God sends them to help those who shall be saved.

2 ¹So we must pay the closest attention to the preaching we heard, lest we drift away. ²If words spoken through angels became law and all disobedience or neglect received its due reward, ³how could we now escape if we neglect such powerful salvation? For the Lord himself announced it first and it was later confirmed by those who heard it. ⁴God

2. Gal 4, 4; Jn 1, 3; Col 1, 16

3. 2 Cor 4, 4; Col 1, 17; Wis 8, 1; Mk 16, 19; Acts 2, 33

4. Phil 2, 9

5. Ps 2, 7

6. 2 S 7, 14; Ps 97, 7

7. Ps 104, 4

8. Ps 46, 7

10. Ps 107, 26

13. Ps 110, 1; Acts 2, 33

14. Mt 4, 11; 18, 10

2. Gal 3, 19

4. Mk 16, 17; 1 Cor 12, 11; 2 Cor 12, 12

■ This chapter shows Christ, the Son of God, as superior to angels. See the same controversy in Col 1:15-20 and Eph 1:2-23. Before Jesus was born, the Son was in God, the radiance of the glory of the Father. God from God, Light from light, invisible Image of the invisible God, bearing the stamp of God's hidden being (Jn 1:1-14).

This comparing Jesus with the angels may surprise us (as in Eph 1 and Col 1). But for believers of Jesus' time, it was enough to contemplate nature to presume, beyond the harmony and splendor of creation, the active presence of cosmic power beings, which they called angels – the distributors of divine riches. To them, Moses had not met God himself, but it was the angels who had given him the Law (see 2:1). Thus, could a man match these mysterious powers, no matter how holy he may have been, even Jesus?

■ The new world. Actually the text says: *the world to come*. This does not mean future times, or the end of the world, but the new and definitive times which began with the resurrection of Christ.

The new world is where the risen Christ is. It is the homeland we were hoping for. But, this new world has also already come to us: he who believes and is alive experiences it all the time and recognizes it in others.

He thought it fitting to make perfect through suffering the initiator of their salvation (v 10). There is no other way to the liberation of men than the way of the cross. Those who are eager to free their brothers must be tested, some through opposition, others through indifference. Suffering is a good teacher: and it tests the strength of our surrender.

It is on the cross of Christ that we must dis-

confirmed their testimony by signs, wonders and miracles of every kind – especially by the gifts of the Holy Spirit which he distributed according to his will.

■ ⁵ The angels were not given dominion over the new world of which we are speaking. ⁶ Instead someone declared in Scripture: *What is man, that you should be mindful of him?* ⁷ *For a while you placed him a little lower than the angels, but you crowned him with glory and honour.* ⁸ *You have given him dominion over all things.*

When it is said that God gave him dominion over all things, nothing is excluded. As it is we do not yet see his dominion over all things. ⁹ But Jesus who suffered death and *for a little while was placed lower than the angels has been crowned with honour and glory.* For the merciful plan of God demanded that he experience death on behalf of everyone.

¹⁰ God, from whom all comes and by whom all things exist, wanted to bring to glory a great number of sons, and he thought it fitting to make perfect through suffering the initiator of their salvation. ¹¹ So he who gives and those who receive holiness are only

one. He himself is not ashamed of calling us brothers, ¹² as we read: *Lord, I will proclaim your name to my brothers; I will praise you in the congregation.* ¹³ He also says: *I will trust in God; here I am and the children God has given me.*

¹⁴ And because all those children share one same nature of flesh and blood, Jesus likewise had to share this nature. This is why his death destroyed the one holding the power of death, that is the devil, ¹⁵ and freed those who remained in bondage all their lifetime because of the fear of death. ¹⁶ Jesus came to take by the hand, not the angels but the human race. ¹⁷ So he had to be like his brothers in every respect, in order to be the High Priest faithful to God and merciful to them, a priest able to forgive and atone for their sins.

Christ came as the new Moses

◆ **3** ¹ Holy brothers, called to a supernatural vocation, consider Jesus, the apostle and High Priest of our faith.

² He is faithful to God who appointed him, just as Moses was a *faithful steward over God's household* ³ but Jesus deserves much greater honour

5. Col 2, 15

6. Ps 8, 5

8. 1 Cor 15, 25; Eph 1, 20

9. Phil 2, 6

10. Rom 11, 36;

1 Cor 8, 6; Jn 17, 19

12. Mt 28, 10; Jn 20, 17; Ps 22, 23

13. Is 8, 17

14. Rom 8, 3;

Wis 2, 24; 1 Jn 3, 8

16. Is 41, 8

17. Phil 2, 7

2. Num 12, 7

3. 2 Cor 3, 7

cover the love of the Father for his Son, since he did not "condemn him" to suffer among men, but rather, by way of suffering, he called him to be the Saviour and model for everyone.

Christ *had to share this nature* (v 14). God uses human solidarity to save us. Christ saves us through sharing *flesh and blood*, and the destiny of men. In the same way, we are saved if we help in the liberation of the world, if we accept our dependence and solidarity with others courageously. To work side by side with others, to suffer and rejoice with them is a way of saving them. We would like, at times, to escape our human condition and be more independent: it seems to us that we would be better able to serve God, yet, this dependence in the details of daily life is the means which God wants so we can *take the human race by the hand*.

◆ The Jews knew that their ancestors, the Hebrews, had traveled through the desert under Moses' leadership, in the search of the land God had promised them.

We find the story of this march in Exodus. Through Moses, God was always inviting them to follow the path to real freedom. They, however, stopped longing for the Promised Land when they saw their nightmares disappear. Now, believers have to begin anew the search for the Promised Land, that is, the *Rest* that God offers. The first time, it was Moses, the *servant* of God, who guided his people and was responsible for his *household*. Now, it is the Son: they thought they would find rest in a specific place, in Palestine. But the true *Rest* is the intimate life of God which we reach through faith and entrance into the Christian community.

than Moses, since he who builds the house is greater than the house. ⁴As every house has a builder, God is the builder of all. ⁵It is said that Moses was found faithful as a servant of God over all his household, and as witness of a former revelation from God. ⁶Christ, came as the Son, to whom the house belongs; and we are his household, provided that we stand firm in hope and courage.

⁷Listen to what the Holy Spirit says: *If only you would hear God's voice today!* ⁸*Do not be stubborn, as they were in the place called Rebellion,* ⁹*when your fathers challenged me in the desert, although they had seen my deeds* ¹⁰*for forty years. That is why I was angry with those people and said: Their hearts are always going astray and they do not understand my ways.* ¹¹*I was angry and made a solemn promise: They will never enter my rest.*

¹²So, brothers, be careful lest some of you come to have an evil and unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³Encourage one another, day by day, as long as it is called *today*. Let no one become hardened in the deceitful way of sin. ¹⁴We are associated with Christ provided we hold steadfastly to our initial hope until the end.

¹⁵Scripture says: *If you hear God's voice, do not be stubborn as they were*

in the place called Rebellion. ¹⁶Who are those who having heard still rebelled? They were all those who came out of Egypt with Moses. ¹⁷With whom was God angry for forty years? With those who sinned and whose bodies fell in the desert. ¹⁸To whom did God swear that they would not enter into his rest? To those who had disobeyed. ¹⁹We see then that unbelief prevented them from reaching their rest.

4 ¹Therefore let us fear while we are invited to enter the rest of God, lest any of you be left behind. ²We have been invited like them. But the message they heard did not benefit them because they did not hold to this belief. ³We are now to enter this rest because we believed, as it was said: *I was angry and made a solemn promise: they will never enter my rest* – that is the rest of God after he created the world. ⁴In another part it was said about the seventh day: *And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.* ⁵But now it is said: *They will not enter my rest.* ⁶We must conclude that some will enter the rest of God and those who first received the good news did not, because of their unbelief. ⁷Yet God again assigns a day when he says: *today*, and declares through David many years later: *If you hear God's voice today, do not be stubborn.*

6. 1 Cor 3, 9; Eph 2, 19; 1 Pet 2, 5; Ps 95	8. Ps 95	13. 2 Thes 2, 10	14. Phil 3, 12
17. Num 14, 19; Jn 6, 58; 1 Cor 10, 5	4. Gen 2, 2		

Several times this letter will recall the warning given the Hebrew pilgrims in the desert: *If only you would hear God's voice today!* The road is long and the believer grows tired when difficult times come following the enthusiasm of the first days. Supported by Christ's words, we must continue to hope for that which God promised, but which is invisible to our eyes.

The creation poem spoke of God's Rest after creating the world: this meant that the progress of the universe must come to a point, which is entering into the fulness of the mystery of God. The sorrow and work of man on this earth bring

him to his true end, which is "to rest" in the happiness of God.

• For the Jews, the High Priest – despite his personal defects – was a sacred person protecting the people from the punishment deserved by their sins. The people did not only need leaders to govern them, but also an advocate before God. Aaron, Moses' brother, the first priest of the Jews, had been such a man. His successors, the high Priests, were to be the same.

This idea is developed here: the High Priest is men's representative before God and he must

⁸ So it was not Joshua who let them enter the land of rest; otherwise God would have not assigned another day later on. ⁹ Then some other rest, or sabbath, is reserved for the people of God. ¹⁰ He who enters this rest of God rests from all his works as God rests from his work.

¹¹ Let us strive, then, to enter the rest and not to share the misfortune of those who disobeyed. ¹² For the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and judges the intentions and thoughts of the heart. ¹³ All creation is transparent to Him; everything is uncovered and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we render account.

Christ is our high priest

ο ¹⁴ We have a great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who has entered Heaven. Let us, then, hold fast to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ Our high priest is not indifferent to our weaknesses, for he was tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sinning. ¹⁶ Let us, then, approach with confidence God, the giver of grace; we will obtain mercy and through his favor, help in due time.

5

¹ Every High Priest is taken from among men and ap-

pointed to be their representative before God. It falls to him to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin. ² He is able to understand the ignorant and erring for he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he is bound to offer sacrifices for his sins as well as for the sins of the people. ⁴ Besides, one does not take upon himself this dignity, but he has to be called by God, as Aaron was.

⁵ Nor did Christ become High Priest in taking upon himself this dignity, but it was given to him by the One who says: *You are my son, I have begotten you today.* ⁶ And in another place: *You are a priest forever in the priestly order of Melchisedek.*

⁷ Christ, in the days of his mortal life offered his sacrifice with tears and cries. He prayed to him who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his humble submission. ⁸ Although he was Son, he learned through suffering what obedience was, ⁹ and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to those who obey him. ¹⁰ This is how God proclaimed him Priest in the order of Melchisedek.

You should be teachers

+ ¹¹ About this we have much to say, but it is difficult to explain, for you have become dull in understand-

8. Jos 22, 4

10. Rev 14, 13

12. Eph 6, 17; Wis 18, 25

13. Jer 17, 10; Ps 139; Rom 14, 12

15. Gal 4, 4; 2 Cor 5, 21; Jn 8, 46

16. 10, 19

1. 8, 3

3. Lev 9, 7

4. Ex 28, 1

5. Ps 2, 7

6. Ps 110, 4

9. Phil 2, 8; Jn 17, 19

be weak as they are but accepted by God. Christ is just that and perfectly so. Forgetting that Jesus is a man among men is as serious for the faith as forgetting that he is the Son of God.

It is helpful to look at the role of Christ, the High Priest, at the time the Church is reminding us that all the faithful are associated with the priestly role of Christ. We must represent humanity before God; we are consecrated to God for that purpose.

When we celebrate the Eucharist, along with the offering of our own lives, we present to God all the work and life of the world. In the Eucharist we thank God in the name of everyone. In daily

life, we must be the instruments of the grace of God, by being people who promote truth, encourage love and establish peaceful relationships.

He offered his sacrifice with tears and cries (v 7). In the Bible, these words are used to express the insistent prayer of the oppressed sons of God: they cry to God in such a loud voice that he listens to them. Thus, the night before his death, Jesus identified with men and women who suffer and do not want to die.

+ *You should be teachers.* There are different stages in the development of faith. We cannot begin again to take our first steps. To be in



ing.¹² You should be teachers by this time, but in fact you need to be taught again the basic elements of God's teaching. You need milk, not solid food.¹³ Those fed with milk are still infants: this refers to those who have not been tested in the way of righteousness.¹⁴ Solid food is for the adults who have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

6 ¹Therefore let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and move forward to a more advanced knowledge without laying again the foundation, that is: turning away from dead works, faith in God,² the teaching about baptisms and laying on of the hands, the resurrection of the dead and the definitive judgment.³ This is what we shall do, God permitting.

⁴In any case, it would be impossible to renew again through penance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift and received the Holy Spirit,⁵ tasted the beauty of the word of God and the wonders of the supernatural world.⁶ If in spite of this they have ceased to believe and have fallen away, it is impossible to move them a

second time to repentance when they are crucifying, on their own account, the Son of God, and spurning him publicly.⁷ Soil that drinks the rain falling continually on it and produces profitable grass for those who till it, receives the blessings of God,⁸ but the soil producing thorns and bushes is bad soil and in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

Remain him in our hope

⁹Yet even though we speak like this, we are more optimistic, dear friends, regarding you and your salvation.¹⁰ God is not unjust and will not forget everything you did for love of his name; you have helped and still help the believers.¹¹ We desire each of you to have, until the end, the same zeal to reach what you have hoped for.¹² Do not grow careless but imitate those who, by their faith and determination, inherit the promise.

¹³Remember God's promise to Abraham. God wanted to confirm it with an oath and, as no one is higher than God,¹⁴ he swore by himself: I shall bless you and give you many descendants.¹⁵ By just patiently waiting, Abraham obtained the promise.

12. 1 Cor 3, 1; 1 Pet 2, 2 1 In 5, 16	14. 1 Cor 2, 6; Phil 1, 10 Gen 22, 17	4. 1 Per 2, 3	6. 10, 26; 12, 25;
	15. Rom 4, 20		

the Church for years, without achieving a more enlightened faith and a richer experience, is to grow old and to become incapable of progress.

This letter tells us briefly what were the basic points of Christian teaching (6:1-3).

Teaching about baptism, that is, explanation of the various ways which were presented to men of good will in search of a religion. Some Jewish groups practised a weekly baptism; there was John's baptism, and also, Christian baptism. There, the value of Christian baptism was taught.

The laying on of hands is the ancient name for confirmation: the sacrament communicating the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In these basic points the seriousness of human life stands out: there are only two opposed roads which lead to judgment. If one does not decide for the road leading to Christ, one loses one's life.

Those who were enlightened (v 4). In the early Church, baptism was often called, enlightenment. Not only because people had been instructed in the true faith, but because, very often, the Lord grants a very tangible experience of his presence to the person entering the Church after an authentic conversion. It is the same experience of God which the people who take part in spiritual exercises with a very sincere dedication, often have.

Such an experience is explained more extensively in 12:18-24.

Those who have tasted the wonders of the supernatural world (v 5). Let us remember that up until a few centuries back, everyone believed that the earth was the center of the universe. For them, heaven was above the earth, like a vault, and beyond this vault were the high heavens also called the heavenly world. They thought that God was dwelling



¹⁶Men are used to swearing by someone higher than themselves and their oath affirms everything that could be denied. ¹⁷So God committed himself with an oath in order to convince those who were to wait for his promise that he would never change his mind. ¹⁸Thus we have two certainties in which it is impossible that God be proved false: promise and oath. That is enough to encourage us strongly when we leave everything to hold to the hope set before us. ¹⁹This hope is like a spiritual anchor, secure and firm, thrust beyond the curtain of the Temple, into the sanctuary itself, ²⁰where Jesus has entered ahead of us – Jesus, High Priest for ever in the order of Melchisedek.

Melchisedek a figure of Christ

7 ¹Scripture says that *Melchisedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, came out to meet Abraham who returned from defeating the kings. He blessed Abraham and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.*

²Let us note that the name of *Melchisedek* means King of Justice, and that *king of Salem* means king of

Peace. ³There is no mention of father, mother or genealogy; nothing is said about the beginning or the end of his life. In this he is the figure of the Son of God, the priest who remains forever.

⁴See then how great Melchisedek was. Even Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils!

⁵When the descendants of Levi are consecrated priests, they are commanded to collect tithes from their countrymen, that is from their brothers, although they, too, are descendants of Abraham. ⁶Here, however, Melchisedek, who does not belong to the family of the Levites, is given tithes from Abraham. Still more, he blesses him, the man of God's promise. ⁷There is no doubt that he who blesses is higher than the one who is blessed.

⁸In the first case we see mortal men receiving tithes; here instead, Melchisedek is mentioned as the living.

⁹When Abraham pays the tenth, it is, so to speak, the Levites, receivers of the tithes, who pay the tithe, ¹⁰because, in a way, Levi was still in the body of Abraham, his ancestor, when Melchisedek met him.

¹¹The Law of the chosen people was founded upon the Levitical priesthood, but with it they could not attain what is perfect and definitive. If that were possible, why would there be a need of another priest *after the order of Melchisedek* instead of Aaron's? ¹²If there is a change in the priesthood, the Law also has to be changed. ¹³Jesus to whom all this has reference, was from a tribe that never served at the altar. ¹⁴All know that he belonged to the tribe

18. Num 23, 19
11. Ps 110, 4

19. Mt 10, 20; Lev 16, 2; Mt 27, 51
14. Mt 1, 1; Rom 1, 3; Rev 5, 5

1. Gen 14, 17

3. Jn 7, 27

5. Dt 14, 22

there with those who have a share in his glory.

Thus, heavenly things were also supernatural things as we say now, or divine. For this reason, in this letter we are saying supernatural wherever we could also write: heavenly (3:1; 8:5; 9:23; 11:16), because the author is referring to divine things which are already experienced on earth.

An anchor which is thrust beyond the curtain (v 19). In the Temple of Jerusalem, only the High priest entered the Holy of Holies, separated from the adjoining room by a veil. This is the image of heaven, the authentic Holy of Holies, where Jesus alone entered. We remain behind, but our hope is already in heaven: this is not human illusion, but a longing which comes to us from God himself who is incapable of deceiving us. We will surely arrive there where we have placed our hope.

■What was said about Melchizedek, a figure of Christ, continues here (see Gen 14:18 and Psalm 110:4). Let us not forget that this letter is addressed especially to Jewish priests, descendants of Aaron, who were priests from generation to generation. And so, it was a question of demonstrating to them that this Jewish worship had ceased to be useful and that Scripture itself had announced this change.

We can admire the way this Melchizedek event, which occupies such a minor place in the Bible, is probed in depth to prove with irrefutable logic that Christ had to change the whole religion of Israel. We said in the introduction that this letter may have been written by Apollos, a prophet of the early Church. His gifts as a prophet are obvious here.

The Old Testament was the religious book of everyone in the early Church. Yet, this book ap-

of Judah, that is not mentioned by Moses when he speaks of the priesthood.

¹⁵ All this, however, becomes clear if this priest after the likeness of Melchisedek ¹⁶ has in fact received his mission, not on the basis of any human law, but by the power of an immortal life. ¹⁷ Because Scripture says: *You are priest forever in the priestly order of Melchisedek.* ¹⁸ With this the former disposition is removed as insufficient and useless ¹⁹ (for the law did not bring anything to perfection). At the same time a better hope is given to us: that of drawing near to God.

²⁰ This change is confirmed by God's oath. When the others became priests, God did not compromise himself with an oath ²¹ but Jesus is confirmed with an oath, as it is said: *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: you are priest forever.* ²² Therefore, Jesus is our assurance of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many since, as mortal men, they could not remain in office. ²⁴ But Jesus remains forever and the priesthood shall not be taken from him. ²⁵ Consequently he is able to save for all time those who approach God through him. He always lives to intercede on their behalf.

²⁶ It was fitting that our High Priest be holy, undefiled, set apart from sinners and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷ a priest who does not first need to offer sacrifice for himself before offering for the sins of the people, as high priests do. He offered himself in sacrifice once and for all. ²⁸ And, whereas the Law elected weak men as high priests, now, after the Law the word of God with an oath, appointed the Son, made perfect forever.

A new sanctuary and a new covenant

◆ **8** ¹ The main point of what we are saying is that we have a high priest. He is seated at the right hand of the divine majesty in Heaven, ² where he serves as minister of the true temple and sanctuary, set up not by men but by the Lord.

³ A high priest is appointed to offer to God gifts and sacrifices, and Jesus also has to offer some sacrifice. ⁴ Had he remained on earth, he would not be a priest, since others offer the gifts according to the Law. ⁵ In fact, the ritual celebrated by those priests is only an imitation and shadow of the supernatural ritual. We know the word of God to Moses with regard to the construction of the holy tent. He said: *You are to make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain.*

⁶ Now, however, Jesus enjoys a much higher ministry for being the mediator of a better covenant, founded on better promises. ⁷ If all had been perfect in the first covenant, there would have been no need for another one. ⁸ Yet God is seeing defects when he says:

The days are coming – it is the word of the Lord – when I will draw up a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

⁹ *It will not be like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. They did not keep my covenant, and so I myself have forsaken them, says the Lord.*

¹⁰ *But this is the covenant that I will*

22. 2 Cor 3, 6

27. 5, 3

5. Rev 11, 19; Ex 25, 40

8. Jer 31, 31

parently did not mention Jesus and many Jews even thought, in good faith, that Christ was destroying the teaching of the Bible. The task of these Christian prophets was to demonstrate how the Bible was leading to Christ, and to refute the Jews' arguments with it: they provided the Church with a Christian understanding of the Old Testament. When Christians read the Old Testament now, they see there their own Christian history, while Jews view it quite differently as the "book of the Jews". To write these pages revealing the fuller meaning of the Old Testament, it was not enough to be able to understand the Scriptures, one needed to have the particular gift of prophecy.

◆ All those sacrifices to placate God's wrath

come from the idea they had then of a violent God who punishes, but cannot heal the heart.

Jesus enjoys a much higher ministry characteristic of people who know they are at peace with God, and today's prophets show us through what roads we must bring peace to the world. Even though some accuse us of being involved in politics when we show the demands of justice and peace, we must insist that such is our mission. Jesus did not die to defend religious observances, but rather to show that they were not what really mattered. His willing sacrifice sheds a light on everything we do to curb violence, injustice and alienation.

But this superior worship also involves an ever clearer loving relationship with God: a love

make with the people of Israel in the days to come: I will put my laws into their minds and write them in their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.

¹¹None of them will have to teach his fellow countryman or to tell his brother: Know the Lord, for they will know me from the least to the greatest. ¹²I will forgive their sins and no longer remember their wrongs.

¹³Here we are being told of a *new covenant*; which means that the first one had become obsolete, and what is obsolete and aging is soon to disappear.

The temple in Jerusalem

9 ¹The first covenant had rites and prescriptions. There was also a sanctuary – an earthly one. ²A first room had the lampstand, the table and the bread of the presence. This room is called the Holy Place. ³Behind the second curtain, there is a second sanctuary called the Most Holy Place, ⁴with the gold altar for the burning of incense, and the ark of the Covenant, fully covered with gold. The ark contained a golden jar holding the manna, Aaron's rod that had sprouted leaves and the two slabs of the covenant. ⁵Above the ark the two cherubim of glory overshadowed the Seat of Mercy. But we cannot here describe it in detail.

⁶With everything arranged as described, the priests continually enter the first room to fulfil their ministry; ⁷but the High Priest enters only once a year the second one, and not without bringing the blood which he will offer for himself and for the sins of the people. ⁸By this the Holy Spirit teaches us that the way into the inner sanctuary is not opened as long as the first room still stands. ⁹Here is a teaching by means of figures for the present age: the gifts and sacrifices presented to God cannot bring the people offering them to interior perfection. ¹⁰For these foods, drinks and different kinds of cleansing by water are only human regulations to be performed until the time of renewal.

Jesus entered with his own blood

¹¹But now Christ has appeared as the high priest with regard to the good things of these new times. He passed through a sanctuary more noble and perfect, not made by man, that is, not created. ¹²He did not take with himself the blood of goats and bulls but his own blood, when he entered once and for all into this sanctuary after obtaining definitive redemption. ¹³If the sprinkling of people defiled by sin with the blood of goats and bulls or with the ashes of a heifer provides them with exterior cleanness and holiness, ¹⁴how much more will it be

13. 1 Cor 11, 25; Mt 26, 28; 2 Cor 5, 17; Rev 21, 4	1. Ex 25-26	4. Ex 16, 34; Num 17, 23
7. Lev 16, 2	10. Col 3, 17; 3. 23	14. 1 Pet 1, 19; 1 Jn 1, 7

coming from him and returning to him is at the root of all our actions.

o After establishing that Jesus was replacing the Jewish priests, we have a long comparison between their kind of worship and the worship which Christ celebrates.

In the first Covenant, or the Old Testament, the Jews had a temple with rituals and sacrifices which were a way to obtain the forgiveness of sins, every day. A *New Covenant* (or New Testament), announced by Jeremiah, begins with Jesus.

The author of this letter develops a compar-

ison between the death of Christ and the old sacrifices. This, however, does not mean that Jesus' Passion was a sacrifice like the old ones, to placate God's wrath. There is an enormous difference between those sacrifices required by the Law at specific times and the death of Jesus. His death was his final witness and the way for him to sow in men what they did not want to receive.

Knowing who the author of this letter was and to whom it was addressed, we understand that he relates the *blood* of Jesus and his *death* to that of the victims which were offered in the

with the blood of Christ? He, moved by the eternal Spirit, offered himself as an unblemished victim to God and his blood cleanses us from dead works, so that we may serve the living God.

¹⁵ So Christ is the mediator of a new covenant or testament. His death made atonement for the sins committed under the old testament, and the promise is handed over to all who are called to the everlasting inheritance.

¹⁶ With every testament it is necessary to wait until its author has died. ¹⁷ For a testament infers death and has no value while the maker of it is still alive.

¹⁸ That is why the first covenant was not ratified without blood.

¹⁹ Moses proclaimed to the assembled people all the commandments of the Law; then he took the blood of bulls and goats and mixed it with water, hyssop and red wool, and sprinkled the book of the Covenant and the people ²⁰saying: *This is the blood of the Covenant that God commanded you.* ²¹ In the same way he sprinkled with blood the Sanctuary and all the objects of the ritual. ²² According to the Law, almost all cleansings have to be performed with blood; there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.

²³ It was necessary that mere copies of supernatural realities be purified, but now these realities need better sacrifices. ²⁴ Christ did not enter some man-made sanctuary, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself. He is now in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Unlike the High Priest who enters the Sanctuary year after year bringing blood which is not his own, ²⁶ he sacrificed himself once – not repeatedly. Otherwise he would have suffered many times from the creation of the world. But no; he manifested himself only now at the end of the ages, to take away sin by sacrifice, ²⁷ and, as men die only once and afterwards are judged, ²⁸ in the same way Christ sacrificed himself once to take away the sins of the multitude. There will be no further question of sin when he comes again to save those waiting for him.

The old covenant prefigures the new

♦ **10** ¹ The religion of the Law is only a shadow of the good things to come; it has the patterns and not the realities. So, year after year the same sacrifices are offered without bringing the worshippers to what is the end. ² If they had been cleansed once and for all, they would no longer have felt guilt and would have

15. Mt 26, 28 16. Gal 3, 15 20. Ex 24, 8
1 Thes 1, 10; Phil 3, 20 1. Col 2, 17

26. Gal 4, 4; Jn 1, 29 28. 1 Tim 6, 14; Is 53, 12;

Temple, since, for them these things were very important. But, today, we have the right to relate the blood and the death of Christ to the death of all the murdered innocent, as Jesus himself gave us to understand (Mt 23:35): their blood is sacred too (Rev 6:9).

The author remarks that Jesus *entered with his own blood* while men always sacrifice others. *He passed through a more perfect sanctuary* (11), that is, it was not only a human action but one inspired by God (14) and through it, Jesus came to share the Glory of the Father once more (Jn 17:5).

♦ If, once and for all, the worshippers had been cleansed (10:2). The author states that, if there were many sacrifices for forgiveness, this

shows that they cannot free from sin. Then, since we often need the forgiveness of our sins in confession, for example, it is fitting to ask: is this not the proof that Christ's sacrifice does not free us completely?

This can be answered in different ways:

On one hand, even though we receive the sacrament of penance quite often, we are always the beneficiaries of the same sacrifice of Christ.

But, above all, we must insist that Christians are free from sin, namely, of being slaves to sin. John says (1 Jn 3:6) that he who abides in Christ does not sin, nor can sin, referring to the sin leading to death (1 Jn 5:17), because there are also sins that we commit and which do not bring

stopped offering the same sacrifices.³ But no, year after year their sacrifices witness to their sins⁴ and never will the blood of bulls and goats take away these sins.

⁵This is why, on entering the world Christ says: *You did not desire sacrifice and offering;*⁶ *you were not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings.*⁷ Then I said: "Here I am. It was written of me in the scroll. I will do your will, O God".

⁸First he says: *Sacrifice, offering, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire nor were you pleased with them* – although they were required by the Law. ⁹Then he says: *Here I am to do your will.*

This is enough to nullify the old testament and establish the new.¹⁰ Now, by this will of God, we are sanctified at once by the sacrifice of the body of Christ Jesus.¹¹ So, whereas every priest stands daily by the altar offering repeatedly the same sacrifices that can never take away sins,¹² Christ has offered for all times a single sacrifice for sins and has taken his seat *at the right hand of God*,¹³ waiting until God *puts his enemies as a footstool under his feet*.¹⁴ By a single sacrifice he has brought those who are sanctified to what is perfect and definitive.

¹⁵This also was testified by the Holy Spirit. For after having declared: ¹⁶*This is the covenant that I will make with them in the days to come – says the Lord – I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds.*¹⁷ He says: *Their sins and evil deeds I will remember no more.*¹⁸ So, if sins are forgiven, there is no longer need of any sacrifice for sin.

Be confident in God

+ ¹⁹So, my brothers, we are assured of entering the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus²⁰ who opened for us this new and living way passing through *the curtain*, that is his body.²¹ Because we have a high priest in charge of the House of God,²² let us approach with a sincere heart, with full faith, interiorly cleansed from a bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

²³Let us hold fast to our hope without wavering, because he who promised is faithful.²⁴ Let us consider how we may spur one another to love and good works.²⁵ Do not abandon the assemblies as some of you do, but encourage one another, and all the more since the Day is drawing near.

²⁶If we sin willfully after receiving knowledge of the truth, there is no longer sacrifice for sin,²⁷ but only the

5. Ps 40, 6

16. Jer 31

22. Ex 36, 25; Eph 5, 26

us to death.

It is only the sins which produce a complete break with Christ, in denying one of the great commitments of our lives, which can bring us back to the former situation. Those who often come to the sacrament of penance would be wrong to think they lose God's friendship from one confession to the next: we are and we remain in grace.

+ *We are assured of entering, let us approach.* To encourage those who doubt, it is necessary to awaken their confidence in God, the Father.

Do not abandon the assemblies (v 25). To abandon the Sunday celebration, or the assembly of the community to which we belong, is a serious fault. The Christian community, which is

not a group of angels, comes to pieces when its members only appear once in a while. And we, not being angels, have trouble remaining united with Christ if we do not take part in a community. When we lose contact with our brothers in the faith, we run the risk of losing the meaning of our mission. No solidarity with our neighborhood or work companions will remind us that, in their midst, we are the witnesses of something which they do not know.

A little longer (37). This is taken from Habakkuk 2:3 referring to the judgment of God which is approaching. The author of the letter may have wanted to allude to the crisis which, very soon, was going to destroy the Jewish nation.



fearful prospect of fire which devours the rebellious. ²⁸ For whoever violated the law of Moses there is no mercy: he is put to death by the testimony of two or three persons. ²⁹ What, then, do you think it will be for the person who has despised the Son of God? How severely shall he be punished for having defiled the blood of the covenant that sanctified him and for having insulted the Spirit given to him? ³⁰ For we know the One who says: *Revenge is mine, I will repay.* And also: *The Lord will judge his people.* ³¹ What a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³² Remember the first days when you were enlightened. You had to undergo a hard struggle in the face of suffering. ³³ Publicly you were exposed to humiliations and trials, and had to share the sufferings of others who were similarly treated. ³⁴ You showed solidarity with those in prison; you were dispossessed of your goods and accepted it gladly for you knew you were acquiring a much better and more durable possession. ³⁵ Do not now throw away your confidence which will be handsomely rewarded. ³⁶ Be patient in doing the will of God, and the promise will be yours: *A little, a little longer – says Scripture – and he who is coming will come; he will not delay.* ³⁸ *My righteous one will live if he believes; but if he distrusts, I will no longer look kindly on him.*

³⁹ We are not of those who withdraw and perish, but of those who believe and win personal salvation.

Remembering the heroes of faith

11 ¹ Faith is the way of holding on to what we hope for, being certain of what we cannot see. ² Because of their faith our ancestors were approved.

³ By faith we understand that the stages of the world were disposed by God's word, and what is visible came from what cannot be seen.

⁴ Because of Abel's faith his offering was more acceptable than that of his brother Cain, which meant he was upright, and God himself approved his offering. Because of this faith he *cried to God*, as said in Scripture, even after he died.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken to Heaven, instead of experiencing death: *he could not be found because God had taken him.* In fact, it is said that before being taken up he had pleased God. ⁶ Yet without faith it is impossible to please him: no one draws near to God without first believing that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him earnestly.

⁷ By faith Noah was instructed of events which could not yet be seen and, heeding what he heard, he built a boat in which to save his family. The faith of Noah condemned the world and he reached holiness born of faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham, called by God, obeyed when told to set out for a country that would be given to him as an inheritance, and he set out without knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as a stranger in that promised land. There he lived in

27. Is 26, 11 28. Dt 17, 6 29. Mt 26, 28; 1 Cor 11, 27 30. Dt 32, 35 31. Mt 10, 28 37. Heb 2, 3
39. 1 Pet 1, 9 1. Rom 8, 24 4. Gen 4, 4 5. Gen 5, 24 7. Gen 6; Rom 3, 22 8. Gen 12 9. Gen 26

■ Faith is a way of holding on to what we hope for, being certain of what we cannot see. The examples chosen in this page and the lessons drawn from each of them, are especially addressed to persecuted believers who had to give up their quiet lives in order to be faithful to Christ.

Christian faith is not only in our convictions. It always leads to a way of life according to faith values, in the midst of hardships and distress. More important than to know the definition of faith and hope, is to act and take decisions inspired in faith. That is why St. Paul introduces here so many Biblical exam-



tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, beneficiaries of the same promise.¹⁰ Indeed, he looked forward to that city of solid foundation of which God is the architect and builder.

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to be a mother, in spite of her advanced age; since she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful.¹² Therefore, from an almost impotent man were born descendants as numerous as the stars of heavens, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore.

¹³ Death found all these people strong in their faith. They had not received what was promised, but they had looked ahead and had rejoiced in it from afar, saying that they were *foreigners and travellers* on earth.¹⁴ Those who speak in this way prove that they are looking for their own country.¹⁵ For if they had longed for the land they had left, it would have been easy for them to return.¹⁶ but no, they aspired to a better city, that is, a supernatural one; so God, who prepared the city for them is not ashamed of being called their God.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham went to offer Isaac when God tested him. And so he who had received the promise of God offered his only son¹⁸ although God had told him: *Isaac's descendants will*

*bear your name.*¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God is capable even of raising the dead, and he received back his son, which has a figurative meaning.

²⁰ By faith also Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, determining their future.

²¹ By faith Jacob, before he died, blessed both children of Joseph, and worshipped as he leaned on his staff.

²² By faith Joseph, when about to die, warned the children of Israel of their exodus and gave orders about his remains.

²³ By faith the parents of the newly born Moses hid him for three months, for they saw the baby was very beautiful and they did not fear the order of Pharaoh.²⁴ By faith Moses, already an adult, refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter.²⁵ He preferred to share ill treatment with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin.²⁶ Moses considered humiliation for the sake of Christ greater riches than the wealth of Egypt, and he looked ahead for his reward.²⁷ By faith he left Egypt without fearing the king's anger, and he persevered as if he could see another invisible wrath.

²⁸ By faith Moses had the Passover celebrated, sprinkling the doors with blood so that the Destroyer would not kill the firstborn sons.²⁹ By faith they crossed the Red Sea, as if on dry land,

11. Gen 17, 19 22. Gen 48, 15	12. Gen 15, 5 23. Ex 2, 2; 1, 22	13. Gen 47, 9 28. Ex 12	17. James 2, 20	18. Gen 22, 1
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ples of men and women who risked everything for the sake of their faith. We do not understand Abraham's extreme obedience and trust in God 'against all hopes', without faith. We do not understand Moses giving up a comfortable future, and taking up an impossible task as his people's leader, unless his faith were so strong as to live in the present "as if seeing the invisible".

He persevered as if he could see another invisible wrath (27). Faith inspires us to act in the present, but with a view to what is not seen yet. In this paragraph we are dealing with leaders, courageous, strong men. By seeking the liberation or promotion of their group, or more

human life-situations, enabling people to live with dignity, they are looking for the best homeland, which is never attained in this life.

Today, we can say the same of many people who, perhaps, are not believers nor take part in the Church, but people who are truly on the way to the city of God when they sacrifice themselves to prepare the future of the world, as if they saw what is invisible: they are the Hebrews of the modern world and God is not ashamed of being called their God (16).

These heroes of faith all work with the same goal. Each one of them dies without seeing what God promised, in seeming failure, but their successors, in looking back, verify that people of faith built real history.

while the Egyptians who tried to cross it were swallowed by the waters and drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho crumbled and fell, after Israel had marched round them for seven days; ³¹ by faith, also, the prostitute, Rahab, escaped death, for having welcomed the spies.

³² Do I need to say more? There is not enough time to speak of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, as well as Samuel and the prophets.

³³ Through faith they fought and conquered nations, established justice, saw the fulfilment of God's promises, shut the mouth of lions, ³⁴ quenched raging fire, escaped the sword, were healed of their sicknesses, were valiant in battle, repulsed foreign invaders.

³⁵ Some women recovered their dead by resurrection but there were others – persecuted and tortured believers, who, for the sake of a better resurrection, refused to do what would have saved them. ³⁶ Others suffered chains and prison. ³⁷ They were stoned, sawn in two, killed by the sword. They fled from place to place with no other clothing than the skins of sheep and goats, lacking everything, afflicted, ill-treated. ³⁸ These men of whom the world was not worthy had to wander through wildernesses and mountains, and take refuge in the dens of the land.

³⁹ However, although all of them were praised because of their faith, they did not enjoy the promise ⁴⁰ be-

cause God was preparing something much better, and did not want them to reach this end ahead of us.

Accept the correction of the Lord

12 ¹ What a cloud of innumerable witnesses surround us! So let us be rid of every encumbrance and especially of sin, to persevere in running the race marked out before us.

² Let us look to Jesus the founder of our faith and who will bring it to completion. For the sake of the joy reserved for him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and then sat at the right of the throne of God. ³ Think of Jesus who suffered so many contradictions from evil people, and you will not be discouraged or grow weary. ⁴ Have you already shed your blood in the struggle against sin?

⁵ Do not forget the comforting words that Wisdom addresses to you as children: *My son, pay attention when the Lord corrects you and do not be discouraged when he punishes you. For the Lord corrects those he loves and chastises everyone he accepts as a son.*

⁷ What you endure is in order to correct you. God treats you like sons and what son is not corrected by his father? ⁸ If you were without correction, (as is fitting for sons), you would not be sons but bastards. ⁹ Besides, when our parents according to the flesh corrected us, we respected them. How much more should we be subject

30. Jos 6, 20 2 Mac 6, 18	31. Jos 2, 11; James 2, 25 36. Jer 20, 37	32. Jdg 6, 11; 4, 6; 1 S 12, 11 2. 13, 13; Phil 2, 5	35. 1 K 17, 23; 5. Pro 3, 11
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♦ Three arguments to remain steadfast under testing:

- Think about Jesus and his sufferings.
- Think about "the communion of saints", that is to say, the mysterious bonds uniting all believers.
- Think of the trial as a testing coming from the Father.

After such a long presentation of Christ, priest and victim, a conclusion is evident for those of us who are part of Christ: we want to see God, but in order to find him, we must die, letting go of this life without sadness.

The Father of spirits (v 9). In Numbers 16:22, Moses begs the God of the spirits of all mankind: it is a way of saying that since God

to the Father of the spirits to have life?

¹⁰ Our parents corrected us as they saw fit, with a view to this very short life; but God corrects us for our own good that we may share his holiness.

¹¹ All correction is painful rather than pleasant; later it brings the fruit of peace, that is, holiness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Lift up, then, your drooping hands, and strengthen your trembling knees; ¹³ make level the ways for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but healed.

Strive to be holy

o ¹⁴ Strive for peace with all men and strive to be holy, for without holiness no one will see the Lord.

¹⁵ See that no one falls from the grace of God, lest a *bitter plant springs up and its poison corrupts* many among you. ¹⁶ Let no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ You know that later, when he wished to get the blessing, he was rejected although he pleaded with tears.

¹⁸ You have come to the mountain which is not of this earth. There was no *blazing fire, darkness and gloom and storms...* ¹⁹ *blasts of trumpets* or such a *voice* that the people pleaded that no further word be spoken. ²⁰ Because of this they respected the order not to approach: *Every man or beast reaching the mountain shall be*

stoned. ²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said: I tremble with fear.

²² But you came near to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem with its innumerable angels. You have come to the solemn feast, ²³ the assembly of the firstborn of God, whose names are written in Heaven. There is God, Judge of all, with the spirits of the upright brought to perfection. ²⁴ There is Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, with the sprinkled blood that cries out more effectively than Abel's.

²⁵ Be careful not to reject God when he speaks. If those who did not heed the prophet's warnings were not spared on earth, how much more shall we be punished if we do not heed the One warning us from Heaven? ²⁶ His voice then shook the earth, but now he says: *In this last time I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.*

²⁷ The words *in this last time* indicate the removal of everything that can be shaken, that is created things, and only those that cannot be shaken will remain. ²⁸ Such is the kingdom that we receive. Let us then be grateful and offer to God a worship pleasing to him with reverence and awe. ²⁹ Our God is indeed a *consuming fire*.

Words of encouragement

+13 ¹ Preserve brotherly love. ² Do not neglect to offer hospitality; you know that some people

12. Is 35, 3 13. Pro 8, 26 15. Dt 29, 17
21. Dt 9, 19 22. Gen 4, 26; Rev 21, 2
29. Dt 4, 24; 9, 23 2. Gen 18, 2

16. Gen 25, 33 18. Ex 19, 16 20. Ex 19, 12
23. Ps 82, 2 26. Ag 2, 6 28. Dn 7, 18

knows the inner core of all people, he knows their misery and he cannot punish them too severely.

o *You came near Mount Zion* (22). This mountain on which Jerusalem is built, is the figure of the heavenly city for the Jews. This paragraph expresses with powerful images all that an adult discovers when he converts to Christ and enters the Church. With baptism he

enters into the family of God, the saints and the angels. He has access to the mysterious center where the destiny of the world is decided, and he finds Jesus himself. In conversion, we can experience this and almost touch these truths, but we must not forget them, later, when tiredness and trials come.

+ Faith is great, but it is lived in the little things of daily life. The persecuted people to whom this

have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember prisoners as if you were with them in chains, and the same for those who are suffering. Remember that you also have a body.

⁴Marriage must be respected by all and husband and wife faithful to each other. God will punish the immoral and the adulterous.

⁵Do not depend on money. Be content with having enough for today for God has said: *I will never forsake you or abandon you*, ⁶and we shall confidently answer: *The Lord is my helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me?* ⁷Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Consider their end and imitate their faith. ⁸Christ Jesus is the same today as yesterday and forever.

⁹Do not be led astray by all kinds of strange teachings. Your heart will be strengthened by the grace of God rather than by foods of no use to anyone. ¹⁰We have an altar from which those still serving in the Temple cannot eat.

¹¹After the High Priest has offered the blood in the Sanctuary for the sins of the people, the carcasses of the animals are burnt outside the camp. ¹²For this same reason Jesus, to purify the people with his own blood, suffered his Passion outside the holy city. ¹³Let us, therefore, go to him outside the sacred area, sharing his shame. ¹⁴For we have here no definitive city and we are looking for the one to come.

¹⁵Let us, then, continually offer through Jesus a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips celebrating his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect good works and common life, for these are sacrifices pleasing to God. ¹⁷Obeys your leaders and submit to them, for they are concerned for your souls and are accountable for them. Let this be a joy for them rather than a burden, which would be of no advantage for you.

¹⁸Pray for us, for we believe our intentions are pure and that we only want to act honourably in all things. ¹⁹Now I urge you all the more to pray for me that I may be given back to you the sooner.

²⁰May God give you peace, he who brought back from among the dead Jesus our Lord, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, whose blood seals the eternal covenant.

²¹He will train you in every good work, that you may do his will, for it is he who works in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom all glory be for ever and ever. Amen!

²²Brothers, I beg you to take these words of encouragement. For my part, I have written to you too briefly. ²³Know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he comes soon I will visit you with him. ²⁴Greetings to all your leaders and to the saints. Greetings from those in Italy.

²⁵Grace be with you all.

4. Eph 5, 5; 1 Cor 6, 13; 1 Thes 4, 4	5. 1 Tim 6, 6; Dt 31, 6	6. Ps 118, 6	9. Eph 4, 14;
Col 2, 17	12. Jn 19, 20; Acts 7, 58; Mt 21, 39	14. 1 Cor 7, 29; Phil 3, 21	15. Ps 50, 14;
Rom 10, 9	16. Phil 4, 18	17. 1 Thes 5, 12; 1 Cor 6, 16; Phil 2, 29	20. Jn 10, 11; 1 Pet 2, 22

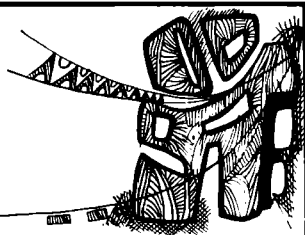
letter is addressed need not undertake new tasks. They will manifest their faith through an upright and generous life. They will also have to accept their situation of being marginalized, *sharing the shame of Christ*.

Jesus suffered the Passion outside the holy city (v 12). The Bible required that the victims sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins be burned outside the sacred area of the Temple: that was a way to show that the sin of the people had been transferred to those victims, then thrown out to

take all evil and sin away from the people. This rite was somehow already announcing what happened with Jesus who died outside the holy city of Jerusalem: he was the true victim for sin.

We can draw another lesson too: believers must leave the holy area, that is, comfortable and respected life, in order to seek the Kingdom of Justice to which little care is given. Believers oppose the present world, and "are not of this world", and they refuse to enjoy this world as if it were the final homeland.

letter of JAMES



Endure trials patiently

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, sends greetings to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

² Consider yourselves fortunate, my brothers, when you meet with every kind of trial, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith makes you grow. ⁴ Let your steadfastness become perfect with deeds, that you yourselves may be perfect and blameless, without any defect.

⁵ If any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God for it, because he gives to everyone easily and unconditionally. ⁶ But he should ask

with faith, not doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave driven and tossed by the wind on the sea. ⁷ Such a man should not expect anything from the Lord. ⁸ He is a divided man and his conduct will always be insecure. ⁹ Let the poor man boast, because he has been uplifted, ¹⁰ and let the rich man boast when he is humbled, because he will pass away like the flower of the field. ¹¹ The sun rises and its heat dries the grass; the flower withers and its beauty vanishes. So, too, will the rich man fade away even in the midst of his pursuits.

¹² Happy the one who patiently endures trials, because afterwards he will receive the crown of life which

1. Acts 12, 17; 26, 7; 1 Pet 1, 1

4. Mt 5, 11; 1 Pet 4, 13; Heb 12, 11; 1 Pet 1, 6; Wis 8, 21; 1 K 3, 7

6. Mt 7, 7; 21, 21

9. Jer 9, 22

11. Is 40, 6

12. Wis 5, 15; 2 Tim 4, 8

INTRODUCTION

Who is this James, the "brother of the Lord?" He is barely mentioned in the Gospel (Mk 6, 3), and yet, a few years after Pentecost, he appears as the leader, we might say the bishop of the Jerusalem community. Then, when the Gospel spread, it seems he was viewed as the one responsible for all the Christian communities with a majority of Jews which were established in Palestine, Syria and Cilicia (see Acts 15, 13-29).

Of all the apostles, he was the most attached to the Jewish traditions (the extreme opposite of Paul). In speaking to the faithful in Jerusalem, he was teaching them simple and practical things, inspired from the wisdom of the Old Testament. We hear the echo of his Sunday preaching in the letter addressed to the Christians of Jewish origin living in his huge diocese.

They are called "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations," a name which was given to the Jews established outside their homeland. The letter was probably written between the years 50 and 60 after Christ.

Since the letter does not contain much doctrinal teaching, some people have looked down on it. But, it does in fact contain a very valuable and relevant moral teaching, especially in reference to justice.

the Lord promised to those who love him. ¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, "This temptation comes from God." God is never tempted and he can never tempt anyone. ¹⁴Instead, each of us is lured and enticed by his own evil desire. ¹⁵Once this desire has conceived, it gives birth to death.

+ ¹⁶Do not be deceived, dear brothers. ¹⁷Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of Light, in whom there is no change or shadow of a change. ¹⁸By his own will he gave us life through the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of offering to him among his creatures.

¹⁹My dear brothers, be quick to hear but slow to speak and slow to anger. ²⁰for human anger does not fulfil the justice of God. ²¹So get rid of any filth and reject the prevailing evil, and welcome the Word which has been planted in you and has the power to save you.

²²Be doers of the Word and not just hearer, lest you deceive yourselves.

²³The hearer who does not become a

doer is like a man who looks at himself in the mirror and then promptly forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But he who fixes his gaze on the perfect law of freedom and holds on to it, not listening and then forgetting, but acting on it, will find blessing on his deeds.

²⁶If anyone considers himself a religious person but does not restrain his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is in vain. ²⁷In the sight of God, our Father, pure and blameless religion lies in helping the orphans and widows in their need and keeping oneself from the world's corruption.

Treat the rich and the poor equally

2 ¹My brothers, if you truly believe in our glorified Lord, Jesus Christ, you will not discriminate between persons. ²Suppose a man enters the synagogue where you are assembled and he is dressed magnificently and wears a gold ring;

14. 1 Cor 10, 13; Mt 6, 13
19. Pro 10, 19; 1 Pet 2, 1
27. Ex 22, 21

15. Rom 6, 23
22. Lk 8, 21; 1 Jn 3, 17

18. 1 Jn 1, 5; 1 Tim 6, 16; 1 Pet 1, 23; Jn 1, 12
25. Mt 5, 17; Ps 19, 8; Jn 13, 17

o What is most impressive at the beginning of the letter is the firmness of faith. James is a man who does not hesitate and we feel very reassured by his conviction: *ask God because he gives to everyone. Fortunate when you meet with every trial.*

The testing of your faith. (v 3). We are not in this world to have a good time. What matters is to take advantage of the time God gives us to grow and mature as persons. The person who has not suffered knows very little. And, often-times, those who suffer do not realize that they owe the best in them to their having had to overcome a thousand difficulties.

To save the poor does not consist so much in giving them bread as to help them face their destiny, to realize themselves through their own efforts and to discover they are helpless if they do not first acknowledge their brothers and act with them.

If someone lacks wisdom (v 5). God has placed in our midst all that we need to solve our problems. And the wisdom which makes us responsible for our destiny instead of resigning ourselves comes from sin.

He should ask with faith (v 6). The one who asks without doubts knows for sure what are the obstacles which God wants to preserve us from.

Let no one say (v 13). Most people are secretly resentful toward God and they do not miss an opportunity to make him responsible for their own errors.

+ *The Father of Light in whom there is no change or shadow of a change* (v 17). Because we are inconstant. James invites us to look up to the Father who does not change and whose holiness and happiness are touched by nothing. What an amazing thing: in his eternity, the Father enjoys our presence, while we who live in time, do not yet know how to focus on him. We must acquire the same firmness and constancy which are in God.

He gave us life (v 18). This is similar to what is said in 1 Peter 1. It is a reminder of baptism through which we received new life. James draws this conclusion: we must keep the word of God, meditate on it to find out what it demands of us. It is not enough to have improved our lives for a while in preparation for baptism, but we must persevere on the path of goodness.

at the same time, a poor man enters dressed in rags. ³If you focus your attention on the well-dressed man and say to him, "Come and sit in the best seat," while to the poor man you say, "Stay standing or else sit down at my feet," ⁴have you not in fact, made a distinction between the two? Have you not judged, using a double standard?

⁵Look, brothers, did God not choose the poor of this world to receive the riches of faith and to inherit the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶Yet you despise them! Is it not the rich who are against you and drag you to court? ⁷Do they not insult the holy name of Christ by which you are called?

⁸If you keep the Law of the Kingdom, according to Scripture: *Love your neighbour as yourself*, you do well; ⁹but, if you make distinctions between persons, you break the law and are condemned by the same law. ¹⁰If anyone keeps the whole law but

fails in one aspect, he is guilty of breaking it all. ¹¹For, he who said, *Do not commit adultery*, also said, *Do not kill*. If, then, you do not commit adultery but you do commit murder, you have broken the Law. ¹²Therefore, speak and behave like people who are going to be judged by the Law of freedom. ¹³There will be justice without mercy for those who have not shown mercy, for mercy is greater than judgment.

Faith is shown in action

◆ ¹⁴Brothers, what good is it to profess faith without showing works? Such faith has no power to save you. ¹⁵If a brother or sister is in need of clothes or food ¹⁶and one of you says, "May things go well for you; be warm and satisfied," without attending to their material needs, what good is that? ¹⁷So it is for faith without deeds: it is totally dead.

¹⁸Say to whoever challenges you "You have faith and I have good

5. 1 Cor 1, 26; Zep 2, 3; Rev 2, 9
Mt 5, 19

6. 1 Pet 4, 11
15. 1 Jn 3, 17

8. Lev 19, 18; Mt 22, 39

9. Lev 19, 15;

■ James speaks clearly: the person who discriminates against people (2. 4) cannot be Christian. Today, it is quite common to make this distinction. The well dressed person is well received. Everywhere the poor are made to wait. If we do not attend to someone who is black, or poor, or a foreigner and on the other hand, we welcome those with a car, or wealth, etc, we are making an abominable distinction. The person who keeps making distinctions among people has not yet accepted the Gospel.

God chooses the poor to receive the riches of faith. The apostles, who believed and passed on the message which transformed the pagan Roman empire, were poor in terms of money and influences, but they were so rich in faith that they sealed their faith with their own blood. James writes for those who are poor money-wise, but rich in faith.

James says that the rich profane the name of Christ. He maybe speaking of the rich who do not believe and make fun of simple believers. He may be speaking of rich "Christians" whose lifestyle brings criticism to the name of Christ. They profane the name of Christ and bring about scorn for the church.

James invites the church to self-examination to see if the way we treat one another in the institutions of the church respects the dignity of the poor, if the pastors of the church share the meal with ordinary families or are seen rather with the authorities, if the dominating influence is that of the people with greater faith, or that of those who defend money, if the church courageously defends the rights of the poor.

A Law of freedom: Paul, John, Peter and James all agree on the point that Christians cannot be satisfied with simply obeying the commandments, or how to respect a master's will in order not to get in trouble. No: Christians must have the free and intelligent generosity of volunteers whose only law is their commitment to Christ.

◆ It is necessary to have faith to be saved, but following Christ cannot be theoretical; it must be shown in actions, in deeds. Christ himself says the same thing in Mt 7, 21: "Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven."

Let us look at the two examples that James takes from the Old Testament and let us compare them with Heb 11, 31, and above all with

deeds; show me your faith apart from actions and I, for my part, will show you my faith in the way I act." ¹⁹Do you believe there is one God? Well enough, but do not forget that the demons also believe and tremble with fear!

²⁰You foolish man, do you have to be convinced that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹Think of our father Abraham. Was he not justified by his act of offering his son, Isaac, on the altar? ²²So you see, his faith was active along with his deeds and became perfect by what he did. ²³The word of Scripture was thus fulfilled, *Abraham believed in God so he was considered a righteous man and he was called the friend of God.*

²⁴So you see, a person obtains holiness by his deeds and not by faith alone. ²⁵Likewise, we read of Rahab, the prostitute, that she was acknowledged and saved because she welcomed the spies and showed them another way to leave.

²⁶So, just as the body is dead without its spirit, so faith, without deeds, is also dead.

Sins of the tongue

3 ¹Brothers, don't be all teachers! You know that, as teachers, we will be judged most strictly; ²in fact,

we make mistakes, like everybody else. A person who commits no offence in speech is perfect and capable of ruling the whole self. ³We put a bit into the horse's mouth to master it and, with this, we control its whole body. ⁴The same is true of ships: however big they are and driven by strong winds, the helmsman steers them with a tiny rudder. ⁵In the same way, the tongue is a tiny part of the body but it is capable of great things.

A small flame is enough to set a huge forest on fire. ⁶The tongue is a smilar flame; it is in itself as a whole world of evil. It infects the whole being and sets fire to our world with the very fire of hell. ⁷Wild animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures of every kind are and have been ruled by man. ⁸Nobody, however, can control the tongue; it is an untiring whip, full of deadly poison. ⁹We use it to bless God, our Father, and also to curse those made in God's likeness. ¹⁰From the same mouth come both blessing and curse.

Brothers, this should not be the case. ¹¹Can both fresh and salt water gush from the same source? ¹²Can a fig tree produce olives or a grapevine give figs? Neither the sea is able to give fresh water.

19. Mk 1, 24
2. Sir 14, 1

23. Gen 15, 6
10. Eph 4, 29

24. Rom 4, 12
12. Mt 7, 16

25. Hos 2, 4; 6, 17

26. Gal 5, 6

Rom 4 (Gal 3). It seems that James and Paul draw opposite teachings from the same examples. Paul says: Abraham was justified by faith and not by following the Law. James, on the other hand, says that they were saved by putting their faith into practice. Actually, in speaking of practices, Paul is thinking about the religious rites and observances of the Jews which are useless for salvation, and he says that faith is at the root of all Christian life. On the contrary, in speaking of practices, James is thinking about deeds inspired by love. And, Paul said the same when he wrote: "Faith works through love." (Gal 5, 6).

• There are too many people in our midst who believe "they know everything." True wis-

dom manifests itself in our behavior. What is the use of experience? The true wise person unites people. False wisdom separates and divides. James refers to practical, not theoretical wisdom. The truly wise seek justice and peace.

+ You pray wrongly. James tells us that prayer obtains for us things enabling us to respond to God's plan (see 1,5-8). But our prayers will not be heard if our love for the world takes the place of God in our hearts.

What is the *friendship with the world* which prevents our being heard? We explain this in more details in the commentary on John 3, 17 and 1 John 2, 15. God asks us to love all the things he created, viewing them as means of

True Wisdom

o ¹³If you consider yourself wise and learned show it by your good living and let your actions, in all humility, be an example for others. ¹⁴But if your heart, is full of bitter jealousy and ambition, do not try to show off; that would be covering up the truth: ¹⁵this kind of wisdom does not come from above but from the world and it is earthly and devilish. ¹⁶Wherever there is jealousy and ambition, you will also find discord and all that is evil. ¹⁷Instead, the wisdom which comes from above is pure and peace-loving. These persons show understanding and listen to advice; they are full of compassion and good works: they are impartial and sincere. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of justice.

Wicked ambitions

+ 4 What causes these fights and quarrels among you? Is it not your inner longings which make war within your own selves? ²When you long for something you cannot have, you kill for it and when you do not get what you desire, you squabble and fight. The fact is, you do not have what you want because you do not pray for it. ³You pray for something and you do not get it because you pray with the wrong motive of indulging your pleasures. ⁴You adulterers! Do you know that making friends with

the world makes you enemies of God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be the world's friend has made himself God's enemy.

⁵Surely, Scripture is not wrong when it says that our spirit tends towards excess ⁶but God's grace overcomes it. Scripture also says, *God opposes the proud but he gives his favour to the humble.* ⁷Give in, then, to God; resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw close to God and he will come close to you. Clean your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you doubters. ⁹Recognise your distress, be miserable and weep. Turn your laughter into tears and your joy into sadness. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will raise you up.

¹¹Brothers, do not criticize one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or condemns him, speaks against the Law and condemns the Law. If, however, you condemn the Law, you are no longer an observer of the Law but a judge over it. ¹²There is only one lawgiver and one judge: he who has the power to save or condemn. So you, who are you to judge your neighbour?

¹³Listen, now, you who speak like this, "Today or tomorrow we will go off to this city and spend a year there; we will do business and make money." ¹⁴You have no idea what tomorrow will bring. What is your

14. 1 Cor 3, 3; Eph 4, 31	18. Mt 5, 9; Phil 1, 11; Heb 12, 11	2. Rom 7, 23; 1 Pet 2, 11; Mt 7, 7
4. Mt 6, 24; 1 Jn 2, 15	5. Ex 20, 5	6. Pro 3, 34
10. Job 5, 11; Mt 23, 12	11. Lev 19, 16; Mt 7, 1	7. Eph 6, 11; 1 Pet 5, 6; Mal 3, 7
Lk 12, 18		12. Rom 2, 1; 14, 4
		13. Pro 27, 1;

reaching him, and to reject what does not serve this purpose. *Loving the world* is wishing for and clinging to things, without looking beyond them for God himself and the brothers that he gave us. It is adultery in the same sense as the phrase from the Gospel: "No one can serve two masters" (Mt 6, 24). Men cannot divide their love between God and the world, neither can we ask God to help us satisfy egotistical ambitions.

Criticizing others is the same as despising the law of love. We must see, and at times, say,

what is wrong in an action, but God has not appointed us to judge and condemn our brothers and sisters. What a horrible sin when, in the very Church, "Christian" groups spend their time spying, scrutinizing, denouncing and condemning what other Christians say, write and do with apostolic purpose! (See Rom 14:4 and Mt 7:1).

You who are making plans. We all make many plans: to earn more, to buy things, to have a good time. What is serious matter is that we forget meanwhile to do good. We know it has to

life? No more than a mist which appears for a moment and then disappears. ¹⁵Instead of this, you should say, "God willing, we will live and do this or that."¹⁶ But no! You boast of your plans: this brazen pride is wicked. ¹⁷Anyone who knows what is good and does not do it, sins.

The misfortunes of the rich

5 So, now for what concerns the rich! Cry and weep for the misfortunes which are coming upon you. ²Your riches are rotting and your clothes eaten up by the moths. ³Your silver and gold have rusted and their rust grows into a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like a fire, for having piled up riches in these the last days.

⁴You deceived the workers who harvested your fields but now their wages cry out to the heavens. The reapers' complaints have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵You lived in luxury and pleasure in this world and felt happy while others were murdered. ⁶You have easily condemned

and killed the innocent since they offered no resistance.

Look forward to the Lord's coming

⁷Be patient, then, my brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the sower waits for the precious fruits of the earth, looking forward patiently to the autumn and spring rains. ⁸You, also be patient and do not lose heart because the Lord's coming is near.

⁹Brothers, do not fight among yourselves and you will not be judged. See, the judge is already at the door. ¹⁰Take for yourselves, as an example of patience, the suffering of the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. ¹¹See how those who were patient are called blessed. You have heard of the patience of Job and know how the Lord dealt with him in the end. *For the Lord is merciful and shows compassion.*

¹²Above all, brothers, do not swear: either by heaven or by earth, or make a habit of swearing. Let your yes be

1. Lk 6, 24; Mt 6, 19

3. Pro 16, 27; 11, 14

4. Lev 19, 13; Dt 24, 14; Mal 3, 5

5. Is 5, 7;

Jer 25, 34; Lk 16, 19

6. Wis 2, 10

7. Lk 18, 1; Heb 10, 36; Dt 11, 14; Mk 4, 26

8. 1 Thes 3, 1

9. Mk 13, 29

10. Mt 5, 11

11. Ex 34, 6

12. Mt 5, 34

be done and we know how to do it, but what we do not know is if we will have time to accomplish. We may die without having done what mattered the most.

■ The rich will lose what they have accumulated which is corrupted by injustice. Remorse will devour them like a fire devours the culprit. Their riches will perish on the day of judgment:

- a) because of the injustice done to acquire them or in holding on to wages belonging to the workers.
- b) because of their misuse: for pleasure and luxury.
- c) because they condemn defenseless men to death.

Today, what was taking place in the poor civilization of James' time is happening again. Those who enjoy the good life owe their prosperity to the fact that two billion people live in misery. Every year, the defense of their privileges brings as a consequence the unjust death of millions of people, through hunger, repression and wars.

Who are responsible in such a situation when, in so many countries those who strive for educating and organizing their fellow farmers and workers are threatened to lose their work or even are killed, while the others stay in illiteracy and starvation?

◆ We know, through James' words, that the Church continued – and must continue today – Christ's actions of coming to the sick. Salvation is both physical and spiritual health. The Gospel shows us that the second one is the most important and God always grants it, although he does not always restore physical health.

In the Gospel, Jesus lays his hands on the sick and when he sends his missionaries, he asks them to lay their hands on the sick or to anoint them with oil (Mk 6, 13 and 16, 18). The laying of hands is like communicating to another person the power which will heal him, in the name of Christ and with his authority. As to oil, it was used in those days as a remedy, but Christ gives it the power to heal the soul and the body. The

yes and your no be no, lest you become liable for judgment.

The sick

◆¹³Is anyone among you discouraged? Let him pray. Is anyone of you happy? Let him sing songs to God. If anyone is sick, let him call on the elders of the Church. They shall pray for him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer said in faith will save the sick man; the Lord will raise him up and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.

+ ¹⁶There will be healing if you confess your sins to one another and pray

for each other. The prayer of the upright man has great power, provided he perseveres. ¹⁷Elijah was a human being like ourselves and when he prayed earnestly for it not to rain, no rain fell for three and a half years. ¹⁸Then he prayed again: the sky yielded rain and the earth produced its fruit.

¹⁹Brothers, if any one of you strays far away from the truth and another person brings him back to it, ²⁰be sure of this: he who brings back a sinner from the wrong way, will save his soul from death and *win forgiveness for many sins*.

13. Acts 16, 25

14. Mk 6, 13; Sir 38, 14

16. Pro 28, 13; 1 Jn 1, 8

17. 1 K 17, 1; Rev 11, 6

19. Mt 18, 15; Gal 6, 1

20. Pro 10, 12; 1 Pet 4, 8

two signs can accompany the prayer.

The elders, that is those in charge of the Christian communities, either priests or lay, must visit the sick and pray for them, asking God to heal them with faith. At the same time, they must invite the sick person to acknowledge his sins and to prepare to receive God's grace.

When the church speaks of the sacrament of the sick, it refers only to the anointing with oil done by someone who has officially received the power for this sacrament (up to now, only priests can administer this sacrament). This sacrament strongly involves the church.

But the fact that the anointing with oil is a sacrament only when given by a priest, in no way excludes leaders of the Christian communities from praying, anointing, and laying hands on the sick. When they dare do this with faith, in the name of the church, there is an increase of God's interventions for the sick-healings preparing them for conversion.

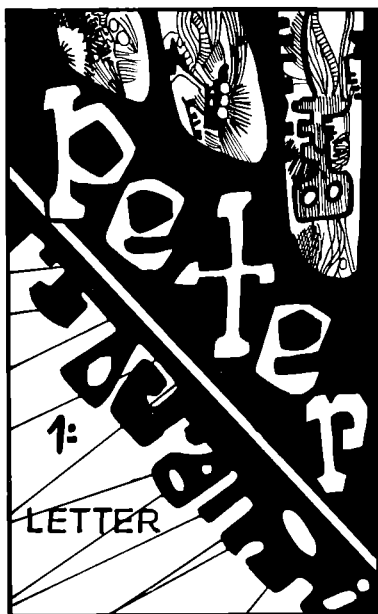
It has been a great error – in past days to reserve the anointing of the sick to the dying and

to call it *extreme unction*. It is also a serious error to wait until the sick person is unconscious in order not to frighten him into thinking that death may be near.

See the commentary on Lk 10, 9.

+ Jesus said to Peter: "What you forgive on earth will be forgiven in heaven." (Mt 16, 19). He said the same thing to the apostles: "What you forgive on earth..." (Jn 20, 23). He said the same to the church (Mt 18, 18). It is the task of the pastors of the church to decide on the reconciliation of sinners with the community – and with God. Yet, in many cases, we have more need of the forgiveness of one or several persons whom we have offended and we must ask for it with simplicity: the forgiveness of a brother in the faith will be the forgiveness of God.

Likewise, it is good to confess our faults to those who are able to understand us. The trust of the one and the mercy of the other: nothing more is needed for God to be in the middle.



INTRODUCTION

We know almost nothing about the life of the apostle Peter from the Council of Jerusalem, in the year 49 (see Acts 15), until the time he wrote this letter, around the year 64. It is certain that he went to Rome. Being in charge of the entire church, he, like Paul, had to go to the center of the Roman world, though their motives were different.

A very ancient tradition assures that he was killed in the persecution of Nero, in 66, and that he was buried on the grounds of the Vatican hill. Investigations carried out these

past years enabled us to discover a grave and bones with various inscriptions which are, almost certainly, those of the apostle, the first Rock of the church.

Thus, it was a short time before his death that he wrote this letter from Rome. Peter neither had the genius, nor the literary talent of Paul. Instead, with simple words, he addressed the Christians of the Asian province, where the first persecutions were beginning. Differently from Paul, he is not concerned with clarifying or defending the faith. He tries to encourage believers who are suffering by presenting the example of Christ to them and by explaining the consequences of baptism.

1 From Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ, to the Jews who live outside their homeland, scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

² to those whom God the Father has called, according to his plan, and made holy by the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be purified by his blood: may grace and peace increase among you.

You have been saved

³ Let us praise God, the Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ, for his great mercy. In raising Jesus Christ from the dead, he has given us new life and the hope of sharing enduring life beyond death, ⁴ sin and all fleeting things. This inheritance is kept in the heavens for you, ⁵ since God's power shall keep you faithful until salvation is revealed in the last days.

⁶ There is cause for joy, then, even though you may, for a time, have to suffer many trials. ⁷ Thus will your faith be tested, like gold in a furnace: Gold, however, passes away but faith;

1. James 1, 1

2. Jn 3, 3; 1 Jn 3, 9

4. Eph 1, 19

5. Jn 17, 11

6. Jn 16, 20

7. Mal 3, 2; 1 Cor 3, 13

In this letter, everything from 1:3 to 3:7 is inspired by the baptismal ceremony in the early church: hymns, homily on the ritual and on Christian life. For Peter, it is an excellent way to remind his readers of their Christian condition.

The end of the letter tells us that Peter wrote through Silvanus who had been a disciple of Paul. This may be at the origin of various passages where we find the same topics we have in Paul's letters.

worth so much more, will bring you in the end praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ appears.

⁸You have not yet seen him and yet you love him; still without seeing him, you believe in him and experience a heavenly joy beyond all words, ⁹for you are reaching the goal of your faith: the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰This was the salvation which the prophets so eagerly looked when, in days past, they foretold the favour of God with regard to you. ¹¹But they could only research when the Spirit of Christ present within them pointed out the time and the circumstances of this – the sufferings of Christ and the glories which would follow.

¹²It was revealed to them that they were working not for themselves but for you. Thus, in these days, after the Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven, the Gospel's preachers have taught you these mysteries which even the angels long to see.

Be holy

+ ¹³So, then, let your spirit be ready. Be alert, with confident trust in the grace you will receive when Jesus Christ appears. ¹⁴Like obedient children, do not return to your former life given over to ignorance and passions.

¹⁵Imitate the one who called you. As he is holy, so you, too, be holy in all

your conduct, ¹⁶since Scripture says: *Be holy for I am holy.*

¹⁷You call upon a Father who makes no distinction between persons but judges each one according to his deeds; take seriously, then, these years which you spend in a strange land. ¹⁸Remember that you were freed from the useless way of life of your fathers, not with gold and silver ¹⁹but with the precious blood of the Lamb without spot or blemish. ²⁰God, who has known Christ before the world was, revealed him to you in the last days. ²¹Through him, you have faith in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him in order that you might put all your faith and hope in God.

²²In obeying the truth, you have gained interior purification from which comes sincere love for our brothers. Love one another, then, with all your heart, ²³since you are born again, not from mortal beings, but with enduring life, through the Word of God who lives and remains forever. ²⁴It is written: *All flesh is grass and its glory like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.* This Word is the Gospel which has been brought to you.

8. Jn 20, 27; 2 Cor 5, 7	10. Mt 13, 17	11. Is 52, 13; Lk 18, 31	12. 1 Thes 1, 5; 1 Cor 2, 4
15. Eph 2, 1; 4, 7	16. Lev 11, 44	17. 2 Cor 5, 6	18. Eph 4, 17
21. Rom 4, 24	22. Jn 13, 34; Rom 12, 10	23. James 1, 18; 1 Jn 3, 9	24. Is 40, 6

o Notice the greeting, "in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", which is the same as Paul's greetings.

This passage could be the preaching of the leader of a Christian community, addressed to adults who have just been baptized. In those days, people were more preoccupied than they are now about their salvation after death. To those being baptized, the apostles were speaking of this *inheritance* of God which was reserved for them, and had been won by Christ in his resurrection: *Beyond death, sin and all fleeting things* (v 4).

But the newly baptized knew that their Christian faith was threatened and persecuted. To ask

for baptism meant to commit oneself to Christ until death.

You have not yet seen him... (v 8). Hope, love for Christ: the three virtues (or powers) urging Christians, go together. Christ came to glory through sufferings. The Christian follows the same path and he already knows true joy in the midst of trials.

+ The logical consequences of baptism are developed. We cannot go backward; giving in to the evils of the world would mean going back to the slavery from which Christ delivered us through his blood.

22-25: Here we recognize this *being born*

Christ is the cornerstone

2 ¹So, give up all evil and deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all kind of gossip. ²Like newborn children, seek eagerly the unspoiled milk of the Word which will help you grow and reach salvation. ³Did you not *taste the goodness of the Lord*? ⁴He is the living stone rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him. ⁵On drawing close to him, you also became living stones built into a spiritual temple, a holy community of priests offering spiritual sacrifices which please God through Jesus Christ. ⁶Scripture says: *See, I lay in Zion a chosen and precious cornerstone; whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.*

⁷This means honour for you who believed, but for unbelievers also *the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone* ⁸and it is a stone to stumble over, a rock which lays men low. They stumble over it, on rejecting the Word, but the plan of God is fulfilled in this.

⁹You are a *chosen race, a community of priest-kings, a consecrated nation, a people God has made his*

own to proclaim his wonders. For he called you from your darkness to his own wonderful light. ¹⁰At one stage you were *no people*, but now you are *God's people*, you had not received *his mercy*, but now you *have been given mercy*.

Live a blameless life

◆ ¹¹My dear brothers, while you are strangers and exiles, I urge you not to indulge in selfish passions which wage war on the soul. ¹²Live a blameless life among the pagans; so when they accuse you falsely of any wrong, they may see your good works and give glory to God on the day he comes to them.

¹³For the Lord's sake, respect all human authority: the king as chief authority; ¹⁴the governors as sent by him to punish evil-doers and encourage those who do good. ¹⁵And God wants you to do good so that you may silence those fools who ignorantly criticize you. ¹⁶Behave as free men but do not speak of freedom as a licence for vice; you are free men and God's servants. ¹⁷Reverence each person, love your brothers and sisters,

1. James 1, 21	2. Mk 10, 15; 1 Cor 3, 2	3. Ps 34, 8	4. Mt 21, 42	5. 1 Cor 3, 16; Eph 2, 20;
Rom 12, 1; Heb 13, 15	6. Is 28, 16	7. Ps 118, 22	8. Is 8, 14	9. Is 43, 20; Ex 19, 5;
Rom 3, 24; Eph 1, 14; Col 1, 12	10. Hos 1, 6; 2, 23	11. Gal 5, 24; James 4, 1	12. Mt 5, 16	
13. Rom 13, 1; Tit 3, 1	16. Gal 5, 13; Jud 4	17. Pro 24, 21; Mt 21, 21		

anew, being born from above, which Jesus tells Nicodemus in Jn 3:9.

What follows is a call to live perfectly: not attached to the things of the present, but eager to live a useful and holy life before God, in proportion to what we have cost him.

■ Two words stand out in this paragraph: *stones and priests*. They speak about what the new Christians will be.

You are stones. God is the stone which stands out and on which, all those who neither saw nor took notice of him, stumble (Is 8:14). In another sense, Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders, which becomes the foundation of a new building: this is the new people of God, the Church (Is 28:16, Ps 118:22). And Christians are the stones of this Church: *living stones* because each one shares the life of God, and because each one has an active part to play in the Church, the body of Christ (Eph 4:12-16).

You will also be *priests*. To understand what this mean, we must read God's words to Moses in Exodus 19:5. God decided then to become present in the world and to transform the course of history through a people of his own which would be Israel. Well then, Peter tells us: the real people of God is not Israel, who did not acknowledge Christ, but you are God's people.

We, who are baptized, do not form one more religion: we are God's only people, an active minority and the leaven of the world.

We are priests, not in the sense that we pray a lot, but in the sense this word had for ancient people: those who can risk coming close to God. We were made responsible for the mission of preparing men and women so that salvation may mature in them: that people and nations may discover that salvation may mature in them; that people and nations may discover their common destiny, and in the end, admit that they

fear God and show respect to the emperor.

¹⁸Servants must respect their masters, not only those who are good and understanding but also those who are difficult. ¹⁹For there is merit in putting up with unprovoked suffering, for the sake of God. ²⁰What merit would there be in taking a beating when you have done wrong? But if you endure punishment when you have done well, that is a grace before God.

²¹This is your calling: remember Christ who suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you may follow in his way. ²²*He did no wrong and there was no deceit in his mouth.* ²³He did not return insult for insult and, when suffering, he did not curse but put himself into the hands of God who judges justly. ²⁴He went to the cross burdened with our sins so that we might die to sin and live an upright life. *For by his wounds you have been healed.* ²⁵You were like *stray sheep*, but you have come back to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Duties of husbands and wives

3 ¹In same way, wives must be submissive to their husbands.

18. Eph 6, 5

22. Is 53, 9; Mt 5, 39

24. Is 53, 12; 2 Cor 5, 21; Rom 6, 11

25. Ezk 34, 1

1. Eph 5, 22; Col 3, 18; 1 Cor 7, 12; Tit 2, 5

3. 1 Tim 2, 9

6. Gen 18, 12

7. Eph 5, 25;

Col 3, 19

8. Rom 12, 14

9. Lk 6, 28

cannot solve their problems without making the Gospel the Law of their whole lives.

A Christian aware of his dignity as a priestly member of the people of God, by sheer gift and grace, cannot but *proclaim his wonders* (2:19). This is what evangelization is all about. These Christians are a *chosen race, a community of priest-kings* called to proclaim the Gospel. When the Church in Vatican II defines Christians, she quotes precisely this paragraph (2:9) in "Lumen Gentium."

◆ Here we are invited to be model citizens, workers and spouses. If we are slandered, that is one or more reason to show the beauty of Christian life and that those who slander us are wrong. And if the authorities begin to persecute us, this is not an excuse to disobey the laws.

If any of them resist the Word, they will be won over, without words, by the conduct of their wives. ²It will be enough for them to see your responsible and blameless conduct.

³Do not be taken up with outward appearances: hair styles, gold necklaces and clothes. ⁴There is something more permanent that shines from within a person: a gentle and peaceful disposition. This is really precious in God's eyes. ⁵This was the way the holy women of the past dressed. They put their trust in God and were obedient to their husbands, ⁶namely Sarah who had such a respect for Abraham that she called him her lord. You are her children if you do what is right and are not afraid.

⁷Husbands, in your turn, be sensible in your life together. Be considerate, realising that the woman is of a more frail disposition and that you both share in the gift of life. If you do this, God will readily answer your prayers.

⁸Finally, you should all be of one mind: share each other's troubles with mutual affection, be compassionate and humble. ⁹Do not repay evil for evil or answer one insult with another. Give a blessing, instead.

Also see the commentary on Titus 3:1.

○ In speaking to married couples, Peter prefers to address himself to women. Is it because he recognizes the importance of their mission? Or rather, because in the rest of the letter, he paid more attention to men who, according to Jewish customs, occupied the front rows of the assembly?

Why does he ask them to obey their husband? Is it because God wants it that way, or because the Church is anti-feminist and wants women to be submissive? This point was explained in 1 Cor 11:9 and Eph 5:22. The apostles heard and taught the revolutionary ruling of Jesus who gave women the same rights as husbands in marriage. However, since they lived in a male-dominated society, they could hardly imagine or discover a new way of sharing be-

since this is what you have been called to do, and so you will receive the blessing. ¹⁰For if you seek life and want to see happiness, keep your tongue from evil and your mouth from speaking deceit. ¹¹Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. ¹²Because the Lord's eyes are turned to the just and his ears listen to their appeal. But the Lord frowns on evil-doers.

Do not fear or be disturbed

¹³ Who can harm you if you devote yourselves to doing good? ¹⁴ If you suffer for the sake of righteousness, happy are you. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed as they are, ¹⁵ but bless the Lord Christ in your hearts. Always have an answer ready when you are called upon to account for your hope, but give simply and with respect. ¹⁶ Keep your conscience clear so that those who slander you may be put to shame by your upright, Christian living. ¹⁷ Better to suffer for doing good, if it is God's will, than for doing wrong.

Endure sufferings as Christ suffered

+ ¹⁸ Remember how Christ died, once and for all, for our sins. He, the just one, died for the unjust in order to

lead us to God. He died as humans do but was raised to life by the Spirit ¹⁹ and it was then that he went to preach to the imprisoned spirits ²⁰ They were the generation who did not believe when God, in his great patience, delayed punishing the world while Noah was building the ark in which a small group of eight persons escaped through the water. ²¹ That was a type of the baptism which now saves you; this baptism is not a matter of physical cleansing but of asking God to reconcile us through the resurrection of Christ Jesus. ²² He has ascended to heaven and is at the right hand of God, having subjected the angels, Dominations and Powers.

4 ¹ Given that Christ suffered in his human life, arm yourselves with this certainty: he who suffers in his body has broken with sin ² and will spend the rest of his life following the will of God and not human passions.

³ You have given enough time, in the past, to living as the pagans do: a life of excess, evil passion, drunkenness, orgies and worship of idols. ⁴ They now find it strange that you are no longer swept along with them in this ruinous flood, and they misinterpret it. ⁵ But they will be accountable to the one who is ready to judge the

10. Ps 34, 13	14. Mt 5, 10; Is 8, 12	15. Mt 10, 26; Pro 3, 25	18. Rom 6, 10; Heb 9, 26
20. 2 Pet 2, 5; Gen 7, 7	21. Heb 10, 22; Col 2, 12	2. 1 Jn 2, 16	3. Tit 3, 3

tween spouses.

In any case, they could not reform the male-centered culture of their time overnight. They were speaking for women accustomed to obeying... some of them had understood the call to freedom from Christ (Lk 8:1), but it happened that they showed it with actions which scandalized many (1 Cor 11:6). Note in passing that the most anti-feminist words in the New Testament are in 1 Cor 14:34-35 and in 1 Tim 2:11-12. And precisely in those two places, it is most likely that these words were not from Paul, but rather paragraphs added later by his followers.

Peter advises a woman to conquer her husband more by her good behavior than by her words. While a woman must not neglect her

outward appearance, her real beauty will be in her inner heart.

The advice given husbands appears more like a warning: they should be attentive not selfish; sensitive, not violent.

+ In this paragraph we have the reference to "the descent of Christ into hell" mentioned in our Creed: see also Eph 4:9 and the commentary on Mt 27:52.

Peter, according to the expressions of his days, speaks of the sinful people in Noah's time. For the Jews, they were the example of those who sin by irresponsibility and lack of real concern for the will of God. And, yet, Christ saved them: he came for everyone.

Note the comparison between the deluge and

living and the dead. ⁶The Gospel has been preached to many who are now dead. As humans they received a deadly sentence, but through the Spirit they shall live for God.

⁷The end of all things is near; live wisely and spend evening time praying. ⁸Above all, let your love for one another be sincere, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Welcome one another into your houses without complaining. ¹⁰Serve one another with the gifts each of you received, thus becoming good managers of the varied graces of God. ¹¹If you speak, deliver the word of God; if you have a special ministry, let it be seen as God's power so that, in everything, God may be glorified in Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

Be glad to share in the sufferings of Christ

◆ ¹²My dear people, do not be surprised that you are being tested by fire. It is not an unusual occurrence. ¹³Instead, you should be glad to share in the sufferings of Christ because, on the day his Glory is revealed, you will also fully rejoice. ¹⁴You are fortunate if you are insulted because of the name of Christ, for the Spirit of glory

rests on you. ¹⁵I suppose that none of you should suffer for being a murderer, a thief, a criminal or an informer; ¹⁶but, if anyone suffers on account of being a Christian, let him not be ashamed; rather let this name bring glory to God.

¹⁷The time of judgment has come and it begins with God's household. If its beginning so affects us, what will be the end of those who refuse to believe in the Gospel? ¹⁸*If the just man is barely saved, what will happen to the sinner and unbeliever?* ¹⁹So, then, if you suffer according to God's will, entrust yourself to the faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Further admonitions

5 ¹I now address myself to those elders among you; I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, in order that you may share the Glory which is to be revealed. ²Shepherd the flock which God has entrusted to you, guarding it not in a grudging manner but willingly, for God's sake; not as one looking for a reward but with a generous heart; ³do not lord it over those in your care, rather be an example to your flock. ⁴Then, when the Chief

8. Pro 10, 12; James 5, 20

17. Jer 25, 29; Lk 23, 31; 2 Thes 1, 8

2. 2 Tim 3, 8; Tit 1, 7

10. Rom 12, 16; 1 Cor 12, 4

18. Pro 14, 31

3. 1 Cor 4, 16; Tit 2, 7

13. Mt 5, 11

19. Ps 36, 6; Lk 23, 46

14. Col 3, 4

baptism: water washes away the old world, a life of sin: the person who comes to Christ begins a new life, striving for "a pure conscience."

He died as humans do (v 18); the text reads: according to the flesh, that is, because he had accepted our mortal condition (this is the meaning of flesh for the Jews). He was raised by divine energy: by the Spirit. See something similar in Rom 1:4.

Given that Christ suffered. See Rom 6.

■ *They find it strange:* perhaps we accept too readily to take part in doubtful customs and our behavior does not surprise those who do not believe.

The Gospel was preached to the dead (v 6). This refers to the previous passage 3:18-20. It is a way of speaking about the mysterious encounter that, after his death, Jesus had with the

dead of past ages, whom he had come to save as well.

Live wisely and spend evening time praying (v 7): prayer demands a disciplined life. Going to bed when it is time, not wasting one's free time in distractions which are tiring.

◆ These verses present a summary of the central idea in this letter.

Let us note that Peter cannot admit that a Christian should have to be judged or go to jail through his own fault, murder, theft, etc. But, how many "Christians" by name only are in jail today? And, how many more should be there?

○ In the varied counsels which follow, note what concerns pastors, that is, bishops and priests.

In persecution Peter also sees a work of the

Shepherd appears, you will be given a crown of unfading glory.

⁵In the same way, let the younger ones among you respect the authority of the elders. All of you, be humble in your dealings with each other, because *God opposes the proud but gives his grace to the humble*.

⁶Bow down, then, before the power of God so that he will raise you up at the appointed time. ⁷Place all your worries on him since he takes care of you.

⁸Be sober and alert because your enemy the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. ⁹Stand your ground, firm in your faith, knowing that our brothers, scattered throughout the world, are confronting similar persecution.

¹⁰God, the giver of all grace, has called you to share in Christ's eternal Glory and after you have suffered a little he will bring you to perfection: he will confirm, strengthen and establish you forever. Glory be to him forever and ever. Amen.

+ ¹²I have had these few lines of encouragement written to you by Silvanus, our brother whom I know to be trustworthy. For I wanted to remind you of the kindness of God really present in all this. Hold on to it.

¹³Greetings from the community in Babylon, gathered by God, and from my son, Mark.

¹⁴Greet one another with a friendly embrace. Peace to you all who are in Christ.



This is the latest book in the whole Bible, probably written around the year 100, and it is presented as a second letter by Peter. Its three chapters deal with three concerns in the church of the time:

- preserving the faith as it was taught by Jesus' eye witnesses;
- fighting against "teachers" who distort the faith at the same time as they lead to immorality.
- explaining why Christ had not returned yet.

5. Jn 2, 12; 3, 34

2 Cor 4, 17; 1 Thes 2, 12

7. Phil 4, 5; Ps 55, 23; Mt 6, 25

12. Acts 15, 22

8. Eph 6, 19

13. Rev 17, 8

10. Rom 8, 18;

devil who does his best to discourage those who hope in Christ.

It is a proved fact that when we get ready to make an important decision or to make some commitment in the service of Christ, many unexpected obstacles arise. The person who becomes intimated loses everything. When he tries again to take some step, the devil will increase his attacks. These trials are common and to face them we need to be alert in our faith.

+ *To remind you of the kindness of God* (v 12). This kindness, or grace means all of God's plan to save us, all that came to us through Christ.

Babylon: in the language of the Christians of the time, indicates "the great city," the center of pagan religions, namely, Rome (see Revelation 17). Rome already has a community, the Church, at the time Peter writes.

1 ¹ Symeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been sanctified by our God and Saviour Jesus Christ and received a faith as precious as ours:

² may grace and peace abound in you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

We share in the divine nature

+ ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and piety. First the knowledge of the One who called us through his own Glory and Might, by which we were given the most extraordinary and precious promises. ⁴ Through them you share in the divine nature, after repelling the corruption and evil desires of this world.

⁵ So, strive with the greatest determination and increase your faith with strength, strength with knowledge, ⁶ knowledge with moderation, moderation with constancy, constancy with piety, ⁷ piety with fraternal love, fraternal love with charity. ⁸ If all these riches are in you so as to abound in you, you will not be idle and useless; you will rather be rooted in the

knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁹ Whoever is not aware of this is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was purified from his former sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers and sisters strive more and more to respond to the call of God who chose you. If you do so, you will never stumble. ¹¹ Moreover you will be generously granted entry to the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

¹² So I shall always remind you of these things, though you know them and remain firm in the truth that you have. ¹³ It seems fitting that as long as I live in the tent of this body, I refresh your memory of them. ¹⁴ knowing that my tent may soon be folded up, as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me. ¹⁵ I will, nonetheless, endeavour to see that after my departure, you be constantly reminded of all this.

The foundation of faith

¹⁶ Indeed, what we taught you about the power and the return of Christ Jesus our Lord was not drawn from myths or formulated theories. We ourselves were eye-witnesses of

3. 1 Pet 2, 4

6. Gal 5, 22

12. Jud 5

14. Jn 21, 18

† Christians tempted to become complacent are told two things:

- God's call is such a great favour that we cannot really understand it.
- It is not enough to have been called to believe: we must confirm this election by a truly holy life which prepares us to enter heaven.

His divine power. In a few words this paragraph shows what is unbelievable about Christian hope: *to share in the divine nature.* We have been called to nothing less than to share what God is. To him who has become permeated by the greatness of God, this must seem the most extraordinary and precious thing which can be promised, much more than any feat in space, or any success in this life. When the early Christians proclaimed their faith that they would rise to share God's glory, pagan philosophers were scandalized: 'Who has made you so proud that you believe you can reach God?'

We have not drawn what we teach from myths or theories (v 16). Faith is not based on

reasons and theories. We believe in what the apostles saw and in the prophets' words. The last sentence clearly says what we find in the Bible: all that is there was said on behalf of God and all is the work of the Holy Spirit. It does not say that the Holy Spirit dictated the books nor that he granted revelations to all the authors: it says that he inspired them to write. And thus, each author wrote in his own style and according to the custom of his time, what seemed good to write. Each author was aware that he was expressing the faith of his people, but he was not necessarily conscious that he was obeying the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit and of human authors at the same time. Therefore, *no prophecy of Scripture can be handed over to private interpretation* (v 20). It is true that anyone, according to his intelligence and faith, can understand one text or another. The message, however, is the whole. When we try to see how statements fit together, to see the important lines or discover the spirit of the Bible,

his majesty, ¹⁷when he received glory and honour from God the Father, when from the magnificent Glory this most extraordinary word came upon him: "This is my beloved Son, this is my Chosen One." ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹Therefore, we believe most firmly in the message of the prophets which you should consider rightly as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the break of the day, when the Morning Star shines in your hearts.

²⁰Know this well: no prophecy of Scripture can be handed over to private interpretation, ²¹since no prophecy comes from human decision, for it was men of God, moved by the Holy Spirit, who spoke.

False teachers

2 ¹Just as there have been false prophets in the midst of the people of Israel, so will there be false teachers among you. They will introduce harmful sects and, by denying the Master who saved them, they will bring upon themselves sudden perdition. ²Many, nonetheless, will imitate their vices and because of them the Way of Truth will be discredited. ³They will take advantage of you with deceitful words for the sake of money. But their condemnation has already begun and their destruction awaits them.

⁴In fact, God did not pardon the angels who sinned but cast them into hell confining them in the dark pits, keeping them there until the Day of Judgment. ⁵Neither did he pardon the ancient world when he unleashed the waters of the flood upon the world of wicked people, but protected only Noah, the eighth prophet of righteousness. ⁶God also condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, reducing them to ashes, to serve as a warning to wicked men in the future. ⁷But he saved Lot, a good man deeply afflicted by the unbridled conduct of those vicious people. ⁸For Lot, a righteous man, who lived in their midst suffered day after day in the goodness of his heart as he saw and heard of their crimes.

⁹So, then, the Lord knows how to free from trial those who serve him and keep the wicked for punishment on the Day of Judgment.

¹⁰He will do this especially for certain people who follow the baser desires of their nature and despise the Lord's majesty. Those proud and daring men are not afraid of insulting fallen spirits ¹¹while the angels who are superior to them in strength and power do not permit themselves any injurious accusation in the presence of the Lord.

¹²Those men slander what they cannot understand, they are like irrational animals born to be caught and killed.

¹³And they will suffer the repayment of their wickedness.

They enjoy fleeting pleasures; they are obscene and vicious men who delight in deceiving you when they share in your fraternal meals. ¹⁴They cannot look at a woman without desiring her, they do not tire of sinning and seducing weak souls. They are full of greed -- an accursed people.

¹⁵They abandoned the right way and followed Balaam, son of Beor who was attached to what he gained from his wrongdoing. ¹⁶But he was rebuked for his sin: his she-ass began to speak with a human voice, stopping the prophet in his madness. ¹⁷These people are like waterless springs, clouds driven by a

17. Mk 9, 2 6. Jud 7	20. 2 Tim 3, 16; 1 Pet 1, 11 10. Jud 8	1. 2 Dr 13, 2; 1 Tim 4, 1; Jud 4 13. Jud 12	5. 1 Pet 3, 20 15. Num 22, 7
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then, only the Church and those in communion with her can discern.

The Morning Star (v 19). This refers to Christ (see Revelation 22:16).

■ This chapter dealing with false masters repeats, in part, the threats found in the Letter of Jude.

◆ Two generations of Christians have waited for Jesus' return: such a hope helped them to be more generous in their faith. Now, false teachers

oppose daily experience to the words of the prophets (especially the "prophets" of the Church who were announcing an imminent end). They argue and had doubts, saying that the leaders in the faith, namely, the witnesses of Christ were dead, and everything stayed the same.

The answer is twofold. On one hand, God does not measure time as we do. He can present something as very close and not accomplish it right away. On the other hand, if it seems a long

storm which move swiftly into the blackest darkness.

¹⁸With their boastful and empty discourses, they encourage the lust and impure desire of their hearts. They manage to seduce those who have just freed themselves from the common errors.

¹⁹They promise freedom when they themselves are slaves of corruption: for anyone is a slave of what dominates him. ²⁰Indeed, after being freed from worldly vices through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they returned to those vices and surrendered to them; and their present state has become worse than the first. ²¹It would have been better for them not to have known the way of holiness, than knowing it, to turn away from the sacred doctrine that they had been taught. ²²In their case these proverbs are relevant: "The dog turns back to its own vomit", and: "Hardly has the pig been washed that it again wallows in the mud."

Why is the second coming of Christ delayed?

3 ¹Dearly beloved, this is the second letter I write to you. In both of them I have intended to remind you of sound doctrine. ²Do not forget the words of the holy prophets, of the teaching of our Lord and Saviour, as you heard it through his apostles.

³Remember first of all that in the last days scoffers will appear, their mockery serving their evil desires. ⁴And they will say, "What has be-

come of his promised coming? Since our fathers in faith died, everything still goes on as it was from the beginning of the world." ⁵Indeed, they deliberately ignore that in the beginning the heavens existed first and earth appeared from the water, taking its form by the word of God. ⁶By the same word of God, this world perished in the Flood. ⁷Likewise, the Word of God maintains the present heavens and earth until their destruction by fire; they are kept for the Day of Judgment when the godless will be destroyed. ⁸Do not forget, brothers, that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. ⁹The Lord does not delay in fulfilling his promise, though some speak of delay; rather he gives you time because he does not want anyone to perish, but that all may come to conversion. ¹⁰The Day of the Lord is to come like a thief. Then the heavens will dissolve with a great noise; the elements will melt away by fire, and the earth with all that is on it will be burned up.

¹¹Since all things are to vanish, how holy and religious your way of life must be, ¹²as you wait for the Day of God and long for its coming, when the heavens will dissolve in fire and the elements melt away in the heat. ¹³We wait for a new heaven and a new earth in which justice reigns, according to God's promise.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved brothers, as you wait in expectation of this, strive

20. Mt 12, 45

Rom 2, 4; 1 Tim 2, 4

22. Pro 26, 11; Lk 12, 47

10. 1 Thes 5, 2; Mt 24, 43

2. Jud 17

8. Ps 90, 4

9. Heb 2, 3;

13. Is 65, 17; Rev 21, 1

18. Jud 25

time to us, that does not mean we can go back to a complacent life, but instead we must take advantage of the mercy of God who grants us time to convert more deeply and time for others to come to conversion, because of our good example and our prayer.

Today, many people are under the impression that Christ will not come back soon to put an end to our present world and to judge it. But, in fact, we do not know how much time we have

left to make this world better. It is always urgent to do good.

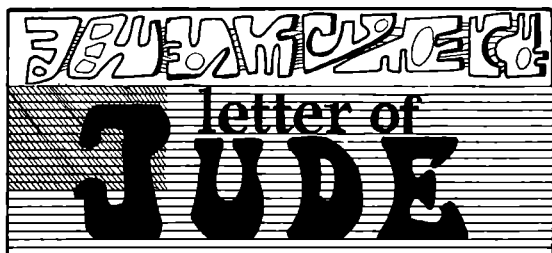
The paragraph referring to Paul shows that already at that time Paul's letters had the same authority in the Church as the old sacred books or the Gospel, the "rest of Scripture." The Church was also concerned about the wrong interpretations that people could get from passages in which Paul did not express himself clearly.

that God may find you without blemish or fault, living in peace.

¹⁵And consider that God's patience is for our salvation, as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you, with the wisdom given him. ¹⁶He speaks of these things in all his letters. There are, however, some points in them that are difficult to understand, which people ignorant and immature in their faith twist, as they do with the rest of

the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

¹⁷So then, dearly beloved, as you have been warned, be careful lest those people who have gone astray deceive you in turn and drag you along, making you stumble and finally fall away. ¹⁸Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: to him be glory, now and to the day of eternity. Amen.



¹ Jude, servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those called to the faith, beloved by God the Father and kept in Christ Jesus.

² May mercy, peace and love abound in you. ³ Most beloved, I had wanted to write to you about the salvation we all share, but now I feel I must urge you to fight for the faith God has given once for all to the saints.

⁴ Some individuals have slipped into your midst, godless people already condemned. They make use of the grace of our God as a license for immorality and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵ Although you may be aware of it, I wish to remind you that the Lord saved his people from the land of Egypt, but later delivered to

death those who did not believe. ⁶ He did the same with the angels who did not keep their rank but abandoned their dwelling places. God enclosed them in eternal prisons, in the pit of darkness until the great day of Judgment. ⁷ Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities who prostituted themselves and were lured into unnatural unions are also a warning of the punishment of eternal fire. ⁸ In spite of all this, these people now do the same: in their ravings, they debase their bodies, scorn the celestial authorities, blaspheme against the angels.

⁹ When the archangel Michael fought against the devil and disputed about the body of Moses, he did not dare insult him, but

1. James 1, 1 5. Num 14, 35 8. 2 Pet 2, 10-18 9. Dn 10, 13; Rev 12, 17 15. Zac 14, 5

The Holy Spirit may have wanted to leave us the Letter of Jude so that we may admire more the Gospels and the other writings by the apostles. We would have to be familiar with the literature of those days to know how complicated and incredible religious books are, both the books of the Jews and of the pagans. In comparison, the Gospels and Paul seem to belong to this century.

This letter which is attributed to the apostle Jude Thaddeus was written in fact about the end of the first century. It denounces the false teachers resembling those mentioned in the letters to Timothy and Titus.

Nevertheless, the comparisons and the ex-

amples which are used come from the Jewish books of the time. The Church had not yet defined which books were inspired by God and were part of the Bible. Besides the Old Testament, Christians used the religious literature of the Jews (for example, the Book of Enoch, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Assumption of Moses). And so, there are many legends concerning ancient times which we find in this letter. In this form which seems rather antiquated to us, there is a strong call to preserve the integral faith of the apostles, which at the time was a serious concern of the Church. Therefore, a few years later, the author of 2nd Peter copied part of this letter.

simply said, "May the Lord rebuke you!"

¹⁰Not so these men, they insult and scorn what they cannot understand; and like animals, what they know by instinct they use for their corruption. ¹¹Woe to them! They follow the footsteps of Cain and like Balaam go astray because of money: they will finally perish like the rebellious Korah. ¹²When you celebrate your fraternal meals, they spoil everything, coming only for the food and shamelessly seeing to their own needs. They are like clouds carried along by the wind which never bring rain, like trees without fruit at the end of autumn, twice dead when uprooted. ¹³The scum of their vices are splashed like foam on the rough waves of the sea, they are like shooting stars which the thick darkness engulfs for ever. ¹⁴The patriarch Enoch, the seventh after Adam, said these words about them: The Lord comes with thousands of angels ¹⁵to judge everyone and call the wicked to account for all the evil deeds they committed; he will punish all the injurious words the impious sinners uttered against him. ¹⁶All these are discontented who curse their lot and follow their passions. Their mouth is full of arrogant

words, and they flatter people for their own interest.

¹⁷But, most beloved, remember what the apostles of Christ Jesus, our Lord, announced to you. ¹⁸They said to you, "At the end of time, there will be men who will make use of sacred things for the sake of their impious desires."

¹⁹Actually, these people are those who cause divisions, worldly men who do not have the Holy Spirit.

²⁰But, dearly beloved, build your life on the foundation of your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. ²¹Remain firm in the love of God, welcoming the mercy of Jesus Christ, our Lord, which leads to eternal life.

²²Try to convince those who doubt ²³and save them by snatching them from condemnation. Treat the others with compassion but also with prudence, shunning even the clothes which touched their body.

²⁴To the one God who is able to keep you from all sin and bring you happy and without blemish before his own Glory, ²⁵to the one God who saves us through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to him be glory, honor, might and power, from past ages, now and forever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS OF JOHN

THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN – inseparable from his Gospel – reminds us that the Christian way is the way of divinization. This assertion could help many who doubt. Thus, for example, a young university student instructed in the faith explains how he became a marxist militant: "I wanted to love my companions more efficiently."

Another one declares: "Faith helps those who still do not have the *true vision of things* which modern science gives us."

Someone else seeks the way to overcome the deceptive pleasures of life and how to *enter into communion with the infinite* in oriental doctrines.

These three examples would seem to say that, however beautiful and respectable it may be, faith is limited, and that there is something in man which Christ does not fulfil. Quite to the contrary, in this first Letter, John affirms: in having the Son of God, you are in the total Truth, you walk in authentic Love, you are in communion with God himself.

Perhaps, however, we are deceiving ourselves when we pretend to be in Christ. And this

LETTERS of JOHN

• John will not speak about miracles, nor revelations, nor secrets jealousy kept by some initiates. The truth that he relates to us is both simpler and more divine than all this: God, the Eternal Life has come to live with men. *The Word*: see Jn 1:1.

Life became visible. Do not look for miracles, nor miraculous powers. Do not expect fantastic revelations about the beyond. Life was revealed as the gift of the Father, the rebirth of man without hope, the divine smile, the unexpected visit of the one seeking to share his life with men (Prv 8:31). We will not find life in mere books, but through communion with those who have seen and experienced it before us, and who became his Church.

+ *To walk in light*: this is the Christian life.

Over and beyond the different truths which people discover, there is a light which is total Truth and which cannot be divided: one is or is not in the

1 ¹ About what has been from the beginning,

and what we have heard
and have seen with our own eyes,
what we have looked and touched with our
hands, I mean the *Word* who is Life...

² The *Life* made himself known,
we have seen him and we are his witnesses,
and we are telling you of Eternal Life.
He was with the Father
and he appeared to us.

³ We make known to you
him whom we have seen and heard,
that you may be in fellowship with us, with the
Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

⁴ And we write this that you may have perfect
joy.

Walk in the light

+ ⁵ We heard his message from himself
and announce it to you:
God is light and there is no darkness in him.
⁶ If we say we are in fellowship with him,

1. 2, 13; Jn 1, 1; Jn 1, 14

2. Jn 1, 4

3. Jn 17, 20; 1 Cor 1, 9

6. Jn 8, 12; 3, 12

is why John specifies the criteria, the conditions enabling us to verify if we are truly walking in the light and living in Love:

- In Christ we recognize God himself; yet we must always remember to interiorize his actions, his mission, his way of being human.
- We believe we have been reborn from God: that does not mean that we are above his commandments, nor that we should neglect daily efforts to be worthy of him.
- Faith has renewed our knowledge of God. But what matters most is to understand his love, and to that effect, there is no better teaching than that of the cross.

light. It is not a matter of mere knowledge: the whole person is the one who acts, *lives, walks* in the Light. Faith gives us light and frees us from many obstacles:

– The partial vision of the unbeliever who does not respect the different values: for example, in seeking order, he neglects the yearning for justice; or in struggling for justice he steps on his neighbour's rights.

– The restlessness of the one who does not have a goal and who silences his own doubts by throwing himself into frantic action.

— The sectarianism preventing us from being "universal brothers and sisters."

The Church makes us adopt a global vision of the whole man. This is one of the riches which Christians – especially militants – must share with their companions.

First intention to determine if we walk in light do we leave sin behind? To really understand this we must know that John is telling what some false prophets were saying. Since we are Christians we remain united with God, thus the sins of the body are unimportant." John declares that if we decide for God, we cannot continue to surrender to sin. Obviously, no one is without sin; we all need the salvation of Christ; but forgiveness itself compels us even more to stay away from sin.

John invites us to *confess* our sins to God, that is to say, to admit humbly before God that we have sinned, but with confidence in his kindness. If this attitude were not present, the sacrament of "confession" would be worthless. But, on the other hand, confessing our sins in the sacrament of penance is quite helpful in keeping our hearts open to God.

■ Second criterion of our love of God: to obey the commandments which are summarized in love. Do we, perhaps, pretend to know God and to believe? If so, it must be measured by the

while we walk in darkness,
we lie instead of being in the truth.

⁷ But if we walk in the light,
as he is in the light,
we are in fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus, the Son of God,
purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we say, "We have no sin,"
we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

**9 If we confess our sins,
he, who is faithful and just,
will forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all wickedness.**

¹⁰ If we say that we do not sin
we make God a liar, his word is not in us.

Fulfil the commandment of love

2 ¹ My little children, I write to you that you may not sin.

But if anyone sins,
we have an intercessor with the Father.
Jesus Christ, the Just One.

He is the sacrificial victim for our sins
and the sins of the whole world.

‘How can we know that we understand him?’
If we fulfil his commands.

⁴If anyone says, "I know him," but does not fulfil his commands, he is a liar and the truth is not in him.

⁵ But if anyone keeps his word,
God's love is made complete in him.

This is how we know that we are in him:

⁶he who claims to live in him
must live as he lived.

7 My dear friends, I am not writing you a new commandment,
but reminding you of an old one,
one you had from the beginning.
This old commandment is the word you have
heard.

^a But, in a way, I give it as a new commandment for it was indeed new in Jesus Christ and must be so in you as well, because the darkness is passing away and the true light already shines.

love we have for others. An old commandment, namely, the first one we learned in the Church; a new commandment, because the world must constantly, and in new ways, discover the power of love.

o Third criterion: not to love the world. Note how John begins by rejoicing with his readers because they know the Father. It is not a matter of hating the world which Christ came to save (see commentary on Jn 3:17). But, we must be aware that there is an evil current coming from the *evil one* in the world. According to John *the world* is the deceitful life which people live when they cease to seek the Father's will, and when they oppose Christ. Two opposed forces co-exist in this world of ours and also in people: what comes from the Father and is forever; and what was planned and desired by men when they forgot their condition and dignity as sons of God: greed and pride leading them to death.

There is something more to say about this *not loving the world*. Even though all that comes from God is good: the sunlight, love, what emerges from men's intelligence and hands, yet the whole creation is worth nothing if we compare it with God.

While we look upon the world as the great gift that God gave us and we feel accountable to him for its progress and development, the world is good for us. But as soon as we consider the world as our thing, use it or neglect it according to our fancy, or if we pretend to change it alone and by force, it becomes our worst enemy, an idol which enslaves us and the source of rivalries. Christians commit themselves to the world (first case) but not with the world (second case). They keep their freedom as sons of God or they are no longer sons because of their love for the world.

◆ Fourth criterion: to be sure we are walking in the Light, we must reject the Antichrist, we

⁹ If anyone claims to be in the light but hates his brother, he is still in darkness.

¹⁰ He who loves his brother remains in the light and need not be afraid of stumbling.

¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in the dark and walks in darkness without knowing where he goes, for the darkness has blinded him.

¹² My dear children, I write to you because you have already received the forgiveness of your sins through the Name of Jesus.

¹³ Fathers, I write to you because you already know him who is from the beginning.

Young men, I write to you because you have overcome the Evil One. My dear children, I write this to you: you already know the Father.

¹⁴ Fathers, I write this to you: you know him who is from the beginning. Young men, I write to you: you are strong and the Word of God lives in you who have indeed overcome the Evil One.

o ¹⁵ Do not love the world or what is in it. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶ For everything in the world – the craving of the flesh, the greed of eyes and men boasting of their superiority – all this belongs not to the Father but to the world. ¹⁷ The world passes away with all its craving, but those who do the will of God remain for ever.

Reject the antichrist

◆ ¹⁸ My dear children, it is the last hour. You were told that an antichrist would come; but several antichrists have already come, by which we know that it is now the last hour.

¹⁹ They went out from us though they did not really belong to us. Had they belonged to us,

must remain steadfast in the faith and in what faith teaches. The believers of John's days knew that before the glorious return of Christ, an Antichrist would appear. John says: the person who denies that Jesus is the Christ already is an antichrist. And, today, we still know many people who distinguish, on one hand, the man Jesus lost in the mists of legend, – surely a prophet who failed – and on the other hand, an idealized "Christ" adored by believers.

You received this Anointing that comes from him. John is saying that we, Christians, have received an anointing. He does not mean only the anointing with oil which is conferred at baptism and confirmation. "Christ" means precisely "anointed," not anointed with oil, but with the Holy Spirit of God, his Father. John says: you, the Christians, must be instructed in the Church, but not in a passive way: you must discern with what sense of responsibility the word of God is given to you.

The Anointing (the Spirit) will teach you all things. In writing this, John also thought about the prophets who were encouraging and teaching in the churches of the time: through their inspired words, the Spirit was teaching the community (see Acts 14:21 and 1 Thes 5:19). Now too, the Spirit preserves us in the truth and teaches the ways of truth to those who share in the life of the Church; but we must not think the Spirit teaches everything to everyone individually.

o Here begins the second part of the Letter: we are God's children and we must live as such. How do we prove that we are God's children? According

they would have remained with us.

So it was shown that not all of us were really ours.

²⁰ But you have the anointing from the Holy One, so that all of you have true wisdom.

²¹ I write to you,

not because you lack knowledge of the truth, but because you already know it and lies have nothing in common with the truth.

²² Who is the liar?

He who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

He is the antichrist,

he who denies both the Father and the Son.

²³ He who denies the Son is without the Father, and he who acknowledges the Son has also the Father.

²⁴ Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you.

If what you heard from the beginning remains in you,

you, too, will remain in the Son and in the Father.

²⁵ And this is the promise he himself gave us: eternal life.

²⁶ I write this to you

thinking of those who try to lead you astray.

²⁷ Since that anointing you received from him remains in you,

you do not need someone to teach you.

The anointing that comes from him teaches you all things

and speaks the truth and does not lie to you;

so remain in him,

and keep what he has taught you.

²⁸ And now, my children, live in him,

so that when he appears in his glory,

we may be confident

and not be ashamed before him when he comes.

²⁹ You know that he is the Just One:

know then that anyone living justly is born of God.

3 ¹ See what singular love the Father has for us:

not only are we called children of God,

but we really are.

20. 2 Cor 1, 21; Jn 14, 26

21. Jn 8, 44

23. Mt 10, 33; Jn 5, 23

24. Jn 15, 7

25. Jn 17, 2

27. Jn 16, 13

28. 1 Cor 1, 8

1. Jn 16, 3; 1 Cor 1, 21

to the same criteria which we have already seen: breaking away from sin, keeping the love commandment, proclaiming our faith. There are many ways of saying we are God's children. One person might simply think: God loves people means that human beings have great dignity. But here John calls our attention to two points:

– You are sons, but in order to become like God. Do not seek anything else than to be perfect as God is perfect.

– You are sons to return to the Father. Do you really think about the unique and transcendent end for which God has chosen you? Being aware of this, let us understand that God is purifying us in a thousand ways, because only in this way can we attain our goal.

We will be like him: sharing all that God is and somehow becoming God with God (see 1 Cor 13:13). Those who now bear their lives of suffering with Christ will be transfigured like him (Mk 9; Col 3:4). Then, the universe will reach its goal, having the children of God as its center (Rom 8:19) or better, the New Man.

Those who are born of God do not sin (9). This appears exaggerated, but being children of God is not some sort of fantasy: we have really begun a life in truth and in love. To the person who has been reborn, it becomes impossible to commit a real sin: to deliberately refuse to love, or to forgive or to continue to struggle. But we pray to the Father: "Lead us not..."

+ Keeping the love commandment is what distinguishes God's children.

Most people are accustomed to thinking that the world is divided into two opposed factions. Some see an exploiter or exploited in every man. Others only know liberals and conservatives. Others see black and

This is why the world does not know us, because it did not know him.

² Beloved, we are God's children and what we shall be has not yet been shown. Yet when he appears in his glory, we know that we shall be like him, for then we shall see him as he is.

³ All who have such a hope try to be pure as he is pure.

⁴ Anyone who commits a sin acts as an enemy of the law of God; any sin is a refusal of his law.

⁵ You know that he came to take away our sins, and that there is no sin in him.

⁶ So whoever sins has not seen or known him.

+ ⁷ My little children, do not be led astray, those who do what is right are upright, just as Jesus Christ is upright.

⁸ But those who sin belong to the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning. This is why the Son of God was shown to us he was to undo the works of the devil.

⁹ Those born of God do not sin for the seed of God remains in them; they cannot sin because they are born of God.

¹⁰ What is the way to recognize the children of God and those of the devil? He who does not do what is right is not of God; so, too, he who does not love his brother.

¹¹ For this is the message taught to you from the beginning: we must love one another.

¹² Do not imitate Cain who killed his brother for he belonged to the Evil One. Why did he kill him?

Because he himself did evil and his brother did good.

¹³ Likewise the world hates us, so, be not surprised, brothers;

¹⁴ we love our brothers and sisters, and with this we know that we have passed from death to life.

He who does not love remains in death.

¹⁵ He who hates his brother is a murderer,

2. Jn 1, 12; Rom 8, 16; Gal 4, 4; Phil 3, 21; Col 3, 4; Rev 22, 4; 2 Cor 3, 18
 3. 2 Cor 7, 1
 5. Jn 1, 29; 1 Pet 2, 22
 8. Jn 8, 34; Mk 1, 24; Jn 12, 31
 11. Jn 13, 34
 12. Heb 11, 4
 13. Jn 15, 18
 14. Jn 5, 24
 15. Mt 5, 21; Jn 8, 44

white. John tells us what is the boundary dividing men: those who love and those who do not love. Because believers are in the camp of those who love, they will be persecuted. Their companions and compatriots will not forgive believers for not sharing their own hatred and sectarianism.

He who hates his brother is a murderer. All murders and massacres spring from a lot of hatred. When war suddenly devastates a country, it is due to the fact that many people were resentful toward others, and others, in even greater numbers, refused to make sacrifices to settle their difficulties and tensions.

The practice of love never weakens us as can happen with other forms of sacrifices without love. Rather, it transforms us into likeness to God and we are no longer fearful or distrustful of him.

When our conscience condemns us, God is greater than our conscience. John may mean that only God knows man's depths. He can judge us better than we can judge ourselves, and he does it with a love that is lacking in us. And so, we must not be embittered over our past faults, nor live in a state of anxiety. After sinning, we must imitate Peter, not Judas.

To believe in the Name (3.23), that is to say, in the divinity of Christ.

■ John underlined the role of the Holy Spirit to guide us in the truth, but now he is dealing with the case of the prophets who do not speak according to the faith received from the apostles through the Church. Similar conflicts continue to exist in today's Church between the leaders of the Church and those who criticize their actions in the name of the Spirit who inspires them. It should be clear that no inspired person will ever be able to speak against the traditional

and, as you know,
eternal life does not remain in the murderer.

¹⁶This is how we have known what love is: he gave his life for us.

We, too, ought to give our life for our brothers.

17 If anyone enjoys the riches of this world,
but closes his heart when he sees his brother or
sister in need.

how will the love of God remain in him?

18 My dear children, let us love not only with words and with our lips but in truth and in deed.

¹⁹ Then we shall know that we are of the truth
and we may calm our conscience in his presence
²⁰ everytime it reproaches us,

for God is greater than our conscience,
and he knows everything.

²¹ When our conscience does not condemn us,
dear friends,

we may have complete confidence in God.

²² Then whatever we ask, we shall receive since we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

²³ His command is that we believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ

and that we love one another,
as he has commanded us.

²⁴ Whoever keeps his commands remains in God and God in him.

It is by the Spirit God has given us
that we know he lives in us.

Do not trust every inspiration

4 ¹My beloved,
do not trust every inspiration.

Test the spirits to see whether they come from God,
because many false prophets are now in
the world.

²How will you know whom God inspires?

Any spirit acknowledging that Jesus Christ has taken our flesh speaks in the name of God.

**³But any spirit which does not recognize Jesus
is not from God,
it is the spirit of the antichrist.**

16. In 15, 13

17. Dt 15, 7; James 2, 15

20. Lk 8, 13

22. Mt 7. 7; Lk 15. 7

23. In 6, 29;

13, 34; 1 Pet 1, 22

24. In 14, 23; Rom 8, 9

1. Dr 13,

7, 15; 2 Pet 2, 1; 1 Thes 5, 20

2. 1 Cor 12, 3; Rom 10, 9

3. Acts 20, 29; 2 Thes 2, 7

faith of the Church. But, what if it deals with ways of being or doing in the Church? Must we always support the people in charge in all circumstances? That would be forgetting that the Gospel forms free people who must never accept to follow blindly the opinion of the pope, or the bishop, or the majority. It is our responsibility to think for ourselves and to evaluate according to the criteria of the Gospel.

Can we then favour those who seem to be guided by the Spirit? But, how many are those inspired people who believe only in their own inspiration! If the Holy Spirit really inspires them, however much they may criticize what must be criticized, they will never attempt to divide the Church. The community may expel them, but they will not become responsible for the break. And even when the local community rejects them they will never accept to separate themselves from the universal communion of the Church, which, with time, always recognizes true prophets.

◆ *Here we have the beginning of the third part of the letter: God-Love is the source of love and faith.*

God is love (8 and 16). The supreme revelation, characteristic of the Christian faith. Other religions know of a God who is good and compassionate: no other religion knew that the dynamism of love moves the entire creation and that its source lies in God-Love.

In this beautiful text John insists on the inseparability between love of God and love of our neighbour. We all know this, but sometimes we might wonder why is it so. John gives us the paramount reason, *love comes from God* (7). If we can love God it is because *God loved us first* (10); if we love each other it is

You have heard of his coming and even now he is in the world.

4 You, my dear children are of God and you have already overcome these people, because the one who is in you is more powerful than he who is in the world.

5 They are of the world and the world inspires them and those of the world listen to them.

6 We are of God and those who know God listen to us, but those who are not of God ignore us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error as well.

God - Love is the source of love

◆⁷ My dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

⁸ He who does not love has not known God, for God is love.

⁹ How did the love of God appear among us? God sent his only Son into this world that we might have life through him.

¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God but that he first loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, if such has been the love of God, we, too, must love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love spreads freely among us.

¹³ How may we know that we live in God and he in us?

Because God has given us his Spirit.

¹⁴ We ourselves have seen and declare that the Father sent his Son to save the world.

¹⁵ When someone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God,

God remains in him and he in God.

¹⁶ We have known the love of God and have believed in it.

God is love.

because God's love extends among us (12).

John also puts together love of God and faith in God: a true Christian believer is somebody who begins by "believing in God's love, and that God is love" (4.16).

He loved us first (10): through his eternal predestination (Eph 1:4), the sending of his Son and through his sacrifice (Rom 5:8). And if we are authentically loving, we never feel superior nor do we have merits as those who boast of their good works. We simply realize that the love of God works through us.

The lives of those who dedicate themselves lovingly to serve the abandoned, the sick, the elderly, those no longer useful to society are justified and so are the lives of those who withdraw from ordinary lives to dedicate themselves more totally to a more intimate love of God.

o God-Love is the one who asks us to believe in his Son, and faith is a victory. John wrote the book of Revelation to give hope to persecuted believers, showing them the victory they share with Christ simply because they believe in him. John repeats the same thing here in a different way.

Our greatest victory is to conquer our inheritance as children of God and to reach the eternal life of God himself. Those who believe in Jesus are achieving this feat: they have already come to the Truth, God, in accepting Jesus.

How do we know we love the children of God? John already told us: the person who loves God also loves people, his brothers and sisters. Here, however, John expresses it the other way round: those who love their brothers and sisters are known by the fact that they love God.

Many things are called love: there may be something of love in all of them, but more or less. The love of God for us and the

He who lives in love, lives in God and God in him.

¹⁷ When do we know that we have reached a perfect love?

When in this world, we are like him in everything,

and expect with confidence the Day of Judgment.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love.

Perfect love drives away fear, for fear has to do with punishment; he who fears does not know perfect love.

¹⁹ So let us love one another, since he loved us first.

²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," while he hates his brother, he is a liar.

How can he love God whom he does not see, if he does not love his brother whom he sees?

We received from him this commandment:

let him who loves God also love his brother.

Faith comes from God

5 ¹ All those who believe that Jesus is the Anointed, are born of God; if you love the Father you also love all those born of him.

² How may we know that we love the children of God?

If we love God and fulfil his commands,

³ for God's love requires us to keep his commands.

In fact, his commandments are not a burden

⁴ because all those born of God overcome the world.

And the victory which overcomes the world is our faith.

⁵ Who has overcome the world?

The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

⁶ Jesus Christ was acknowledged through water, but also through blood.

Not only water but water and blood.

And the Spirit, too, witnesses to him for the Spirit is truth.

⁷ There are then three testimonies:

⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three witnesses agree.

love which he gives us toward other people cannot be confused with other loves. The love springing from an authentic communion with God does not resemble sentimental love, so blind and fickle. On the contrary, it is effective, both in the sense that it liberates others and it transforms us in Christ.

Verses 6-9 point out three complementary aspects of the Christian experience, which are first seen in Jesus himself. John characterizes them with three words:

– *water*: Water is the symbol of cleanliness and of new life.

– *blood*: The blood of the sacrifice, the painful atonement for sin, the blood of martyrs.

– *Spirit*: The uncontainable power which animates Christ's witnesses; the amazing creativity of the people and institutions which are rooted in faith.

These three witness to Jesus Christ and they also characterize Christian salvation. We can easily see that they correspond to the three sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharist and Confirmation.

+ In this conclusion, John repeats what he said throughout the letter: you who believe, appreciate what you have. Do not underestimate the step you took in accepting Christ. Explore and look for the riches which are meant for you and which are found in "Him who loves us" (Rv 1:5).

The whole world is under the power of the evil one. As has already been mentioned, this world belongs to God who made it good. Nevertheless, this world is not simply a building site for us to work. It is first the place where the evil one competes with God. He is not used to side with any group, atheist or materialist or whatever else, but everywhere he transforms the best things into destroying idols – even among these looking for a more perfect life.

⁹ If we accept the testimony of men, with greater reason must we accept that of God, given in favour of his Son.

¹⁰ If anyone believes in the Son of God, he has God's testimony in him.

But he who does not believe makes God a liar, since he does not believe his words when he witnesses to his Son.

¹¹ What has God said?

That he has granted us eternal life and this life is in his Son.

¹² He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Keep yourselves from idols

+ ¹³ I write you, then, all these things that you may know that you have eternal life, all you who believe in the Name of the Son of God.

¹⁴ Through him we are fully confident that whatever we ask, according to his will, he will grant us.

¹⁵ If we know that he hears us whenever we ask, we know that we already have what we asked of him.

¹⁶ If you see your brother committing sin, a sin which does not lead to death, pray for him, and God will give life to your brother. I speak, of course, of the sin which does not lead to death.

There is also a sin that leads to death; I do not ask that you pray about this.

¹⁷ Every kind of wrong-doing is sin, but not all sin leads to death.

¹⁸ We know that those born of God do not sin, for what has been born of God takes care of them,

and the Evil One can do nothing against them.

¹⁹ We know that we belong to God,

while the whole world lies in evil.

²⁰ We know that the Son of God has come

and has given us power to know the truth.

9. Jn 3, 33; 5, 34

11. Jn 17, 3

12. Jn 20, 31

14. James 1, 5

15. Mt 21, 22; Jn 14, 13

16. Mt 3, 29; Heb 6, 4; 10, 26

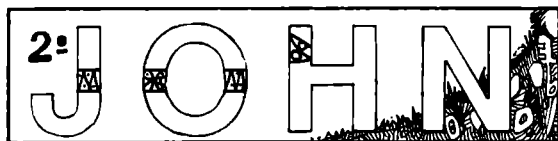
18. Jn 17, 15

19. Col 1, 13

20. Jn 20, 20; Rom 9, 5; Tit 2, 13

We are in him who is true, his Son Jesus Christ.
He is the true God and eternal life.

²¹ My dear children, keep yourselves from idols.



¹I, the elder, to the chosen Lady and her children, whom I love sincerely – and with me all who know the truth – ²because of this same truth which is and will be in us forever.

³Grace, mercy and peace be with you in the name of God the Father and of his Son, Christ Jesus, in truth and love.

⁴I rejoiced greatly on meeting some of your children who live in accordance with the truth, according to the command we have received from the Father. ⁵And now, I ask you, Lady – I write to you not a new commandment but that which we had from the beginning – I ask you: *let us love one another.*

⁶This is love: to walk according to his commandments. And this is the commandment: that you walk in love as you have learned from the beginning.

⁷Many deceivers have gone out

into the world, people who do not acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ who came as a man. They are impostors and antichrists. ⁸Take care of yourselves that you do not lose the fruit of your labours, but receive a perfect reward. ⁹Everyone who goes beyond and does not remain within the teaching of Christ does not have God. He who remains in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your houses or even greet him. ¹¹Even in greeting him you would become an accomplice in his wicked deeds.

¹²I have many things to write to you, but I prefer not to use paper and ink. I hope to meet you and speak to you personally, that our joy may be full.

¹³The children of your chosen sister greet you.

Chosen lady: this is the way John greets the community of an unknown city. The Church is chosen and holy, just as the people in it are the chosen and holy ones of God.

John invites the people to have a steadfast and emphatic attitude toward those who do not accept the faith of the apostles. At the same time he reminds them of the fundamental law for Christians: love.

To remain zealously faithful to the Truth is to love Christ who entrusted this truth to us, and to serve men who need the whole truth and not only what is most pleasing to people today.

3-john

To the Christians who knew him, the apostle John was not "Saint John," but a man. For a certain Diotrefes, to whom John had given the responsibility of a community that we do not know, John was a bothersome old man. And, in order to better dominate his church, Diotrefes was cutting off the relationship.

On the contrary, in his three letters, as in the Gospel, John speaks of this "communion" which must exist among Christians. Any church, or group must remain open to others, maintaining constant contacts with them. Paul also insists on this responsibility: to welcome in their homes all Christians coming from other places in order to strengthen the bonds of the common faith.

¹I, the elder, to my dear friend Gaius, whom I love sincerely.

²Dear friend, may everything go well with you and may you enjoy health of body and soul. ³I greatly rejoiced with the brothers who arrived and praised your truth, and how you live the truth. ⁴Nothing gives me greater joy than to know that my children live in the truth.

⁵Brother, you do well to care for the brothers and sisters as you do. I mean those coming from other places. ⁶They spoke of your charity before the assembled Church. It will be well to provide them with what they need to continue their journey, as if you did it for God. ⁷In reality, they have set out on the road for his name without accepting anything from the pagans. ⁸We should receive such men, making ourselves their co-operators in the work of the truth.

⁹I have written these words to the

Church. But Diotrefes, who is anxious to preside over it, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰So when I come, I will not cease reproaching his manner of acting, since he discredited us with words of evil intent. And not content with that, he does not receive the brothers and even restrains those who want to receive them, and expels them from the Church.

¹¹Dear friend, do not imitate evil, but only the good. He who does good is of God. He who does evil does not know God. ¹²Now about Demetrius: everyone praises him, even the truth itself. We, too praise him, and you know that when we recommend anyone, we do it according to the truth. ¹³I have many things to tell you, but I do not want to do it in writing. ¹⁴I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace be with you. Your friends greet you. Greet the friends for me, each one by name.



revelation

INTRODUCTION

Caught up in an ecstasy, John saw the glory of the risen Christ and thus he understood the destiny of the church already threatened by the first persecutions. Such is the origin of his book: *Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

Why does *Revelation* have the reputation of being a mysterious book, hard to understand and why, for many people does it have a terrifying meaning? Can it be because many seek there secret figures and messages which could be adapted to current events as if John had announced them in detail?

This is mostly due to the fact that, in Jesus' days, apocalyptic literature was very fashionable. Thus, we know of an Apocalypse of *Isaiah*, another of *Moses*, one of *Enoch*... Such books pretended to explain the events of the times, but these events were disguised and spoken of through fictitious visions and fantastic images. So for the readers, it was a game to recognize their own reality presented in a sophisticated form.

So then, if John wished to explain his prophetic grasp of history in apocalyptic form, we will understand his message only if we do not take everything literally. Rather, we must interpret these visions, numbers and symbols according to the rules peculiar to apocalyptic literature. Then, we will see that the *Revelation of Jesus Christ* is neither difficult, nor terrifying, but filled with hope.

The Risen Christ is the center of history; the world is the place of the struggle between the church, headed by Christ, and Satan's forces; Christians are called to give their witness with courage.

In this book we can see seven series, each with seven elements, in four major parts:

- The seven messages to the churches, chapters 1-3.
- Inventory of the Old Testament, chapters 4-9.
- The Church faces the Roman Empire, chapter 11-19:6.
- The last days and the heavenly Jerusalem, chapters 20-22.

o *The time is near.* This has been written first for John's first readers. Thus, the estimates of contemporary readers who would wish to read a description of current events into Revelation are misconstrued.

+ John greets his readers, wishing them the peace coming from the Father, Christ and the Holy Spirit. As soon as John has named the three divine Persons, all his praise goes to Christ. This was the newness which energized the early Christians so powerfully: Christ, God who came as man.

The Seven Spirits means the fullness of God's Spirit.

The one who is, who was, and who is to come. This way of naming God expands what had been revealed to Moses: "I am who am" (Ex 3). The living God is a God who is coming.

Then, Christ is presented as the Messiah and Judge hoped for by the Jews. *He comes with the clouds.* In his trial, Jesus had also referred to this text of the prophet Daniel (7:13).

All the nations of the earth will mourn his death. See this prophecy of the murdered Messiah: "the one they pierced" in Zechariah 12:10.

Alpha and Omega (or A and Z). This suggests that God embraces all time.

Revelation is addressed to Christians who are beginning to suffer for their faith, and it shows Christ to them, as the model they are imitating. Christ is the "servant and the witness of God and of the Father." *Let us not forget that martyr means witness.*

■ John had been condemned on account of his faith and he was living in exile on Patmos. It was around the year 95.

John has this vision on the Lord's day, that is, on Sunday, or the day of the resurrection. And so, this vision will be enlivened by the triumphant breath of the resurrection.

I saw someone like a son of Man. This is a symbolic vision of Christ; dressed as a priest, and with a golden sash as a king. His white hair is a symbol of his eternity. *His feet like bronze* means that no one will defeat him. Christ appears just like Daniel represents God, the universal judge (see 7:9).

1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ.* God gave it to him to let his servants know what is soon to take place. He sent his angel to make it known to his servant, John, ² who reports everything he saw, for this is the word of God and the declaration of Jesus Christ.

³ Happy is the one who reads aloud these prophetic words, and happy those who hear them and treasure everything written here, for the time is near.

+ ⁴ From John to the seven Churches of Asia: receive grace and peace from him who is, who was and who is to come, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has washed away our sins with his own blood, ⁶ making us a kingdom and priests for God his Father, to him be the glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

⁷ See *he comes with the clouds* and everyone will see him, even those who pierced him and all the nations of the earth will mourn his death. Yes. It will be so.

⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, *he who is, who was and who is to come: the Master of the universe.*

■ ⁹ I, John, your brother, who share with you, in Jesus, the sufferings, the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island of Patmos, because of the Word of God and witnessing to Jesus. ¹⁰ On the Lord's day, the Spirit took possession of me and I heard a voice behind me which sounded like a trumpet, ¹¹ "Write down all that you see, in a book, and send it to the seven Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

¹² I turned to see who was speaking to me; behind me were seven golden lampstands ¹³ and, in the middle of these, I saw someone like a son of man, dressed in a long robe tied with a golden girdle.

¹⁴ *His head and his hair are white as wool* or as snow and his eyes are like flames of fire.

¹⁵ His feet are like burnished bronze when it

4. Ex 3, 14	5. Ps 89, 28; Col 1, 15	6. 1 Pet 2, 9, 12. Dn 7, 24
7. Dn 7, 13; Zac 12, 10; Mt 24, 30		13. Dn 7, 9; 7, 13; 10, 5
14. Dn 10, 6	15. Ezk 1, 24	



The *World* hates the poor
Christian Communities.
Slanders, harassment, killing
of their leaders in several
places. Unknown martyrs,
sometimes disowned by
religious authorities, who
eventually are the glory of
Christ.

... saying when anyone who kills you will claim to be serving God.





has been refined in a furnace. His voice is like the roaring of the waves.

¹⁶ I saw seven stars in his right hand and a sharp, double-edged sword coming out of his mouth; his face shone like the sun in all its brilliance.

¹⁷ Seeing him, I fell at his feet like one dead but he touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. It is I, the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the living one; I was dead and now I am alive for ever and ever; and mine are the keys of death and the nether-world. ¹⁹ Now write what you have seen, both what is and what is yet to come. ²⁰ Know the secret of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches and the seven lampstands are the seven Churches.

The seven messages to the Churches

♦ 2 ¹ Write this to the angel of the Church in Ephesus, "Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

² I know your works, your difficulties and your patient suffering. I know you cannot tolerate evil-doers but have tested those who call themselves apostles and have proved them to be liars. ³ You have persevered and have suffered for my name without losing heart. ⁴ Nevertheless, I have this complaint against you: you have lost your first love. ⁵ Remember from where you have fallen and repent, and do what you used to do before. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place; this I will do, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet, it is in your favour that you hate the doings of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ If anyone has ears let him listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches: To the victor I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in God's Paradise."

+ ⁸ Write this to the angel of the Church in Smyrna, "Thus says the First and the Last, he

It is I, the First and the Last. By these words, Christ identifies with God himself. In the Bible, this is characteristic of God's way of speaking (see Is 44:6 and 12).

When Christ delivers the seven messages to the churches, he does not appear as a man from the past, but rather as the Lord who holds the destiny of the churches in his hands. *The double edged sword coming out of his mouth* is the word of God which irresistibly penetrates the heart and is always fulfilled in events. It deals death as effectively as it saves.

There were more than seven churches in Asia. But seven means fullness, and the seven churches, then, represent all the Christian communities. Seven is the perfect number and this is why in the book of Revelation, Christ's name is mentioned seven times, Jesus fourteen times, and the Lamb (who is Christ) twenty-eight times. There are seven prophecies of Christ's victory with his people and seven beatitudes like those of the Gospel: "Happy those..."

The stars, the angels and the lampstands: these three images may imply fullness to designate a church, its bishops and believers together.

♦ The seven following messages all begin with the words *I know*. Christ sees, knows and loves his Church. He begins by underscoring what is positive, then he reprimands. Christ remains invisible, but he is the Lord of the universe and of history.

The messages reveal the difficulties these churches of Asia are facing:

– On one hand, there are hostilities coming from the Jews as well as from the pagans: they are a test of the believers' perseverance.

– On the other hand, we have the "Nicolaitans," those Christians who, not wanting to be cut off from the pagans, accept even participation with them in the banquets of the pagan temples where meat sacrificed to idols was eaten: this is a threat to faith.

– The last temptation is the one which comes with time: the love which had awakened in the first moments of conversion was growing cold.

♦ Ephesus comes first since it is the mother Church. Paul preached



there for two years (Acts 19:8). Later, John came to live there, thus extending his authority over the churches in the Asian province.

I know your patient suffering. While the apostle was absent, the Church had rejected the false prophets and preserved the true faith.

You have lost your first love. How many details – difficult to pinpoint – make us feel the fervor of a community, or, on the contrary, reveal that the essence of authentic, passionate and faithful love of God is missing! *I will remove your lampstand: I will punish your leaders.*

The tree of life is eternal life (see Gen 2:9).

+ The church of Smyrna gathers poor people in an extremely rich city. In fact, it is rich in the eyes of God who is going to put it to the test so that it can be more productive.

There will be ten days of trial. The number ten is characteristic of the period during which evil ones rule. Thus, it announces a trial lasting a short time.

The second death. (See Revelation 20:14.) It means eternal condemnation, which separates the soul not from the body, but from God.

Those who pretend to be Jews. Since they are believers and the people of God, Christians are authentic sons of Abraham and authentic Jews.

Those who are Jews by race and who did not believe, lost their right to boast of that name. Therefore, their "synagogue," that is to say, their assembly, becomes Satan's, by their opposition to the Church.

■ Pergamum has the privilege of being an important center of pagan worship: it is "Satan's throne."

You cling faithfully to my name. The name of Christ is "Lord." This is the period when the Roman emperors begin to have themselves called "Lord" and be adored like gods, thus forcing Christians to choose between emperor worship, imposed on everyone under the pain of severe punishment, and faithfulness to Christ.

The Church in Pergamum is privileged to have had among its

who was dead and returned to life:

⁹ I know your trials and your poverty: you are rich indeed. I know how you are slandered by those who pretend to be Jews but who are, in fact, of the synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what will happen to you. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you and there will be ten days of trials. Remain faithful even to death and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ If anyone has ears, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches: The victor has nothing to fear from the second death.

■ ¹² Write this to the angel of the Church in Pergamum, "Thus says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword:

¹³ I know where you live, where Satan's throne is, but you cling firmly to my name; you have not renounced me, not even in your days when Antipas, my faithful witness, was killed in your place, where Satan lives. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, I have a few complaints against you: Some among you hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak how to make the Israelites stumble, by eating food sacrificed to idols and committing adultery. ¹⁵ Also among you, some follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Therefore, repent; if not, I will come to you soon to attack these people with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ If anyone has ears, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches: To the victor I will give the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it which no one knows except the one who receives it."

◆ ¹⁸ Write this to the angel of the Church in Thyatira, "Thus says the Son of God whose eyes are like flames of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹ I know all your works: your love, faith, service, patient endurance and your later works, greater than the first.

²⁰ Nevertheless, I have a complaint against you: you tolerate your Jezebel, this woman who calls herself a prophetess and is deceiving my servants; she teaches them prostitution

10. Dn 1, 12	11. 20, 6; 21, 8	12. 1, 16; 19, 15
14. Num 22, 2; 1 Cor 8-10; 2 Pet 2, 15		17. 14, 1; Is 62, 2;
65, 15; Jn 6, 32	20. 1 K 16, 31	9. Mt 22, 1 10. 22, 8



and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent but she is unwilling to leave her prostitution. ²² So, I am going to throw her to bed and to inflict severe trials on her partners in adultery unless they repent of their evil. ²³ I will strike her followers dead and all the Churches will know that I am he who probes the heart and mind; I will give each of you what your conduct deserves.

²⁴ Listen to me now, the rest of you in Thyatira, you who do not hold with this teaching and have not learned 'the secrets of Satan', as they are called. I have no cause to reproach you, ²⁵ only hold on to what you have, until I come. ²⁶ To him who is victor and keeps to my ways to the end, *I will give power over the nations; ²⁷ he will rule them with an iron rod and shatter them like earthen pots;* he will be like me, who received this power from my Father. ²⁸ Moreover, I will give him the Morning Star.

²⁹ If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.

3 ¹ Write this to the angel of the Church in Sardis, "Thus says he who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

I know your worth: you think you live but you are dead. ² Wake up and strengthen that which is not already dead. For I have found your works to be imperfect in the sight of my God. ³ Remember what you were taught; keep it and change your ways. If you do not repent I will come upon you like a thief at an hour you least expect. ⁴ Yet, there are some left in Sardis who have not soiled their robes; these will come with me, dressed in white, since they deserve it. ⁵ The victor will be dressed in white and I will never erase his name from the book of life; instead, I will acknowledge it before my Father and his angels.

⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.

⁷ Write this to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, "Thus says he who is holy and true, who holds the key of David; if he opens, nobody shuts and if he shuts nobody opens.

⁸ I know your worth; I have opened a door

members the first martyr of the province, Antipas, mentioned here. His courage in proclaiming his faith before pagan persecution, does not prevent a pagan current to penetrate within the Church through the Nicolaitans mentioned earlier: by taking part in some pagan ceremonies and returning to the sexual freedom of the pagans, they are threatening to destroy the Church.

I will come soon to attack these people. In the early Church, the intervention of the Holy Spirit is felt all the time. Prophets speak, point to the guilty party, and misfortunes soon occur.

The white stone is a sign of happiness. The *new name* (see Is 65:15) means the renewal of the Christian in the depth of his being: in living and growing in the faith, is the beginning of a new personality which will appear clearly in heaven. *The hidden manna* (17): Christ becomes power and source of life (Jn 6:48) for those who are faithful to him.

♦ In the Bible, *Jezebel* is the name of an impious woman (see 1 Kg 19) and here it refers to some Nicolaitan prophetess. Her lovers and sons are her followers.

Also, idolatry is often called *adultery or prostitution*: the believing people belong to God as a wife to her husband, and to be unfaithful is to prostitute oneself. In fact, those who worship idols do not usually respect the sexual discipline imposed by faith. Thus when Revelation speaks of prostitution, we must understand both idolatry and sexual immorality.

He will rule them with an iron rod. By these words, the one who overcomes is promised a share in Christ's victory (see psalm 2); he will receive the *Morning Star*, that is to say, Christ himself (see Revelation 22:15).

◦ This is a brief message to a dying church. The universal Church has been promised that it would remain. Yet, any individual church can disappear.

To be dressed in white means inner life: being clothed with Christ (see Eph 4:24). Throughout the

23. Jer 11, 20 27. 19, 15; Ps 2, 8
28. 22, 16; Is 14, 12; 2 Pet 1, 19
1. 1, 16; Is 11, 2 3. 16, 15;
Mt 24, 42; 1 Thes 5, 2 5. Mt 10, 32
7. Is 22, 22 8. Col 4, 3



book of Revelation, white means joy, strength, victory and eternal glory.

+ This is a message of consolation and optimism for those who work faithfully with the Holy Spirit, but who are troubled by the thousand difficulties of their ministry.

The one who holds the key of David (see Is 22:22). Christ has absolute power over the "house of David," namely, his people. He prepares a fruitful ministry for those who were able to persevere in hard times and when the fruits of their labour were not seen.

I have opened a door before you (v. 8) means: I have prepared a successful ministry. There is one condition: keeping the Word of God and being faithful to him.

■ *You are neither cold nor hot.* Neither unbelievers who remain cold toward a faith they do not share, nor believers who take God's love seriously and with authentic surrender. We can easily imagine this community of nice and comfortable people. They were one more religious group, but not the witnesses of Christ the victor.

Laodicea had hot and cold thermal waters. It was also in that city that an eyewash famous for improving eyesight was made.

Amen means: it is true, or also: I commit myself this way. Christ is the Father's Amen. His commitment to us is the fulfilment of his promises (see 2 Cor 1:20). And because Christ is the Amen, he calls us to a real commitment to God, to realize his plans.

before you, which nobody can close, because you have kept my Word and not renounced me, in spite of your lack of power.⁹ I am giving you some of the synagogue of Satan who call themselves Jews but they are only liars. I will make them fall at your feet and recognize that I have loved you.

¹⁰ Because you have kept my words with patient endurance, I, for my part, will keep you safe in the hour of trial which is coming upon the whole world, to test the people of the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have lest anyone take your crown. ¹² I will make the victor into a column in the sanctuary of my God where he will stay forever. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God in heaven, and my own new name. ¹³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.

■ ¹⁴ Write this to the angel of the Church in Laodicea, "Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation:

¹⁵ I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot!

¹⁶ You are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold so I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You think you are rich and have piled up so much that you need nothing but you do not realize that you are wretched and to be pitied, poor, blind and naked.

¹⁸ I advise you to buy from me gold that has been tested by fire, so that you may be rich, and white clothes to wear so that your nakedness may not shame you, and ointment for your eyes that you may see. ¹⁹ I reprimand and correct all those I love. Be earnest and change your ways. ²⁰ Look, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my call and opens the door, I will come in to him and have supper with him, and he with me. ²¹ I will let the victor sit with me on my throne just as I, was victorious and took my place with my Father, on his throne. ²² If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches."

9. Is 45, 14; 60, 14 12. Gal 2, 9;
1 Tim 3, 15; 21, 2; Ezk 48, 15
14. 2 Cor 1, 19; Pro 8, 22; Jn 1, 3;
Col 1, 15; Heb 1, 2 18. Is 55, 1
19. Pro 3, 12 20. 1 Cor 11, 32;
Jn 14, 23 21. Lk 22, 29; Ps 110, 1



A LOOK AT THE PAST: CHRIST AND ISRAEL

The throne in heaven

◆ **4** ¹ After this, I looked up to the wall of the sky and saw an open door. The voice which I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here and I will show you what will come in the future." ² Immediately, I was seized by the Spirit. There, in heaven, was a throne and one sitting on it. ³ He who sat there looked like jasper and carnelian and round the throne was a rainbow resembling an emerald.

⁴ In a circle around the throne are twenty-four thrones and seated on these are twenty-four elders, dressed in white clothes, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ Flashes of lightning come forth from the throne, with voices and thunderclaps. Seven flaming torches burn before the throne; these are the seven spirits of God.

⁶ Before the throne there was a platform, transparent like crystal. Around and beside the throne stand four living creatures, full of eyes, both in front and behind. ⁷ The first living creature is like a lion, the second like a bull, the third has the face of a man and the fourth looks like a flying eagle. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures has six wings full of eyes, all around as well as within; day and night they sing without ceasing,

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God,
master of the universe,
he was, he is and he is to come.*

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to the One on the throne, he who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship the One who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns in front of the throne and say,

*"Our Lord and God, worthy are you
to receive glory, honour and power!*

*For you have created all things;
by your will they came to be and were made.*

◆ After these messages to the Asian churches, we have visions containing the meaning of his history.

– In chapters 4-11, John describes the meaning of the history of Israel up to the preaching of the Gospel.

– In chapters 12-21, he prepares us to understand the history we are living and the struggles of the Church.

To begin with, we need to know where we are going and why we are struggling. Those without goals will soon be swept away by conflicting currents. Therefore, before developing his vision of history, John shows us the unchanging center in which things and events have their origins and to which they return.

A door opens in the vault of the sky (v. 1). According to the ideas of the time, above the vault, we have "the waters from above," which are the level of another heaven, the real one where God dwells.

In heaven, was a throne, and one sitting on it. That invisible someone from whom light and life radiate is the divine Being contemplated in its source, that is the Father. His face cannot be described, but all the elements of nature are gathered to express something of the divine Being: the imposing force of the storm, the fascinating power of fire, the purity and freshness of water.

The elders are the saints of the Old Testament who represent the faithful people (see Is 24:23). The four living creatures refer to angels. These are poetic images to express what is most noble, strong, wise and quick. Their eyes, always alert, are focused on the center of the divine Being and they spread God's energies throughout the universe (see Ez 1).

They sing without ceasing: Holy, Holy, Holy (v. 8). This is the first of the hymns found in Revelation. At the center where God is and from where all things came when the lives of mortal beings are

1. 1, 10; Mk 1, 10; Acts 10, 11 2. Ezk 1, 26; 10, 1; Is 61, 1
5. Ex 19, 16 6. Ezk 1, 22; 1, 5 8. Is 6, 2-3

over, everything will be gathered up in thanksgiving to the Father. What will we do in heaven? All will be admiration, praise and amazing discovery of God's infinity.

Note how John describes God's mystery here, by using images from Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. As to the four animals, Christian art used them to represent the four evangelists: Matthew as the man; Mark, the lion; Luke, the bull; and John as the eagle.

o The vision follows, with the appearance of two new elements: the *sealed Book* and the *Lamb*. The history of Israel (which can be read in the Bible) and Christ.

John's readers had a book, the Old Testament. For those among them of Jewish origins, it was the history of their people. But it was also the book of the other Christians, and in some way it contains the history of all men, since in this history the salvation of all mankind was being prepared.

The Jewish nation had been destroyed some twenty years before, according to Jesus' prophecy (Mk 13), and Christians of Jewish descent were asking themselves: If Christ is the promised Saviour, why did the history of Israel end in such disasters? And why did the Jewish people, instructed by the Bible, not recognize their Saviour.

Here we are told that though the events are in the Book, the Book is *sealed*. No one was found able to understand God's plan for his people, or able to call God to account. Only Christ reveals the mystery of death and resurrection which is being realized in history, and only he can do so, since he himself surrendered to death for all: you are worthy to take the Book (9).

Now, Christ can read the Book of the history and destiny of men (power, riches and wisdom: v. 12). Still more, he is now the owner of this Book, and in being rejected by Israel, a priestly people (Ex 19:5), he formed his own kingdom and priests, the Church (1 Pet 2:9), as is said in v. 10.

The coming of the Lamb

o 5 ¹Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written on both sides, sealed with seven seals. ²A mighty angel exclaimed in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open this and break the seals?"

³But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth (among the dead) was found able to open the book and read it. ⁴I wept much when I saw that no one was found worthy to open the book and read it. ⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Shoot of David, has conquered; he will open the book of the seven seals."

⁶And I saw next to the throne with its four living creatures and the twenty-four elders a *Lamb* standing, although it had been slain. I saw him with seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth.

⁷The Lamb moved forward and took the book from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸When he took it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed before the Lamb. They all hold in their hands harps and golden cups full of incense which are the prayers of the holy ones.

⁹This is the new song they now sing:

*You are worthy to take the book
and open its seals,
for you were slain
and by your blood you purchased for God
men of every race, people and nation;*

*¹⁰and you made them a kingdom
and priests for our God
and they shall reign over the land.*

¹¹I went on looking; I heard the noise of a multitude of angels gathered around the throne, the living creatures and the elders, numbering millions of millions, ¹²crying out with a loud voice:

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive
power and riches, wisdom and strength,
honour, glory and praise.*

1. Is 29, 11 5. Gen 49, 8; Is 11, 1
6. Jn 1, 29 9. 14, 3; Is 42, 10
10. Ex 19, 10; Is 61, 6
12. Phil 2, 7-9

¹³ Then I heard the voice of the whole universe, heaven, earth, sea and the place of the dead; every creature cried out:

*To him who sits upon the throne
and to the Lamb be praise,
honour, glory and power for ever and ever.*

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, *Amen*, while the elders bowed down and worshipped.

The seven seals

+ 6 ¹ I saw the Lamb opening the first of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures cry out with a voice like thunder, "Come and see!" ² A white horse appeared, and its rider had a bow. He was crowned, and he went out as a conqueror to continue his conquest.

³ When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature cry out, "Come!"

⁴ Then another horse the colour of fire came out. Its rider was ordered to take away peace from the earth, that people might kill one another; so he was given a great sword.

⁵ When he opened the third seal, I heard the third creature cry out, "Come!" This time it was a black horse, and its rider held a balance in his hand. ⁶ Then from the midst of the four living creatures a voice was heard: "A measure of wheat for a piece of silver, and three measures of barley for a piece as well! Do not spoil the oil or the wine."

⁷ When he opened the fourth seal, I heard a cry from the fourth living creature, "Come!"

⁸ A greenish horse appeared, its rider was called *Death*, and *the Netherworld* rode behind him. He was allowed to utterly destroy by sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts a fourth of the inhabitants of the earth.

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the spirits of those who proclaimed the word of God and were slain for its sake. ¹⁰ They began to cry aloud, "Holy and righteous Lord, how long will you remain without rendering justice and avenging our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" ¹¹ Then each one of them was given a white garment,

A Lamb, standing although it had been slain (v. 6). The vision brings us to the moment of the resurrection. While the Gospels relate the resurrection of Jesus as his disciples knew it on earth, here we are in heaven to contemplate the risen Christ entering a glorious world. He is standing after being sacrificed, glorious, but for ever marked by his Passion among men.

The seven horns and the seven eyes express the fullness of the power and the knowledge of the risen Christ. Before all the powers of the world and of heaven, on that day, he comes with authority to take the Book from the hands of the Father.

Let us note how on the day of the resurrection, the same praise previously addressed to God now goes to the Lamb: in being raised up, Christ appears with the glory befitting him: that of God.

+ The Lamb opens the seals. The risen Christ explains the great forces giving an impulse to sacred history. At the time of John's writing, the Old Testament has ended because of the birth of the Church, and shortly thereafter through the destruction of the Jewish homeland. This is the time to think things over.

The four horses symbolize the forces shaping biblical history.

The rider of the white horse is "the word of God." It represents God's words given to the prophets in the Old Testament. Christ, who is *the word of God* had not come yet: he would come later, riding the same white horse (Rv 19:11).

The other three horses represent war, hunger and the plague. These are the great plagues troubling sinful people: they make them experience the need for God's salvation.

With the *fifth seal* another invisible power is discovered, one that moves sacred history: the

2. Zac 6, 1	6. Ezk 4, 16
8. Ezk 14, 21	10. Dt 32, 43;
Zac 1, 12; Lk 18, 7	11. Lk 13



demand of justice for the blood of martyrs. These martyrs, prior to Christ, already share in his victory (that is why they wear a *white garment*); yet, they must wait to be joined by other martyrs, the Christians, the martyrs of the early Church, for God to bring about his justice (see in Mt 23:35).

With the sixth seal, we have the appearance of the signs and plagues which the prophets had announced for the Day of the Lord, and which would be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem (Mk 13, 24).

■ *Do no harm to the earth until we have sealed the servants of our God* (v. 3). In this final moment, before closing the Old Testament and proclaiming the rejection of the Jewish people, John takes stock of these centuries of God's blessing and favours for his chosen people.

Seeing how the Jews did not accept Jesus, we could have the impression of a complete failure. John, however, presents an optimistic vision. The angels point out the elect. There are twelve thousand from each one of the tribes. We know that *twelve* is the number for fullness and we have to understand that the number of elect was the maximum, and that God was not disappointed.

Who are these elect? On one hand, they are the Jews who followed Jesus. They are also those who did not believe in him through no fault of their own and who were saved through his death and his resurrection.

Thus we have an inventory of the saved for God's first people, Israel. Then, a huge crowd which no one could count appears immediately.

12. Is 13, 10	13. Is 34, 4
15. Is 2, 10	16. Hos 10, 8;
Lk 23, 30	17. Rom 2, 5
1. Jer 49, 36	3. 3, 12; 22, 4;
Ezk 9, 4; Ex 12, 7	

and they were told to wait a little while, until the number of their brothers and fellow servants who would be killed as they had been be completed.

¹² And my vision continued. When the Lamb opened the sixth seal, there was a violent earthquake. The sun became black as a mourning dress, and the whole moon turned blood-red, ¹³ and the stars in the sky fell to the earth like dry figs falling from a fig tree shaken by a hurricane. ¹⁴ The sky was folded up like parchment that is rolled up; there was no mountain or continent that was not removed from its place. ¹⁵ The kings of the earth and their ministers, the generals, the rich and the powerful, and all the people, slaves as well as free men, hid in caves or among rocks on the mountains, ¹⁶ saying, "Fall on us, mountains and rocks, and hide us, for we are afraid of him who sits on the throne, and of the wrath of the Lamb. ¹⁷ The great Day of his wrath has come, and who can endure it?"

144,000 from Israel and the great crowd from every nation

■ **7** ¹ After this, there were four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds to prevent them blowing against the earth, the sea and the trees. ² I saw another angel ascending from the sunrise, carrying the seal of the living God, and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels empowered to harm the earth and the sea, ³ "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads."

⁴ Then I heard the number of those marked with the seal: a hundred and forty-four thousand from all the tribes of the sons of Israel:

⁵ from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed;

from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand;

from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand;

⁶ from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand;

from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand;

⁷ from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand;



from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand;
from the tribe of Issachar, twelve
thousand;

⁸ from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand;
from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand;

from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve
thousand.

⁹ After this I saw a great crowd, impossible to count, from every nation, race, people and tongue, standing before the throne of the Lamb, clothed in white, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and they cried out with a loud voice, "Who saves but our God who sits on the throne and the Lamb?"

¹¹ All the angels were around the throne, the elders and the four living creatures; they then bowed before the throne with their faces to the ground to worship God. ¹² They said,

*Amen. Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks,
honour, power and strength to our God
forever and ever. Amen!*

¹³ At that moment, one of the elders spoke up and said to me, "Who are these people clothed in white, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, it is you who know this."

The elder replied, "They are those who have come out of the great persecution; they have washed and made their clothes white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ This is why they stand before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his sanctuary. He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

¹⁶ Never again will they suffer hunger or thirst or be burned by the sun or any scorching wind. ¹⁷ For the Lamb near the throne will be their Shepherd, and he will bring them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away their tears."

◆ 8

¹ When the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I looked at the seven angels standing before God who were given seven trumpets.

³ Another angel came and stood before the altar of incense with a golden censer. He was

After this, I saw a great crowd. This is the new people of God, the followers of Christ coming from all the nations of the world and who are joined with the believers of the Old Testament.

A great crowd, impossible to count (v. 9). The salvation of humanity will be an incredible success, despite appearances which discourage us so often: the people of God is being prepared everywhere.

They are those who come out of the great persecution (v. 14). This multitude of the saved are obviously not all martyrs and yet, John sees them represented as martyrs. It is because every believer has a model in the martyrs who gave even their lives for their faith. Besides, John is speaking for Christians on the eve of the first great persecution.

Praise, glory and wisdom to our God (v. 12). This is another hymn to God our Saviour. Those who sing God's praises may have already seen, during their lives, that all wisdom, power and strength could only come from above.

◆ *When the Lamb opened the seventh seal.* We have come to the end of the Old Testament and the silence that follows announces the coming of God. In fact, the tremendous end of Jerusalem is only a stage. The end of history is post-

9. Gen 15, 5 14. 22, 14 15. Is 4, 5
16. Is 49, 10 17. Ps 23, 1; Is 25, 8
1. Zep 1, 7; Zac 2, 17



poned. With the seven trumpets a new series of plagues begins. We are not quite sure of what is hidden behind those symbols. But they were surely referring to events already known to John's readers, events which had happened shortly before.

In the following chapters there are more and more interventions of "angels."

Are these angels only a poetic way to refer to the intervention of God himself? It is true that in ancient books, oftentimes, the term "angel" was a way of saying that God intervenes (see commentary on Gen 16). But we must also think that God's creation is much wider than what we can see and know. There are other spiritual beings who intervene in God's plan over the world.

"They neither believe in angels nor in the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:8): this is Luke's way of defining the Sadducees, the materialists of Jesus' days.

• These paragraphs intend to show the punishment of the Jewish people who did not welcome Christ: they use images taken from the plagues of Egypt, from Ez 38-39, and from other popular writings. With the first four trumpets, punishment is shown in the very forces of nature which, later, will turn against the guilty people. The third one shows the evil forces of the devil crashing on the earth from the sky. The fifth one may refer to foreign invasions: this is

given much incense that he might offer it, with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the golden altar before the throne; ⁴and the cloud of incense rose with the prayers of the holy ones from the hands of the angel to the presence of God. ⁵Then, the angel took the censer and filled it with burning coals from the altar, and threw them on the earth: and there came thunder, lightning and earthquakes.

The seven trumpets

• ⁶The seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. ⁷When the first angel blew his trumpet, there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up with a third of the trees and the green grass.

⁸When the second angel blew his trumpet, something like a great mountain was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea was turned into blood. ⁹At once, a third of living creatures in the sea died and a third of the ships perished.

¹⁰When the third angel sounded his trumpet, a great star fell from heaven, like a ball of fire, on a third of the rivers and springs. ¹¹The star is called *Wormwood*, and a third of the waters was turned into wormwood and many people died because of the water which had turned bitter.

¹²The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun, the moon and the stars was affected. Daylight decreased one third, and the light at night as well.

¹³And my vision continued: I noticed an eagle flying through the highest heaven and crying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the land when the last three angels sound their trumpets."

9 ¹And the fifth angel blew his trumpet. I then saw a star fall from heaven to earth. The star was given the key to the depths of the abyss. ²He opened the abyss, and a cloud of smoke rose as if from a great furnace which darkened the sun and the air.

³Locusts came from this smoke and spread throughout the earth. They were given the same harmful power as the scorpions of the earth. ⁴Then they were told not to harm the meadows, the green grass or the trees, but only the people who do not bear the seal of God upon their foreheads. ⁵They were not to kill them, but only torture them for five months. This pain is like the sting of scorpions. ⁶In those days, people will look for death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. ⁷These locusts look like horses equipped for battle; they wear golden crowns on their heads, and their faces are like those of human beings. ⁸Their hair is like women's hair, and their teeth like lion's teeth; ⁹their chests are like iron breastplates; and the noise of their wings like the roar of an army of chariots and horses rushing for battle. ¹⁰Their tails are like those of scorpions and have stings; the power they have to torture men for five months is in their tails. ¹¹These locusts have a king,

5. Eek 10, 2	7. Ex 9, 23
8. Jer 51, 25; Ex 7, 20	10. Is 14, 12
12. Ex 10, 21	1. 12, 4 3. 11, 1-2;
Ex 10, 12	6. Job 3, 21
8. 11, 6	9. 11, 6



who is the angel of the abyss whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon or Apollyon in Greek (Destruction in English).

¹² The first Woe! has passed. Two others are to come after this.

¹³ The sixth angel blew his trumpet. Then I heard a voice calling from the corners of the golden altar before God. ¹⁴ It said to the sixth angel who had just sounded the trumpet, "Release the four angels chained at the banks of the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ And the four angels were released who had been waiting for this year, this month, this day and this hour, ready to utterly destroy a third of humankind. ¹⁶ The number of the soldiers on horses was two hundred million; this is the number I heard.

¹⁷ In my vision, I saw those horses and their riders: they wear breastplates the colour of fire, hyacinth and sulphur. The heads of the horses look like lions' heads, and fire, smoke and sulphur come out of their mouths.

¹⁸ Then a third of humankind was killed by these three plagues: fire, smoke and sulphur which the horses released through their mouths, ¹⁹ for the power of the horses was in both their mouths and in their tails. Their tails, in fact, look like serpents, and their heads are able to inflict injury as well.

²⁰ However, the rest of humankind who were not killed by these plagues did not renounce their way of life: they went on worshipping the demons, keeping those idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood that cannot see, hear or walk. ²¹ No, they did not repent of their crimes, or their sorcery, or their sexual immortality or their theft.

What has been proclaimed by the prophets is fulfilled

+10 ¹ Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven wrapped in a cloud. The rainbow was around his head, his face was like the sun and his legs like pillars of fire. ² I could see a small book open in his hand. He stood, his right foot planted on the sea and his left on the land, ³ and called in a loud voice like the roaring of a lion. ⁴ Then, the seven thunders sounded their own message.

I was about to write what the seven thunders had sounded, when a voice from heaven said to me, "Keep the words of the seven thunders secret and do not write them down."

⁵ And the angel I saw standing on the sea and land, raised his right hand to heaven, ⁶ swearing by him who lives for ever and ever, and who created the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them. He said, "There is no more delay;" ⁷ as soon as the trumpet call of

the time of the Jewish war of the years 66-70 which culminated in the capture of Jerusalem. But, just as in the Gospel the prophecies about the end of the world, the first event was an image of the second one, so too here the sixth trumpet announces a punishment extended to all the pagan people.

+ Once again, the end of everything was expected with the seventh trumpet. Yet, before it is sounded, suddenly the seven thunders proclaim a mysterious word for men and it is said that: *The mysterious plan of God will be fulfilled just as it is proclaimed...* (v. 7).

The secret word (v. 4) may very well be the news that the Word of God became man. As to the *small book*, it contains new events which will accompany the spreading of the Gospel. This means that Christ's coming does not put an end to history, nor does it bring heaven on earth.

John must *eat the book*, an expression which we already found in Ezekiel (2:8-3:4). It is both sweet and sour: the voice is sweet, but the task is difficult. Thus we understand that the history of Israel, imaged by the book of the seven seals (5:1) was not all of sacred history, but only its first part, the Old Testament.

14. 16, 12	20. Dn 5, 4; Ps 135, 15
4. Dn 12, 4	6. Dn 32, 40
7. Rom 16, 25; Eph 1, 9; Col 1, 26	

■ This is the beginning of Gospel times. During the forty years between Christ's departure and the end of Jerusalem, Christ's witnesses took the Gospel throughout the pagan world. This is the time that Paul calls "time of the nations" and which, in Palestine, was characterized by continual crises. While God protects his true worshippers (those who are *measured*, or set apart), the pagan Romans hustle and trample more and more the *outer courtyard* representing most of the people of Israel who did not join the Church.

This page glorifies the Christian apostolate: its struggles, its martyrs and its reward.

The two witnesses personify Christian apostles of all times. Do not forget that Jesus sent his disciples two by two. The fact that there are two is also a reminder that there are a variety of ministries in the Church. The two witnesses are also the two most famous apostles, Peter and Paul, both killed in the *Great City*, Rome in the years 64-67. Peter, the first responsible of Jesus' Church, and Paul the apostle to the pagan nations.

To understand what is said about them, it is useful to know that

the seventh angel is heard, the mysterious plan of God will be fulfilled according to the good news he proclaimed through his servants the prophets."

⁸ And the voice I had heard from heaven spoke again, saying to me, "Go near the angel who stands on the sea and on the land, and take the small book open in his hand." ⁹ So I approached the angel and asked him for the small book; he said to me, "Take it and eat; although it be sweet as honey in your mouth, it will be bitter to your stomach."

¹⁰ I took the small book from the hand of the angel, and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, it turned bitter in my stomach. Then I was told, "You must again proclaim God's words about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings."

The two witnesses

11 ¹ Then I was given a staff like a measuring stick, and I was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count those who worship there. ² Do not bother to measure the outer courtyard, for this has been given to the pagans who will trample over the Holy City for forty-two months. ³ Meanwhile, I will entrust my Word to my two witnesses who will proclaim it for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, dressed in sackcloth.

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lamps which are before the Lord of the earth.

⁵ If anyone intends to harm them, fire will come out of their mouths to devour their enemies: this is how whoever intends to harm them will perish. ⁶ They have the power to close the sky and hold back the rain during the time of their prophetic mission; they also have the power to change water into blood, and punish the earth with a thousand plagues, any-time they wish.

⁷ But when my witnesses have fulfilled their mission, the beast that comes up from the abyss will make war upon them, and will conquer and kill them. ⁸ Their dead bodies will lie in the square of the Great City which the believers figuratively call Sodom or Egypt,

10. Ezk 3, 3	11. Jer 1, 10
1. Ezk 40, 3; Zac 2, 1	2. Lk 21, 24
4. Zac 4, 3	5. 2 K 1, 10
6. Ex 7, 17; 1 K 17, 1; James 5, 17	
7. Dn 7, 25	

where their Lord was crucified. ⁹ And their dead bodies will be exposed for three days and a half to people of all tribes, races, languages and nations who will be ordered not to have them buried. ¹⁰ Then the inhabitants of the earth will rejoice, congratulate one another and exchange gifts among themselves because these two prophets were a torment to them.

¹¹ But after those three and a half days, a spirit of life coming from God entered them. They then stood up, and those who looked at them were seized with great fear. ¹² A loud voice from heaven called them, "Come up here." So they went up to heaven in the midst of the clouds in the sight of their enemies. ¹³ At that moment, there was a violent earthquake which destroyed a tenth of the city and claimed seven thousand victims. The rest were overcome with fear, and acknowledged the God of heaven.

¹⁴ The second Woe has passed. The third is coming soon.

◆ ¹⁵ The seventh angel blew his trumpet, then loud voices resounded in heaven: "The world has now become the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ. He will reign for ever and ever."

¹⁶ The twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God bowed down to worship God, ¹⁷ saying,

*We thank you, Lord God,
Master of the universe,
who are and who were,
for you have begun your reign,
making use of your invincible power.*

*¹⁸ The nations raged
but your wrath has come,
the time to judge the dead
and reward your servants the prophets,
the saints and those who honour your Name –
whether great or small –
and destroy those who destroy the earth.*

¹⁹ Then the sanctuary of God in the heavens was opened, and the Ark of the Covenant of God could be seen inside the sanctuary. There were flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a violent hailstorm.

all the comparisons used are taken from the Bible, especially from the texts glorifying the great prophets Moses and Elijah.

– *They will proclaim my word dressed in sackcloth.* The apostle preaches repentance and a more austere life.

– *One thousand two hundred and sixty days*, that is to say, three and a half years, meaning a time of trials.

– *These are the two olive trees*, or, they are precious in the eyes of God: see Zech 4.

– *They have the power to close the sky*, like Elijah, that is to say that God grants them to work miracles.

– *When they have fulfilled their mission.* The forces of evil will not overpower them before God allows it. Only then will martyrdom come.

– *After three and a half days* (again the symbolic figure for trials), they will be raised. They are already glorified by the Church which has its apostles and martyrs as mediators in heaven. They already share the resurrection of Christ and their enemies verify that, in killing Christ's witnesses, they did not destroy his work, which continues to grow victoriously.

Where do they die? The images point to both Jerusalem and Rome, meaning the Jews and the Romans in those first forty years of the Church. Stephen and James have been killed by the Jews; Peter and Paul, by the Romans, not to mention the rest of them.

◆ With the blowing of the seventh trumpet, the beginning of the Kingdom of God in our world is announced. We see a heavenly temple which replaces the Jerusalem Temple, a new Ark symbolizes the new Covenant of God with men of every nation.

12. 2 K 2, 11	15. 12, 10; Ps 2, 2;
Dn 2, 44	18. Ps 2, 1; 46, 7
19. 15, 5; 2 Mac 2, 8	



TOWARDS THE FUTURE: THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH

o Here begins the second part of John's vision. The Church has left the Jewish world and the horizon is expanded. The Church is going to win over the nations, by struggling against the power of the devil. We have the start of a series of seven signs or visions in the sky. The first two present the protagonists of sacred history, the Woman and the Dragon, the People of God and the Devil.

A woman appeared. She seems surrounded with glory, but she is suffering labour pains. This represents humanity. At the beginning of the Bible, it was represented by Eve, the woman who sinned. But now we see humanity the way God wanted it to be: suffering birth pains because our entire history is the painful preparation of our salvation. She gives birth to a boy, who is Christ himself. The Saviour is the fruit of God's love for mankind. Salvation comes from God and from people at the same time.

The woman represents humanity cooperating with God's plans; it is also Mary who gives birth to Jesus; it is also the Church *fleeing to the desert*, that is, living spiritually withdrawn from the world and nourished by the Word of God during the persecutions: *one thousand two hundred sixty days*, or three and a half years (see 11:11).

The snake is the one of the first sin, except that it is better clothed. The seven heads indicate the multiplicity of its inventions, the *ten horns* (imperfect number) state that its power is surmountable. It was defeated in heaven, even though it managed, in its fall, to drag down a number of angels (a *third of the stars*). See 8:10.

As to the *male child*, Satan was preparing to destroy him on the cross, but when he rose, he escaped from the evil of the serpent.

+ God's plan for the world has just been revealed: the Son of God must become man and rise as the Saviour of all people. This mystery causes a double crisis: in the world of spirits (or angels) and in human-kind.

The Jews imagined the angels were a huge army and they called their head *Michael*. Similarly, the devil is presented as the head of the

The woman and the dragon

12 ¹ A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, dressed in the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ² She was pregnant and cried out in pain, looking to her time of delivery.

³ Then another sign appeared: a huge, red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and wearing seven crowns on its heads. ⁴ It had just swept along a third of the stars of heaven with its tail, throwing them down to the earth.

The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour the child as soon as it was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, the one who is to rule all the nations with an iron sceptre; then her child was seized and taken up to God and to his throne ⁶ while the woman fled to the desert where God had prepared a place for her; there she would be looked after for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

+ ⁷ War broke out in heaven with Michael and his angels battling with the dragon. The dragon fought back with his angels ⁸ but they were defeated and lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon, the ancient serpent known as the devil or Satan, seducer of the whole world was thrown out. It was hurled down to earth, together with his angels.

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice from heaven:

*Now has salvation come,
with the power and the kingdom of our God,
and the rule of his anointed.*

*For our brothers' accuser has been cast out,
who accused them night and day, before God.*

¹¹ *They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony,
for they gave up their lives going to death.*

¹² *Rejoice, therefore, O you heavens
and you who dwell in them;
but woe to you, earth and sea,*

*for the devil has come to you in anger
knowing that he has but a little time.*

1. Ps 104, 2; Dt 6, 10; Gen 37, 9; Gen 3, 16

Is 7, 14; 66, 7

4. 7, 7; 8, 10

7. Dn 12, 1; 10, 13

2. Mt 4, 9;

5. Ps 2, 9

9. Gen 3, 15

12. Is 44, 25



■ ¹³ When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴ Then the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly into the desert where she would be looked after for three and a half years. ¹⁵ The serpent poured water out of his mouth after the woman, to carry her away in the flood, ¹⁶ but the earth came to her rescue: it opened its mouth and swallowed the flood which the dragon had poured from its mouth. ¹⁷ Then the dragon was furious with the woman and went off to wage war on the rest of her children, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus.

The beast and the false prophet

◆ **13** ¹ As I stood on the seashore, I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns. On each head was a blasphemous title challenging God. ² The beast I saw looked like a leopard, with paws like a bear and a mouth like a lion. The dragon passed on his power, his throne and his great authority to the beast.

³ One of its heads seemed to be fatally wounded but this wound healed. The whole earth wondered and they followed the beast. ⁴ People prostrated themselves before the dragon who had given such authority to the beast and they prostrated themselves before the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who can oppose it?"

⁵ The beast was given speech and it spoke boastful and blasphemous words against God; it was allowed to wield its power for forty-two months. ⁶ It spoke blasphemies against God, his name and his sanctuary, that is, those who already dwell in heaven. ⁷ It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over people of every tribe, language and nation: ⁸ "this is why all the inhabitants of the earth will worship before it, those whose names have not been written in the book of life of the slain Lamb, since the foundation of the world."

army of the rebellious angels, the stars fallen from heaven.

The following chapters will reveal the devil at work in history. He uses disguises and many substitutes. However, those who are ready to suffer for the truth will recognize him: *they triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb* and by their courage in proclaiming him (12:11).

■ Sin and rebellion against God began in the world of spirits. Being rejected from that world, the devil attacks those who keep the word of God, beginning with the best and most outstanding people in the Church. The struggle will never end. Those who dream of achieving unity among men in this world are forgetting the presence of the Evil One.

◆ The devil tries to stop Christ's victory and to convince people that, in practice, Christ is not the master of life. If they wish to live, they must surrender their freedom and their conscience to another lord, namely, political power.

First generation Christians lived in the Roman empire which, after two centuries of conquests and organized action, had managed to gather many different people. People were marveling at the "Roman peace" and the prosperity which followed. They did not know the dangers of a totalitarian society: when John was writing, the emperor Domitian had just imposed on all his subjects the obligation to honour him as a god.

Under these circumstances, Christians had to make a tremendous choice. By confessing Christ, the Lord of life, they were facing persecution. John points to their responsibility: remaining faithful to Christ and refusing to worship Caesar. A handful of Christians will victoriously face the totalitarian state: the Church will conquer by the blood of its martyrs.

It is the point of the present vision and the two animals represent the two powers which join forces at the service of the Dragon, namely, the devil against the Church.

The first beast looked like a leopard (v. 2). It represents the persecuting power of the Roman empire, through images taken from Daniel 7:3-7. It comes from the sea, or the West, from Rome.

13. Gen 3, 1	14. Ex 19, 4	1. 11, 7; Dn 7, 3	2. Dn 7, 4
4. Lk 4, 6	5. Dn 7, 8	7. Dn 7, 25	8. 3, 5; Dn 12, 1



The vitality and the power of the Roman empire are like a caricature of the Resurrection.

Then, I saw another beast like the Lamb (v. 11). This beast comes from the continent, from the East, from Asia. It represents the religions which were competing with Christianity. They pretended to offer a heavenly salvation, but they did not condemn the sins of the Roman world, especially the corruption of society.

Speaking like the beast. These apparently Christian religions have eventually been taught by local or foreign political power: pastors and miracle crusaders trained and paid in order to maintain an unjust social order. They preach resignation to evil, forgetting that cowardice is a common vice.

Persuading them to make a statue of the beast (v. 14). The very sects that emphasize the Bible condemnation of idols are often the ones who serve new lords, taking the place of God, and demanding blind submission of the people. And they form citizens who are like sheep incapable of asking themselves whether they serve God or the devil.

The devil's tactic consists in joining strong power with an ideology which Christians cannot accept: this is what happens now in all the countries which have no respect for the most basic requirements of conscience. Harassed both by leaders and a public opinion manipulated by modern techniques of propaganda, believers must face open or disguised persecution. Economic problems give new means of pressure to power which can condemn people to losing their bread-earning work: they can no longer buy or sell, obtain work or study (v. 17).

Six hundred sixty-six: In books of that time, it was a common device to assign a numerical value to every letter of the alphabet, and to get the "number" of an individual. Six hundred sixty-six can be figured out many ways, but it may correspond to "Emperor Nero." We know that six means something imperfect: the one who tried to be seven (representing perfection) and who did not make it.

We know that some anti-Catholic polemicists wanted to make this

⁹ If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen:

¹⁰ If your lot is the prison, to prison you will go; if your lot is to be killed by the sword, by the sword will you be slain. This is, for the saints, the time of endurance and faith.

¹¹ Then I saw another beast rise out of the earth, with two horns like the Lamb but speaking like the dragon. ¹² This second beast is totally at the service of the first one and enjoys its authority. So it makes the world and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose fatal wound has been healed. ¹³ It works great wonders, even making fire descend from heaven to earth, in the sight of all.

¹⁴ Through these great wonders which it is able to do on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of the earth, persuading them to make a statue of the beast which, although wounded by the sword, is still alive. ¹⁵ It has been allowed to give a spirit to this statue; the statue of the beast speaks and those who refuse to worship it are killed. ¹⁶ So, this second beast makes everyone – great and small, rich and poor, free and enslaved – be branded on the right hand or on the forehead, ¹⁷ and no one can buy or sell unless he has been branded with the name of the beast or with the number of its name.

¹⁸ Let us see who is wise! If you are clever, you can interpret the number of the Beast; it is a human number, the number 666.

144,000 on Mount Zion

14 ¹ I was given another vision: The Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, surrounded by one hundred and forty-four thousand people who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ² A sound reverberated in heaven like the sound of the roaring of waves or deafening thunder; it was like a chorus of singers, accompanied by their harps.

³ They sing a new song before the throne, in the presence of the four living creatures and the elders, a song which no one can learn

10. Jer 15, 2; 14, 12	11. Mt 7, 15	13. Mt 24, 24; 2 Thes 2, 9
14. Dn 3, 5	17. 14, 9; 16, 2	18. 17, 9
1. Ps 2, 6; Jl 3, 5; Ezk 9, 4	3. 5, 9; Is 42, 10	



except the hundred and forty-four thousand who have been taken from the earth. ⁴ They are those who were not defiled with women but were chaste; these are given to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They are the first taken from humankind who are already of God and the Lamb. ⁵ No deceit has been found in them; they are faultless.

+ ⁶ Then, I saw another angel, flying high in the sky, sent to proclaim the definitive good news to the inhabitants of the earth, to every nation, race, language and people. ⁷ He cried out with a loud voice, "Give God glory and honour, for the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and all the waters."

⁸ Another angel followed him, crying out, "Fallen is Babylon the great, fallen the prostitute who has made all the nations drunk with her wine!"

⁹ A third angel then followed, shouting aloud, "If anyone worships the beast or its image or has his forehead or hand branded, ¹⁰ he will also drink the wine of God's anger which has been prepared, undiluted, in the cup of his fury: he will be tortured by fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb."

¹¹ The smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; there will be no rest day or night, for those who worshipped the beast and its image, and for those who were branded with the mark of its name.

¹² This is the time for patient endurance among the saints, for those who keep the commandments of God and faith in Jesus. ¹³ I heard someone from heaven say, "Write this: Happy from now are the dead who have died in the Lord. The Spirit says: let them rest from their labours: their good deeds go with them."

¹⁴ Then I had this vision. I saw a white cloud and the one sitting on it like a son of man, wearing a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ An angel came out of the sanctuary, calling loudly to the one

number apply to the pope, as if the successor of Peter should be confused with the Roman emperor who condemned the early Christians to death. These fantasies have nothing to do with the Bible. Besides, those who know how to deal with the numerical value of names can easily apply the number 666 to some of the present heads of state, or to any of the people they know, with just a little patience. Thus, this number 666 should be seen as a game.

o Facing the forces that Satan gathers in the Roman empire are the forces of Christ. The Beast must take advantage of the time granted to it, because Christ already rules and the judgment which will put an end to the persecuting power is being prepared.

The Lamb was standing on Mount Zion. Zion represents the Church, both the earthly and the heavenly Church. Christ rules in the Church in the very midst of those who are persecuted. Repression, chains and death do not reach the secret temple of every man, where Christ communicates his life and his presence.

The 144,000 point to the Christians in the Roman empire who remain firm in their faith. They are "the first redeemed" and they represent the believers of future centuries.

Some people who take everything literally state that the saved will number 144,000. But, why do they not read 7:4-9 where 144,000 represent the elect "of the Jewish people," without mentioning a great crowd, impossible to count, from among all the other peoples?

They were chaste. In 7:9 the Christian people were represented by martyrs: here John says *virgins*, and the word has two meanings, the same as the word *adultery* elsewhere: on one hand, they did not worship the Beast; and on the other hand, they were freed from the tyranny of sex.

They sing a new song. When the Lord had saved Israel at the Red Sea, the people sang the *Canticle of Moses* (Ex 15:1). But now, believers and martyrs sing the New Song to celebrate their liberation from hatred, from their own weakness and from the fear of death, through Christ.

+ Evangelization eventually

5. Is 53, 9; Zep 3, 13

8. Is 21, 9; Jer 25, 25

9. Mt 10, 28

10. Gen 19, 24; Is 34, 9

11. Is 34, 10

13. Is 57, 1;

Heb 4, 10

14. Dn 7, 13

15. Mt 13, 39

prepares the fall of the City and its idols (v. 8), foretold as definitive good news, but, for the time being, repression is unleashed against the witnesses of Jesus (v. 9).

The persecuting empire is called *Babylon*: in the Bible, this name symbolizes the power hostile to God. Its ruin will show how God judges unjust structures.

When major crises and the most atrocious wars occur, many people say, "this is the end of the world." And so, when the Roman empire collapsed three hundred years after John, many people thought it was the end of civilization. However, with time, people saw that a larger field was opening up to the preaching of the Gospel.

If anyone worships the Beast... (v. 9). Here are stressed the strongest words in the Gospel on the necessity of proclaiming one's faith (Mt 10:28-33).

Happy are from now the dead who have died in the Lord. John sees the victorious martyrs and other witnesses of Christ, and he encourages them by saying that, from the moment of their death, they already enjoy a share in the promised happiness. Their happiness will be complete in the Resurrection: Phil 1:23 and 2 Cor 5:8.

■ *Here we come back to the awaited fall of Rome to see its religious meaning in a more developed form. The seven bowls combine images from the plagues of Egypt and various prophetic texts.*

Armageddon (or the Hills of Megiddo, 16:16) recalled a famous defeat in Jewish history (2 Kgs 23:29) and it is a symbol to predict the defeat of those who are assembled there. With this, John announces the inevitable judgment of God and the hour of destruction to the anti-Christian civilization ruling the world.

sitting on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for harvest time has come and the harvest of the earth is ripe." ¹⁶ He who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle at the earth and reaped the harvest.

¹⁷ Then another angel, who also had a sharp sickle, came out of the heavenly sanctuary. ¹⁸ Still another angel, the one who has charge of the altar fire, emerged and shouted to the first who held the sharp sickle, "Swing your sharp sickle and reap the bunches of the vine of the earth for they are fully ripe." ¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle and gathered in the vintage, throwing all the grapes into the great winepress of the anger of God. ²⁰ The grapes were trodden outside the city and blood flowed from the winepress, to the height of the horses' bridles and over an area of sixteen hundred furlongs.

15 ¹ Then I saw another great and marvellous sign in the heavens: seven angels brought seven plagues which are the last, for with these the wrath of God will end. ² There was a sea of crystal mingled with fire, and the conquerors of the beast, of its name and the mark of its name stood by it.

They had been given the celestial harps ³ and they sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

*Great and marvellous are your works,
O Lord God, and Master of the universe.
Justice and truth guide your steps,
O King of the nations.*

*⁴ Lord, who will not give honour
and glory to your Name?
For you alone are holy.
All the nations will come
and bow before you,*

for they have now seen your judgments.

The seven cups

■ ⁵ Then the sanctuary of the Tent of Divine Declarations was opened, ⁶ and the seven angels bringing the seven plagues came out of the Sanctuary, clothed in pure and bright linen, with their waists girded with golden belts. ⁷ One of the four living creatures

19. 19, 15; Is 63, 1 2. 4, 6; 13, 15
3. Ex 15, 2 4. Jer 10, 7
7. 14, 10; Jer 25, 15

gave the seven angels seven golden cups full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever. ⁸Then the sanctuary was filled with smoke which wraps God's glory and power, so that no one could enter until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

16 ¹I heard a loud voice calling from the sanctuary to the seven angels. "Go and empty on the earth the seven cups of the wrath of God."

²The first angel went to empty his cup on the earth, and malignant and painful sores appeared on the people who bore the mark of the beast and had bowed before its image. ³The second angel emptied his cup into the sea which turned into blood like that of the dead, and every living thing in the sea died.

⁴The third angel emptied his cup into the rivers and springs which turned into blood. ⁵And I heard The angel of the waters say, "You who are and who were, O Holy One, you are just in punishing them in this way; ⁶since they have shed the blood of your holy ones and the prophets, you have made them drink blood; they rightly deserved it." ⁷I heard another cry from the altar, "Yes, Lord and God, Master of the universe, your judgments are true and just."

⁸The fourth angel poured out his cup on the sun and its heat began to scorch people. ⁹They were severely burned and began to insult God who has power over those plagues, instead of acknowledging him.

¹⁰The fifth angel emptied his cup on the throne of the beast, and sud-

denly his kingdom was in darkness and the people bit their tongues in agony. ¹¹They insulted the Most High God for their pain and wounds, but they did not repent.

¹²The sixth angel poured out his cup on the great river Euphrates; then its water was dried up, leaving a free passageway for the kings of the east. ¹³I saw coming from the mouths of the monster, the beast and the false prophet, three unclean spirits which looked like frogs.

¹⁴They are, in fact, spirits of demons that perform marvellous things and go to the kings of the whole world to gather them for battle on the great day of God the Master of the universe.

¹⁵"Beware! I come like a thief; happy is the one who stays awake and does not take off his clothes; so he will not have to go naked and his whole body be exposed for all to see."

¹⁶Then they assembled them at the place called Armageddon in Hebrew (or the Hills of Megiddo).

¹⁷The seventh angel emptied his cup into the air. Then a voice came forth from the throne and was heard outside the sanctuary, saying, "It is done." ¹⁸And there were flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and a violent earthquake. No, never has there been an earthquake so violent since people existed on earth. ¹⁹The Great City was split into the three, while the cities of the nations collapsed. For the time had come for Babylon the Great to be remembered before God to be given the cup of the foaming wine of his anger.

8. Ex 40, 34; 1 K 8, 10; Is 6, 4

15. 3, 3; 3, 17; 1 Thes 5, 2

3. Ex 7, 17

18. 4, 5; Dn 12, 1; Mk 13, 19

4. Ex 7, 19

7. Ps 19, 10

10. Ex 10, 21



◆ *I will show you the judgment... God reveals the true value of the prosperous and powerful persecuting city.*

To the people living in the empire, Rome personified everything in the empire and its culture. When they came to the capital, they were dazzled by its buildings, its movement, theaters, lights, the life of its countless population. Thus, it was not difficult for them to venerate Rome as a goddess.

The span of the empire, with its reputation of being invincible and divine, is pure deceit, for the *Beast*, the evil one who supports it, *passes away*, differently from God who is and will come. Rome is described as a possessed woman. The *purple*, color of the emperors, and the *gold*, sign of their wealth, cover up its impurity and its cruelty. At the same time it brings men to serve false gods and to murder martyrs.

To describe the near future of Rome, John uses symbols: some of them are easy to interpret. The seven hills point to Rome without a doubt. The seven kings are a figure symbolic of the emperors.

The *ten horns* are the kings of the barbarian people allied with Rome. These satellites will be God's instruments in destroying it. Nevertheless, they will continue as forces hostile to the Church.

The *Lamb* and his followers will conquer them (v. 14). From now on, every believer is associated with Christ's victory, as long as he remains constant in his faith.

²⁰ Then the continents withdrew and the mountain ranges hid. ²¹ Great hailstones from heaven, as heavy as stones, dropped on the people, and the people insulted God because of this disastrous hailstorm, for it was truly a terrible plague.

The judgment of Babylon

◆ **17** ¹ Then one of the seven angels of the seven cups came to me and said, "Now I will show you the judgment of the sovereign prostitute who dwells on the great waters. ² She it is who let the kings of the earth sin with her; and with the wine of her idolatry the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk."

³ The angel brought me to the desert: it was a new vision. There a woman was seated on a red beast. The beast, which had seven heads and ten horns, covered itself with titles and statements that offend God. ⁴ The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, with ornaments of gold, precious stones and pearls. She held in her hands a golden cup full of loathsome idolatry and impure prostitution. ⁵ Her name could be read on her forehead, written in a mysterious way: *Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of the loathsome idols of the whole world*. ⁶ And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the holy ones and the martyrs of Jesus.

What I saw greatly surprised me, ⁷ but the angel said to me, "Why are you surprised? I will reveal to you the secret of this woman and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that she mounts. ⁸ The beast you saw has been, though it IS not. It will come up from the abyss and then go to perdition. What a surprise for the inhabitants of the earth whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world! They will marvel on discovering that the beast who has been IS not and passes away.

⁹ Let us see if you guess: the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. And they are also seven kings, ¹⁰ five of which have already fallen, one is in power, and the seventh has not yet come but will remain only

20. 6, 14	21. Ex 9, 22
1. Jer 51, 13	2. Is 23, 17
5. 2 Thes 2, 7; 1 Pet 5, 13	
6. Ezk 16, 36	8. 20, 12
	9. 13, 18



a short while. ¹¹ The beast that has been but IS not can be considered as the eighth though it takes place among the seven; and he goes to perdition.

¹² The ten horns are ten kings who have not yet received power but will have authority for an hour with the beast. ¹³ They all have only one aim and they place their authority and power at the service of the beast. ¹⁴ They will fight against the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings; and with him will be his followers who have been called and chosen and are faithful.

¹⁵ The angel went on, "Those waters you saw, on which the prostitute is seated, are peoples, multitudes and nations of every language. ¹⁶ The ten horns, and the beast itself, will plan evil against the prostitute. They will destroy her and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and set her on fire. ¹⁷ God makes use of them to carry out his plan, so he has inspired them with their common purpose and they will place their power at the service of the beast until the words of God are fulfilled. A last word: ¹⁸ the woman you saw is the Great City which reigns over the kings of the whole world."

18 ¹ After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. So great was his authority that the whole earth was lit up with his glory. ² In a strong voice he cried out:

"Fallen is Babylon the great! Fallen! She has become a haunt of demons, a lodge for every unclean spirit, a nest for any filthy and disgusting bird.

³ She has made all nations drunk with the wine of her lewdness, fornicated with kings of the earth, and glutted the world's merchants with her wantonness and wealth."

⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven: "Depart from her, my people, lest you share in her evil and so share in her punishments;

⁵ for her sins are piled up to heaven,

• *Fallen is Babylon the great!* (18:1) This is what the prophets shouted when they announced the fall of the oppressing city (see Jr 50 and 51). In prophesying the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus said: "Rejoice..." (Lk 21:28).

Depart from her, my people! (v. 4). The victorious God warns his people to feel uncomfortable in this pagan environment. *Lest you share in her evil.* Live in the world without being of the world, and when the society in which you are in perishes, be ready to follow the triumphant destiny of the people of God (see Phil 3:20).

MUST WE LOOK FOR A GREAT BABYLON IN THE WORLD TODAY?

John saw the rule of the Beast in the Roman empire and he prophesied its fall. He said very little about what would come after.

In speaking about the empire that he knew, John teaches us how to view the empires of this century. This Roman empire had a very flourishing civilization and we still benefit from it today. The fact that John condemned it does not mean that everything in it was bad: let us remark, incidentally, that Christ wanted his apostles to establish the center of his Church precisely in Rome.

However the Great Babylon is present in all ages and this can be seen in every economic and political power pretending to enslave men in its net. We are all inclined to identify it, either with international capitalism or with materialistic socialism, depending on our viewpoints. But, it would be wrong to think that only one of these systems serves the devil's plans: the ruler of this world respects no borders.

We know that throughout the world, atheistic governments persecute the Church, but also, each day more in the Third World, the Church faces violent or subtle per-

14. 19, 11; 1 Tim 6, 15
16. Ezk 16, 39 18. 11, 8
2. 14, 8; Is 21, 9; 34, 11
4. Is 48, 20; 52, 11; Jer 50, 8



to your gold and pearls, your finery,
¹⁷ your great wealth destroyed in an hour!

Every captain and navigator, every sailor and seafarer will stand afar, ¹⁸ crying out on seeing the smoke going up as the city burns to the ground. "What city could have compared with this one?" ¹⁹ They will pour dust on their heads and cry out in mourning:

"Alas, alas, great city,
 where all who had ships at sea
 grew rich through her trade!
 In an hour she has been devastated."

²⁰ *Rejoice over her, O heavens!
 Rejoice, prophets, saints and apostles!
 God has rendered justice to you.*

²¹ A powerful angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, saying:

"With such violence will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down, never again to be seen.

²² Never again will tunes of harpists, minstrels, trumpeters and flutists be heard in you. Never again will workmen of any trade be found in you.

²³ Never again will the light of a lamp shine in you. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never again be heard in you.

Because your traders were the world's great men and you led the nations astray by your magic spell. ²⁴ In this city was found blood of prophets and saints – yes, the blood of all who have been slain on the earth."

Songs in heaven

+19 ¹ After this I heard what sounded like the loud singing of a great assembly in heaven:

Alleluia! Salvation, glory and might belong to our God, ² for his judgments are true and just. He has condemned the great harlot who corrupted the world with her adultery. He has avenged his servants' blood shed by her hand in harlotry.

³ Once more they sang: *Alleluia! The*

dealing in a special way with persons he has elected to share with Jesus in the work of salvation. With this we understand that Mary and the Church go together in God's plans. To both of them the sign of the Woman and the Dragon in chapter 12 refers.

As time runs on we discover that the greatest obstacle opposing and delaying the work of God is not the enemies of faith but the Church itself, frequently blind to the demands of the Gospel while it works to conquer the world. We see, for example, that the Church wants to be the Church of the poor and yet is handed over to rich and satisfied people.

So no wonder that the Virgin Mary makes use of the grace bestowed on her by the Lord and intervenes by becoming present to the poor, entrusting to them time and time again the words of the Gospel. Her apparitions underscore in some way the failures of the Church. Mary comes to the rescue of her forgotten children.

With these apparitions becoming more frequent and more widespread we are led to recognize that not only is the Church weak in withstanding the attacks of Satan, but that Satan is more active because the end draws near.

+ Triumphant songs in heaven.

The huge multitude rejoices over the prostitute's condemnation and shouts "alleluia" for the wedding of the Lamb which is to take place.

21. Jer 51, 63 24. 16, 6; Mt 23, 35
 3. 14, 11; Is 34, 10

Happy are those invited to the wedding of the Lamb (19:9). Now John speaks of delight and joy when the noise of Babylon and its pleasures have ended. Its lights are no more and the deeds of the "saints" – heroic actions or humble service – are shining bright.

At the end of the paragraph John criticizes the excessive interest in angels which was threatening to replace the worship of pagan gods and to lower Christ in several sectors of the Church.

■ Here we have the continuation of chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16, after the parenthesis of chapters 17 and 18. The seven angels had poured the bowls of punishment of the Beast and the decisive encounter was expected. Then, Christ appears.

His name is the Word of God (v. 3). He is the male child born of the woman, and he is to rule all the nations with an iron scepter (12:5). Christ comes triumphantly. His true name is Word, Word of God; this is his divine reality which only he understands. See Jn 1:1-14 in that respect.

The heavenly armies follow him: as Jesus had announced several times (Matthew 16:27).

The Word of God, powerful to conquer, at work to save, *faithful* to fulfil God's promises, *truthful* in what he says, the one who wages just wars. The just wars are the wars waged against the devil and his allies: the persecuting power (the Beast) and the doctrines providing opium instead of salvation (the false prophet).

This page is John's prophecy concerning the destruction of the persecuting Roman empire. It was fulfilled and that empire disappeared. In reading this page we can think about the defeats of the invincible Roman armies, and in the break down of this huge body, whose soul was the faith in the divinity of Rome and of its Caesar-Emperor. Christ did not come to

smoke from her goes up for ever and ever!

⁴The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God seated on the throne. And they cried: *Amen! Alleluia!*

⁵A voice came from the throne: "Praise our God, all you his servants, all you who revere him, both small and great!"

⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great crowd, like the roaring of the waves, like peals of thunder, answering:

Alleluia! The Lord now reigns, our Lord, the Master of the universe!

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!

This is the time to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb, and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.

This linen stands for the good works of the holy ones.

⁹Then the angel told me, "Write: Happy are those invited to the wedding of the Lamb." And he went on, "These are true words of God."

¹⁰As I fell down at his feet to worship him, he said to me, "Beware, I am but a servant like you and your brothers who utter the words of Jesus (these words of Jesus are proclaimed through the spirit of the prophets). Worship God alone.

The triumph of the word of God

■ ¹¹Then I saw heaven opened and a white horse appeared. Its rider is the *Faithful and True*; he judges and wages just wars.

¹²His eyes are flames of fire; he wears many crowns and written on him is his own name, which no one can understand except himself.

¹³He is clothed in a cloak drenched in blood. His name is *the Word of God*. ¹⁴The armies of heaven clothed in pure white linen follow him on white horses. ¹⁵A sharp sword comes out of his mouth. With it he will strike the nations for he must *rule them with an iron rod*. He treads the winepress of the burning wrath of

5. Ps 115, 13	7. Is 61, 10
11. Is 11, 4;	
1 Jn 5, 20	13. 1, 14; Dn 10, 6;
Is 63, 1; Jn 1, 1	

God, the Master of the universe. ¹⁶This is why this title is written on his cloak and on his thigh: King of kings and Lord of lords.

¹⁷I also saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried out with a loud voice to all the birds of the air, "Come here to the great feast of God. ¹⁸Come and eat the flesh of kings of generals and valiant men; come and devour the soldier and his horse, free men and slaves, both small and great.

¹⁹Then I saw the beast with the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to fight against him who rides on the white horse and his army. ²⁰But the beast was captured with the false prophet who served it and performed signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped its statue. The two were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur, and all ²¹the rest were killed by the sword which comes out from the mouth of the rider who mounts the horse. And all the birds were fed with their flesh.

The thousand years

20 ¹Then an angel came down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the Abyss and a huge chain. ²He seized the monster, the ancient serpent, namely Satan or the devil, and chained him for a thousand years. ³He threw him into the abyss and closed its gate with the key, then secured it with locks, that he may not deceive the nations in the future until the thousand years have passed. Then he will be released for a little while.

⁴There were thrones and seated on them were those with the power to judge. I then saw the spirits of those who had been beheaded for having held the teachings of Jesus and on account of the word of God. I saw all those who had refused to worship the beast or its image, or receive its mark on the forehead or on the hand. They returned to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection. ⁵The rest of the dead will not return to life before the end of the thousand years.

do battle against the Roman armies: a certain number of soldiers had already converted to the Christian faith. (Many young Christians enlisted in the army were the missionaries of Christ wherever they went and even had martyrs among them).

Instead, the victory announced by the Apocalypse was the victory of Christ and the martyrs who, through their sacrifice, destroyed the cruelty, injustice and immorality of the pagan world. A believer's daily struggle was the victory of Christ. However, the day came when the Lord brought justice in the sight of everyone: *Come, eat the flesh of kings and generals* (18).

◆ This text is still used for many contradictory and erroneous commentaries. Some think of an earthly paradise of a thousand years before heaven. This, however, would be going against all the clear teaching of the New Testament, affirming there is no intermediary between this life and eternal life.

This vision may be another way of presenting our history, by stressing its positive aspects and successful evangelization. These thousand years stand for the lapse of time during which the Church, liberated from Jewish and Roman persecutions, is evangelizing the world.

The growth of the Church marks the weakening of the devil's power: *he is chained*. A wave of thought and Christian action is going to renew the world. Let us think of the struggle against various forms of slavery, the restoration of manual work, the dignity of women and of marriage, and the respect for the human person and children.

I saw then the spirits of those who had been beheaded (v. 4). They are already sharing in the life and happiness of Christ, and in some way, they share in his ruling over history and along with him, they are present in the life of the earthly Church. Let us think of the growing influence that people who committed themselves to a sacred and noble cause, have after their death.

16. Dt 10, 17; 1 Tim 6, 15	
17. Ezk 39, 17	21. Ezk 39, 20
2. 12, 9	3. 2 Thes 2, 9
4. Dn 7, 9; Mt 19, 28; 1 Cor 6, 2	



At the end of these thousand years (v. 7). We do not know how long the world will last, nor how many cultures and empires will confront the Church. But now, John tells us about a last crisis during which the Church will seem submerged by the forces of evil (see 2 Thes 2:3). There is no description of what will happen: enough has already been said about the struggle of the Church against the agents of the devil for us to be able to imagine what it could be.

Fire came down from heaven (v. 9). This final offensive will be overcome just like the first one. Here the battle is described with images borrowed from Ezekiel, chapter 38.

o Heaven and earth disappeared (v. 11). At the end of the world, we have the definitive judgment.

The books were opened (v. 12). Using images from the book of Daniel (7:10), John shows people judged individually in all their actions. Everything is written in the book: what men did, said and thought.

Death and Netherworld were thrown... (v. 14): this is a way of saying that Christ's final victory consists in destroying the death ruling over the world as a consequence of sin (see 1 Cor 15:26).

The previous chapters spoke repeatedly of God's judgment, against Jerusalem, or against the Roman power, or against the nations replacing it. Thus, the Apocalypse does not really stress the final judgment of the world which only recapitulates what has been said before. It prefers to describe the new Jerusalem coming from God: this is what we have in the last two visions which follow.

+ First vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9).

The Bible began with a vision of the first creation in which God was conversing with man, his friend, in the garden of Eden. The Apoca-

⁶ Happy and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection, for the second death has no power over them; they will be priests of God and of his Messiah and reign with him a thousand years.

⁷ At the end of these thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison; ⁸ then he will set out to deceive the nations of the four corners of the world, namely Gog and Magog, and gather them for war. What an army, so numerous like the sand of the seashore! ⁹ They invaded the land and surrounded the camp of the holy ones, the most beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

¹⁰ Then the devil, the seducer, was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet already were. Their torment will last day and night for ever and ever.

The last judgment

o ¹¹ After that I saw a great and splendid throne and the one seated upon it. At once heaven and earth disappeared leaving no trace. ¹² I saw the dead, both great and small standing before the throne, while books were opened. Another book, the Book of Life, was also opened. Then the dead were judged according to the records of these books, that is, each one according to his works.

¹³ The sea gave up the dead it had kept, as did death and the netherworld, so that everyone might be judged according to his works.

¹⁴ Then death and the netherworld were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ All who were not recorded in the Book of Life were thrown into the lake of fire.

The new heaven and the new earth

+ 21 ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had passed away and no longer was there sea. ² I saw the new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down from God, out of heaven, adorned as a bride prepared for her husband.

³ A loud voice came from the throne, "Here is the dwelling of God among men: He will pitch

6. 2 Tim 2, 12; 1 Pet 2, 9
8. Ezk 38 9. 2 K 1, 10 10. 19, 20
14. 1 Cor 15, 26; 15, 54
1. Is 65, 17; 66, 22; 2 Pet 3, 13
2. Is 61, 10; Gal 24, 26; Is 52, 1
3. Lev 26, 11; Ezk 37, 27; Is 7, 14



his tent among them and they will be his people. God will be with them ⁴and wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, for the world that was has passed away."

⁵ The One seated on the throne said, "See, I make all things new." And then he said to me, "Write these words because they are sure and true: ⁶It is already done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I myself will give the thirsty to drink without cost from the fountain of living water. ⁷Thus the winner will be rewarded: *For him I shall be God and he will be my son.* ⁸As for cowards, traitors, depraved, murderers, adulterers and sorcerers, idolators and liars, their place is the lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death."

The new Jerusalem

■ ⁹ Then one of the seven angels came to me, one of those with the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues. And he said, "Come, I am going to show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ He took me up in a spiritual vision to a very high mountain and he showed me the holy city of Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shines with the radiant Glory of God, like a precious jewel with the colour of crystal-clear jasper. ¹² Its wall, large and high, has twelve gates; stationed at them are twelve angels. Over the gates are written the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. ¹³ Three gates face the east; three gates face the north; three gates face the south and three face the west. ¹⁴ The city wall stands on twelve foundation stones on which are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ The angel who was speaking to me had a golden measuring rod to measure the city, its gates and its wall. ¹⁶ The city is laid out like a square: its length is the same as its breadth. He measured it with his rod and it was twelve thousand furlongs; its length, breadth and height are equal. ¹⁷ Then he measured the wall: it was a hundred and forty four cubits high.

lypse ends with a more beautiful vision in which there is overflowing delight in God. *Now I make all things new.* The holy and definitive City of men has been built.

A new heaven and a new earth. The risen body of Christ was the principle of the new spiritual and material universe we were hoping for. But now, the power of his resurrection has transformed the whole world. It will not be a paradise for isolated "souls," nor for pure angels, but a city of men: men have fully become God's children: *he will be my son.*

He will wipe away every tear. God dwells among men and he pours his own happiness into them. The sufferings which filled so many lives, the martyrs' tortures, the inner pain of repentant sinners, all this is over. Joy and peace, which cannot be found any place on earth, are finally found in the heart of God.

The second death (v. 8). Before this happens, eternal condemnation. Being forever deprived of God and a reason to be, locked in one's sin and aloneness: a mystery for us. Men's freedom is something so great and so real that God himself cannot force them to love him: those who have consciously and definitely left the path to life, will inherit the lake of burning sulphur.

The New Jerusalem comes down from God. Somehow, people tried to build the community of men. But, at the end of history, they discover that along with them, God was building something much greater: a humanity gathered in the very life of God.

It is already done (v. 6). This reality is definitive and there will be no history after it. In the new world, *there is no sea* which means human restlessness (see Is 55:1). From then on, God, *the Beginning and the End*, will continue to give life-giving water, freely; this makes us think of the elect, always eager to know God's mystery more in depth, yet, at the same time they are fully happy.

■ Second vision of the heav-

4. Is 25, 8	5. 2 Cor 5, 17
6. Is 55, 1; Jn 4, 10; 7, 37	
7. 2 S 7, 14	8. 20, 6; 20, 14
9. 19, 7; 21, 2	10. 60, 1
13. Ezk 48, 31	14. Eph 2, 20



only Jerusalem: the Temple coming from God.

To describe the New Jerusalem, John combined two images which are basic in the Bible: *the wedding banquet and the temple*. Here, after speaking about the "Jerusalem which comes down adorned as a bride for her husband" (see 19:7 and 21:2), John develops the image of the temple. The temple expresses the people's longing to see God present among them. But temples are no longer necessary: the shadows are replaced by the reality: God is in the midst of his people in a visible and permanent way.

Its length, breadth and height are equal (v. 16). A city built as a perfect pyramid: perfect and definitive. Its wall, a symbol of security: there is no more fear, not even every hidden fear, the fear of feeling life slipping away. The brightness of the city is that of jasper and its primary foundation is of jasper: jasper is the color attributed to God in the fourth chapter.

There are angels at the gates: that means that the entrances are spiritual. The wall of holiness and truth rests upon the apostles: the truth of the New World was already contained in their words, namely, the testimony of Jesus' apostles. The final city is the goal of men's long pilgrimage: without knowing it, the just, the poor, the merciful, and those who are sorrowful were longing for it: *The nations will walk in its light*.

There was a fountain of life in paradise. Lost through sin, people were always looking for it. Ezekiel already wrote that the living water is the Spirit of God and Jesus promised it to the Samaritan woman. Now it flows from the heart of God-Trinity, *from the throne of God and of the Lamb*.

And they will reign forever (22:5). This is the final word and it is the seventh time it is said in Revelation.

The angel used an ordinary measure which was, in fact, that of an angel.

¹⁸ The wall is made of jasper and the city of pure gold, crystal-clear. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall are decorated with every kind of precious jewel: the first is jasper, the second sapphire, the third turquoise, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth agate, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh hyacinth and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates are twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl and the square of the city is paved with gold as pure as transparent crystal.

²² I saw no temple in the city for the Lord God, Master of the universe, and the Lamb are themselves its temple. ²³ The city has no need of the light of the sun or the moon, since God's Glory is its light and the Lamb is its lamp.

²⁴ *The nations will walk in its light and the kings of the earth will bring their treasures to it.* ²⁵ *Its gates will not be closed at the sunset, for there will be no night there.* ²⁶ It is there that the wealth and the most precious things of the nations will be brought. ²⁷ *Nothing unclean will enter it, or anyone who does what is evil and false but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*

22

¹ Then he showed me the river of life, clear as crystal, gushing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² In the middle of the city, on both sides of the river are the trees of life producing fruit twelve times, once each month, the leaves of which are for healing the nations. ³ No longer will there be a curse; the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the City and God's servants will live in his presence. ⁴ They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will need neither the light of lamp or sun for God himself will be their light and they will reign forever.

I am coming soon

◆ ⁶ Then the angel said to me, "These words are sure and true; the Lord God who

19. Is 54, 11	22. Jn 2, 19
23. Is 60, 19	24. Is 42, 2
27. Is 25, 8; 3, 15; 13, 8	
1. Ezk 47, 1; Jn 7, 38	
2. 2, 7; Gen 2, 9; Ezk 47, 12	
4. Ps 11, 7; 17, 15	6. 1 Jn 3, 2



inspires the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants what must happen soon."

⁷"I am coming soon! Happy are those who keep the prophetic words of this book."

⁸I, John, saw and heard all this. When I had seen and heard them I fell at the feet of the angel who had shown me everything, to worship him. ⁹But he said, "No, I am a fellow servant like you and your brothers, the prophets, and those who heed the words of this book. It is God you must worship."

¹⁰He then said to me, "Do not keep secret the prophetic words of this book because the time is near. ¹¹Let the sinner continue to sin and the defiled remain in his defilement; let the righteous man continue to do what is right and he who is holy grow holier."

– ¹²I am coming soon, bringing with me the salary I will pay to each one according to his deeds. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴Happy are those who wash their robes for they will have free access to the tree of Life and enter the city through the gates.

¹⁵Outside the dogs, sorcerers, the immoral, murderers, idolaters and all who take pleasure in falsehood!

¹⁶I, Jesus, sent my angel to make known to you these revelations concerning the Churches. I am the Shoot and Offspring of David, the radiant Morning Star. –

¹⁷The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" Whoever thirsts let him approach, and whoever desires, let him freely take the water of life. ¹⁸As for me, I warn everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will pile on him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes away words from this book of prophecy, God will take from him his share in the tree of Life and the holy city described in this book.

²⁰He who has declared all this says, "See, I am coming soon."

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.

♦ *I, John, saw and heard all this.* Thus the Bible concludes, and we can recall the parable of the workers hired for the Lord's vineyard (Mt 20). The work in which prophets and writers had participated in the course of a day is over. In the first hour the visions with which Genesis begins and which briefly present the divine vocation of people and the purpose of the world were written. In the final hour, John, after knowing Christ, the morning sun, has just seen humanity preparing to share the glory of God.

It is the final hour, the expected coming of Christ. However, we know that the final hour maybe extended and that the Groom may come late in the night: Christians are watchful, firm in their hope, even as they face the power of darkness.

Christ says: *I am coming soon* (v. 7) and he asks us to persist in repeating this prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus*. The delay does not matter: our hearts are full of hope: *Yes, come, Lord Jesus!*

8. 19, 10	11. Dn 12, 10
12. Is 40, 10; 41, 4	17. 21, 6
18. Dt 4, 2	20. 1 Cor 16, 22

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ALPHABETICAL LISTING WITH ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

NEW TESTAMENT

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Baruch	Bar	2 Maccabees	2 Mac	Colossians	Col
1 Chronicles	1 Chr	Malachi	Mal	1 Corinthians	1 Cor
2 Chronicles	2 Chr	Micah	Mic	2 Corinthians	2 Cor
Daniel	Dn	Nahum	Nh	Ephesians	Eph
Deuteronomy	Dt	Nehemiah	Ne	Galatians	Gal
Ecclesiastes	Ecl	Numbers	Num	Hebrews	Heb
Esther	Es	Obadiah	Ob	James	James
Exodus	Ex	Proverbs	Pro	John	Jn
Ezekiel	Ezk	Psalms	Ps	1 John	1 Jn
Ezra	Ezra	Ruth	Ru	2 John	2 Jn
Genesis	Gen	1 Samuel	1 S	3 John	3 Jn
Habakkuk	Hb	2 Samuel	2 S	Jude	Jd
Haggai	Hg	Sirach	Sir	Luke	Lk
Hosea	Hos	Song of Songs	Song	Mark	Mk
Isaiah	Is	Tobit	Tb	Matthew	Mt
Jeremiah	Jer	Wisdom of		1 Peter	1 P
Job	Job	Solomon	Wis	2 Peter	2 P
Joel	Jl	Zechariah	Zec	Philemon	Phlm
Jonah	Jon	Zephaniah	Zep	Philippians	Phil
Joshua	Jos			Revelation	Rev
Judges	Jdg			Romans	Rom
Judith	Jdt			1 Thessalonians	1 Thes
1 Kings	1 K			2 Thessalonians	2 Thes
2 Kings	2 K			1 Timothy	1 Tim
Lamentations	Lm			2 Timothy	2 Tim
Leviticus	Lev			Titus	Tit

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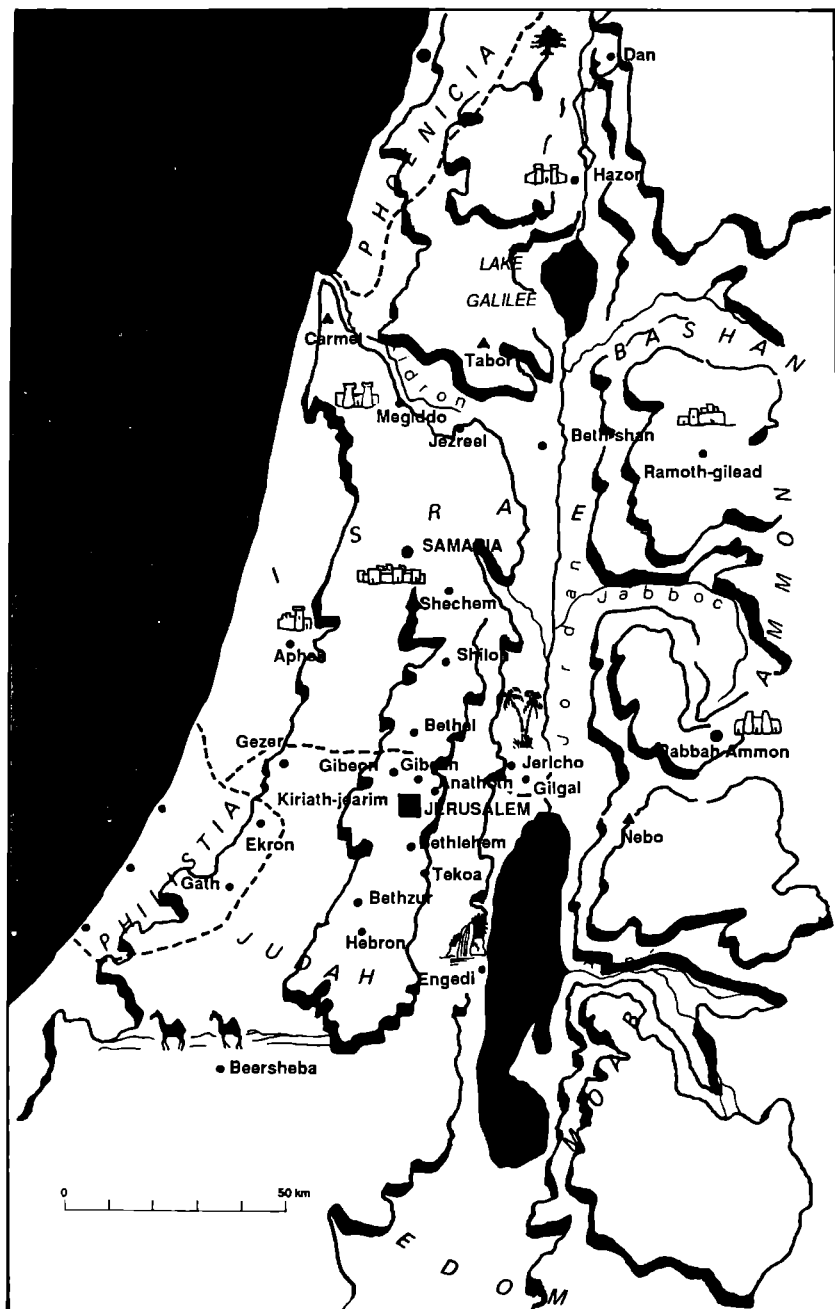
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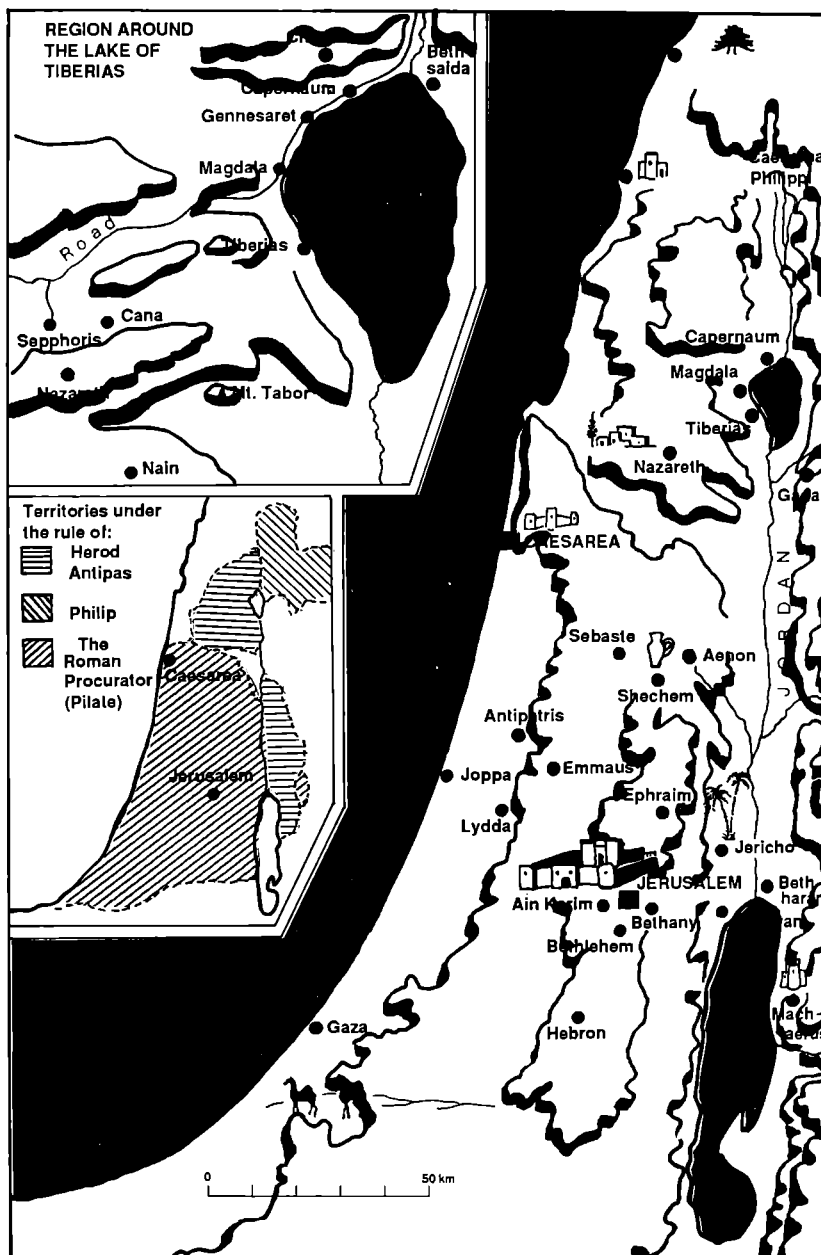
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PALESTINE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT



PALESTINE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT